



**Alma  
Primary**

עולם חסד יבנה  
A world built on kindness

## **An introduction for potential Parent Governors**



**September 2020**

## Role of a school governor at Alma

Thank you for considering becoming a Parent Governor! You would be joining a group of passionate and committed individuals, dedicated to providing an excellent and nurturing learning environment for all pupils at Alma. This document outlines the role of a Governor and gives details of what you should expect when taking on the role.

### 1. About Alma's Governing Body

Alma Primary has a Governing Body currently made up of 12 governors, and the Headteacher. A full list of current Governors is on our website, [here](#). Some of the current Governors were Founders of the school, centrally involved in establishing Alma between 2011 and 2013. Six of our Governors are parents of children at Alma and six are not, bringing a vital, external and fresh perspective to our school. All Alma Governors are elected for an initial term of 4 years.

The Governing Body is supported by a range of professional advisors who provide legal support and other relevant expertise on an ad-hoc basis. Our formal meetings are professionally supported by an external Clerk in order to be sure that we have fulfilled all of our statutory duties, stay up to date with governmental requirements, and so that our papers and minutes are rigorous and timely.

Our 2019 Ofsted report praised the governance of Alma, and can be read [here](#)

### 2. The role of the Governing Body

The role of a school Governing Body is determined by law and through national guidance from the DfE and Ofsted.

The Governing Body has three core duties, as set out in the Department for Education's Governance Handbook, which you can access [here](#):

- Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;
- Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the effective and efficient performance management of staff; and
- Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent.

In addition Alma, is an Academy and is an Exempt Charity, and the Governing Body is therefore effectively a Board of Trustees. This means that the Governing Body carries specific legal responsibilities and liabilities. As a Governor you will also be a Trustee and a Company Director of Alma Primary, under the legal framework for Academies.

The National Governors' Association defines the role of the Governing Body as a whole as follows:

#### **Establishing the strategic direction, by:**

- Setting the vision, values, and objectives for the school(s)/trust
- Agreeing the school improvement strategy with priorities and targets
- Meeting statutory duties

#### **Ensuring accountability, by:**

- Appointing the lead executive/headteacher

- Monitoring progress towards targets
- Performance managing the lead executive/headteacher
- Engaging with stakeholders
- Contributing to school self-evaluation

**Ensuring financial probity, by:**

- Setting the budget
- Monitoring spending against the budget
- Ensuring value for money is obtained
- Ensuring risks to the organisation are managed

Governors only act as a group – an individual governor has no authority to act individually in any matter, except where the Governing Body has specifically delegated authority to them.

**The role of Governor is largely a thinking and questioning role, not a doing role.** What Governors should do is:

- Ask challenging and valuable questions;
- Ensure that the school is meeting all of its statutory responsibilities;
- Hold senior school leaders to account for the school’s performance.

**A governor does NOT:**

- Spend much time with the pupils of the school – *if you want to work directly with children, there are many other valuable voluntary roles within the school;*
- Undertake classroom observations to make judgements on the quality of teaching – *the governing body monitors the quality of teaching in the school by scrutinising data provided by the senior staff and by reviewing the reports of the various external advisers who observe the school in action each term. Only a small number of governors with specialist knowledge and expertise undertake classroom visits.*
- Do the job of the school staff – *if there is not enough capacity within the staff team to carry out necessary tasks, the governing body need to consider and rectify this.*

Alma’s Governing Body has a Code of Conduct and all Alma Governors are required to act in accordance with this Code of Conduct at all times. Please review the Code of Conduct, which you can access [here](#).

### 3. Our Governance Structure

The main Governing Body has overall responsibility for the governance of the school. Much of the detailed oversight is delegated to two main standing committees, with additional sub and ad-hoc committees which meet less frequently or as required to focus on specific issues or undertake specific tasks.

We restructured the work of the Governing Body in 2019 and currently have two main standing committees of the Governing Body:

- **Finance, Operations and People** – which looks at all financial, site, operational, as well as policies and process relating to staff;

- **Children and Learning** – which looks at the curriculum, assessment and attainment at Alma as well as inclusion and issues around children’s wellbeing.

These committees each meet at least once in each term, and have established specialist sub-committees for specific tasks – such as the Pay Committee to oversee performance related pay decisions and the Jewish Learning and Ivrit sub committee to oversee this aspect of learning at Alma.

In addition to the standing committees and sub-committees, there are a number of panels that need to be constituted by Governors at certain times of the year or in the event of certain needs, e.g. the Admissions Panel, the Exclusions and Discipline Panel.

## 1. What is involved in being a Governor at Alma?

1. All Governors are required to be members of (or to Chair) one of the school’s 2 standing committees. The formal standing committees of the Governing Body look at the issues under their remit in depth and report back to the main Governing Body through termly reports. Their membership constitutes both Governors along with non-Governor Committee Members who have relevant expertise and skills to offer and whose appointment must be approved by the Governing Body.
2. **Governors may in addition be asked to sit on ad hoc groups to undertake projects or tasks with specific time-limited remits.** Examples in the past have included: developing and implementing the School Travel Plan; reviewing parent communications; hearing admissions appeals.
3. **All Governors hold an individual portfolio of responsibility.** In Alma, reflecting the school’s Learning in Depth approach, we call this our “Governor in Depth” responsibility. Examples include holding lead responsibility for staff professional development; literacy; numeracy; financial management; admissions; health and safety; emotional well-being. Governors work collaboratively with the relevant member of the school professional team to take forward this lead responsibility. Parent Governors will be expected to take up a specific lead responsibility, like all other Governors.

## 4. What is the role of a Parent Governor?

Alma’s constitution stipulates that two Governors are appointed via election by the parent body. However, the Governing Body is a legally-responsible single group bound by collective responsibility and **no Governor is there to represent a “constituency”**. (There is also a Staff Governor elected by the staff, but they are not there to “represent” staff either).

Once elected, Parent Governors take on the same strategic and overall responsibility for the school as all other Governors. They will take up a particular responsibility, dependent on their skills and expertise, e.g. quality of teaching, communications, finance, etc.

In addition, governors who are also parents of children at the school face particular challenges because it is essential to separate the role of parent from governor. That means that those Governors who are also parents need to:

- Be clear when one is operating in the role of parent, when one is acting in one’s own and one’s family’s interests; and when one is operating in the role of governor, where one is legally bound to act only in the interest of the school;

- Be approachable to other parents, but be clear that one's role is not to represent the views of all parents, nor to become involved as an individual in disputes between parents and the school;
- Always represent the school positively, remembering that as a governor one represents the school at all times;
- Always support decisions that the governing body has made, even if one disagreed with them at GB. Have one's say on decisions in meetings and vote in the way one wishes, but once a decision has been agreed, be bound by 'collective responsibility.';
- Always observe confidentiality. Governors sometimes see sensitive and confidential information that one cannot discuss with anyone who is not a governor. It is impossible to act in the best interests of the school if one allows oneself to be put in the position of sharing confidential information.

## 5. What is the time commitment for Alma Governors?

Being a Governor is a demanding but rewarding role. Governors are only able to discharge their role effectively if they attend meetings with regularity.

Alma usually holds five regular full Governing Body meetings a year (2 per term), which are currently being held on zoom, but we hope will return to in person meetings, in the school, when the COVID situation allows us to. All of these meetings are held in the evening on a weekday, except for our Governor's Day, which is held one morning in the Spring term, once again, dependent on the COVID situation.

Governors are expected to attend all of these meetings. There is always a significant amount of reading to be done prior to the formal meetings, usually requiring 1-2 hours.

In addition, all Governors are members of one of the school's two Standing Committees. These Committees will usually meet once a term, but they may be supplemented by additional sub-committees.

In total, therefore, Governors attend around 12 meetings per year: making an average of one per month.

Under Section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996, if you are employed, then you are entitled to 'reasonable time off' to undertake public duties; this includes school governance. 'Reasonable time off' is not defined in law, and you will need to negotiate with your employer how much time you will be allowed.

## 6. What support is available for new Governors?

Governors are encouraged and expected to take advantage of training opportunities which will be provided throughout the period of their governorship. All Governors will need to develop the specialist knowledge and skills needed to support a high quality school. To facilitate this, we have signed up to Barnet's Governor Training Programme, which provides extensive training opportunities in evening slots at venues around Barnet. We also participate in the governor training events provided by PaJeS, the Partnership for Jewish Schools, a cross communal body which supports schools across the Jewish community. In addition, a detailed induction will be provided to new Governors on appointment. Finally, Safeguarding training is mandatory for all Governors.

## 7. What are the next steps and timetable for appointment?

If you would like to talk informally about applying for a Parent Governor role, or if you have any questions that are not answered by this document, please contact Ilan Jacobs, Alma's Chair of Governors, at [Chairs@almaprimary.org](mailto:Chairs@almaprimary.org)

To put yourself forwards to be included in the election, please complete the online form [here](#). You will be asked on that form to write a paragraph that sets out why you would like to be a Governor and what skills and experience you would bring to the role. This paragraph will be shared with all parents to inform their decision about who they vote for. **You must complete the online nomination form by midday on Friday 16th October 2020 if you wish to stand.**

All voting will be 100% anonymous and will be undertaken online. There is one vote per parent or carer, i.e. if a child has two parents, they have one vote each.

### **Timetable**

Nominations close	Midday on Friday 16th October
Candidates details distributed	Friday 23rd October
Voting opens	Monday 2nd November
Voting closes	Midday on Thursday 5th November.
Results announced	Friday 6th November.