



**TOWER
HAMLETS**
THIS EAST LONDON



The Power of Diversity in Governance

Getting governor recruitment
and retention right -
a guide for schools



THIS GREAT SCHOOLS



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“A board ‘looking diverse’ should not be mistaken for a board being diverse in representation or thought. Efforts must go beyond widening the diversity of characteristics – or the faces around the table – to create the outcome of diversity of representation and thought.”

NGA Increasing Participation in School and Trust Governance

1. Introduction

The power of diverse governance



A school governing board that reflects the wider school community makes a powerful statement about the school's ethos and has a positive impact on its outcomes. But governors need to be recruited, trained and supported with creativity and consideration so they can thrive in their roles.

This toolkit is a no-nonsense guide to improving school governor representation. The focus is on overcoming underrepresentation of governors from Black, Asian and Multi Ethnic backgrounds, but it can be used for increasing diversity in other areas too.

The toolkit includes practical advice, real life case studies and emerging best practice. It addresses issues from dealing with 'imposter syndrome' to creating a welcoming environment for new governors. It will help you benefit from a wider talent pool of potential school governors who can bring professional skills, diverse thinking and community insight to your schools.

Why will this toolkit help your school?

If you know there's room for improvement in your school and you can do more to reap the benefits of the rich and diverse Tower Hamlets community, read on...

If you already have a diverse, representative and inclusive governing body, maybe you can use this toolkit to take it to the next level!

Understanding the challenge

National Governance Association research says that, nationally, 88% of people who became school governors in 2021 were white and 75% were aged between 40 and 70. More governors are over 80 than under 30! Is this the perception many potential school governors have, the first barrier to entry?

Research shows that where schools actively recruit from groups underrepresented on governing boards - in terms of age, gender, religion and ethnicity - they succeed. There is power in diversity that mobilises a wider range of experiences, skills and perspectives and drives inclusive leadership in today's world. It may not be as hard as you think to recruit a more diverse board.



Introduction (continued)

We are doing well in Tower Hamlets

“We have diverse governors in Tower Hamlets, from all walks of life”

36% of governors in schools supported by our Governor Services team are from Black, Asian and Multi Ethnic backgrounds. So, we’re doing better than the national picture, but our school’s population includes about 85% Black, Asian and Multi Ethnic students, one of the highest proportions in London. We want to ensure that local schools maximise the opportunities in our diverse borough. We want governors from a wider range of backgrounds, with professional skills, community knowledge and new perspectives, to make our schools the best they can be.

We want governing bodies who understand our students and their families

“Just as our schools are incredibly diverse and culturally rich places, it is vital that our governing boards reflect that diversity and that richness too.”

The Secretary State for Education at the National Governance Association’s annual conference in 2021

We are striving to teach principles of equality, diversity and inclusion in our schools. How do we do this if our governing bodies do not reflect the school and wider community?

Governing bodies made up of people from similar backgrounds risk all seeing the world through the same lens. They will probably have the same blind spots. A representative governing body enables broader understanding and proves that inclusion is at the heart of the school and threaded through everything it does.

Why make the effort?

Seeing an ethnically diverse group of governors on the school website, visiting classrooms and in meetings, sends a powerful message to parents, students and other stakeholders:

- It says, “this school values everyone in the school”.
- It says, “we understand the needs of the community”.
- It encourages parents to positively engage, even in challenging situations, like disciplinary panels or sensitive curriculum issues.
- It creates an important bridge between parents in the community and the school itself.
- It supports representation of parents to school and school to parents.
- It means pupils and staff see people they can relate to in positions of responsibility.



A governing body that reflects the local community helps the school stay connected to local needs:

- They better understand the challenges faced by the local community.
- The community better understands the challenges faced by the school.
- Everyone recognises opportunities to offer and receive support.

Diverse governing bodies support diverse Senior Leadership Teams. A more representative governing body doesn’t just provide positive role models for students. It supports teaching staff from Black, Asian and Multi Ethnic backgrounds to achieve too.

VIDEO CLIP: The power of diversity –



Watch Tower Hamlets governors talking about the importance of diversity

2. Recruitment

Ten tips to help you get it right

So you're convinced you want to improve the way you recruit new governors. How do you plan your route to a more representative board?

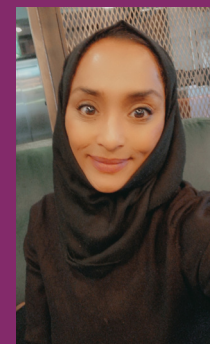
Be clear about the skills and knowledge you need. Promote the role in different ways. Rethink the way you introduce people to the role. Think about particular barriers for groups currently underrepresented on your board at each stage.

Tip 1 Know how diverse you already are

How representative is your board right now? You can look round the table, or maybe at the screen, and make assumptions based on the faces you see. But to really get to know them, you need to ask the right questions.

The NGA's [governing board diversity indicators form](#) is a tool you can use to get to know your board. It asks about gender, age, ethnicity, disability and other factors that will give you a clearer idea of the life experience and perspectives people bring to their roles.

Tip 2 Balance skills and diversity



"It can't be an equality tick box"

Zainab Yasmin is Vice Chair of Governors at Oakland School. Like others, she started as a parent governor and was co-opted when her daughter left the school.

"I wanted to help make changes in the curriculum. I felt the school could do a lot more on health. I brought my specific knowledge of Public Health, a good understanding of how the local authority works and as a local resident I brought community knowledge."

On recruiting to make governing boards more representative, Zainab was clear on the importance of having the right motivation.

"It can't be an equality tick box. You shouldn't just recruit based on ethnicity, gender or other factors. Skills and knowledge must come first. But be clear, they don't need to know everything to begin with. They'll learn on the job."

And when schools get it right, what is the impact?

"As the governing body has become more diverse, so has the senior leadership team. I'm sure this will have an ongoing impact on the school workforce."



Recruitment (continued)



Zainab stressed the importance of reaching out to different demographics - not just aiming at people from professional backgrounds, but targeting people who work in the community and volunteers who work in faith groups, schools and hospitals. She suggested governor roadshows, schools working to go out and meet people and encouraging them to shadow meetings. As a secondary governor, Zainab was keen to promote the flow of experienced governors from primary schools to secondary schools.

The people you recruit must offer something beyond their ethnicity. You need skills and experience that will genuinely enhance the school and make your job easier. Are you taking advantage of all the skill sets out there? There are plenty of talented, skilled and younger people and from a Black, Asian and Multi Ethnic background, if you make the effort to find them.

Have you done a skills audit?

Strong governance requires a range of knowledge, skills, perspectives and backgrounds. There are various skills audit scoring grids that ask your governors to identify what they bring to the board. This can help you identify what you might be missing.

- [National Governance Association](#)
- [GovernorHub](#)
- [Ask A Clerk](#)

Tip 3 Make sure people know what you do

School governance isn't high profile. Most people don't know what being a governor involves. There's lots of information online, but that only helps people who've already thought about becoming governors and are actively looking for information.

What do you tell people about being a governor?

Use all your channels of communication as opportunities to tell people about what the governing board does and how they can get involved.

Everyday conversations

- Notice who you're speaking to at the school gate and events, and more importantly, who you aren't. Make conscious decisions to proactively engage with people who may not fit the governor norm.
- Head teachers and senior leaders should actively target people in and around the school community who would bring value to the governing body.

- At external meetings and events, make a point of talking about the benefits to the wider community, as well as individuals, of being a school governor.

Newsletter

- Use your newsletter to make current governors visible by telling everyone about them. You could ask them to write diary entries, or complete short questionnaires set by members of the school community.
- Include a standing offer for people to shadow a meeting, or to come and talk to current members of the governing board.

Website

- Make sure the governing body isn't hidden in the depths of your school website – put a series of case studies on the front page with friendly photos. You could even make short introduction videos – or get the children to do it!
- There are ready made videos out there you could link to on your website, including this one from the NGA [The role of school governors and trustees and trustees](#).
- You can also link to Tower Hamlets ['How to become a school governor'](#) guide.



Recruitment (continued)



“If you see it, you can be it”

Laurell Hector is Managing Director of a Human Resources Consultancy. She is a Foundation Governor at Our Lady & St Joseph Catholic Primary School in Poplar. It's her second governor role.

Laurell described her motivation for involvement as her commitment to the community and desire to ensure representation of the Black, Asian and Multi Ethnic community on school governing bodies.

“I know it has an empowering effect on parents, pupils and staff seeing someone from the Black, Asian and Multi Ethnic community on the governing board. Not only that, but it also has a real impact on school policy and practice.”

Discussing barriers to recruiting governors from Black, Asian and Multi Ethnic backgrounds, Laurell said recruitment should be formalised, not friendship based, to avoid ending up with boards that all look the same.

“I really believe in the saying ‘If you see it, you can be it’. As well as seeing me in person, I think schools need to display photographs of governors on websites, in newsletters, wherever parents can see them.”

School events

- Use Parents Association activities as opportunities to recruit. The case studies illustrate how many experienced board members started as parent governors.
- Run governor coffee mornings, afternoon teas or evening events and promote them as a chance to meet with the Chair and learn more about the role of governors in your school.
- Parents' evenings are another chance to talk to people you may not see often.
- Use transition events to engage parents, particularly when children arrive at secondary schools. Start engaging parents of new year 7s straight after school offer day. Get them when their enthusiasm is at its highest.

Community networking

- Take your governor opportunities into the community. It's a great way to have friendly conversations about the role of the governor at your school. You will also find out what potential applicants are thinking.
- Take advantage of community events at the local mosque, church or other places of worship, family hubs, community centres and voluntary

sector events. Use the [Tower Hamlets Events page](#) to identify opportunities.

- Target activities celebrating religious and cultural milestones that highlight diversity, like Ramadan, Diwali, Chinese New Year and Black History Month.
- Contact local media, [radio shows](#), community or housing newsletters and Facebook groups, to promote your governor opportunities.
- Use opportunities like [National Volunteers Week](#), annually in the first week of June, to highlight the profile of your existing governors.

Professional networking

- People already working in and around education bring huge benefits to a governing board. It's also a great professional development opportunity for them.
- Other public sector groups such as NHS and Council Services have a high proportion of people from Black, Asian and Multi Ethnic backgrounds working for them. Many are skilled in governance and public accountability.
- You may have links with the private sector through employability, work experience and careers networks. Invite key contacts to a briefing event promoting the transferable skills that can be developed as a governor.
- Link with neighbouring schools and promote governance opportunities in each other's schools.

Recruitment (continued)

Tip 4 Make sure people know what you do

When thinking about recruiting new governors, think about what motivates them. Different people will have different buttons you can push.

Being a parent of school age children is an obvious motivational factor. In some communities, this is the only time that would feel right to become a governor. So, take advantage of this opportunity to target people who may support your school, and others, for years to come.

VIDEO CLIP: Understanding Motivation



Find out here what motivates governors to volunteer



“A fresh perspective”

Aminul Hoque was born and educated in Tower Hamlets and works at Queen Mary’s University. He has been a governor at Bonner Primary School and Rachel Keeling and Children’s House Nursery Schools for 10 years and plans to become a secondary governor when his children move on from primary school. He was drawn to becoming a governor to have an impact on his own children’s education as well as his community.



“Education is a key tool for social mobility. Governors can have a positive impact on the lives of children and young people. So, it’s important to have boards that reflect the community”.

Aminul knows he impacts the school by bringing a fresh perspective to the governing board. He has seen many benefits from having a more representative governing board.

“It inspires a more balanced approach and has influenced issues like school closure for Eid and community concerns around SRE.”

Aminul believes one of the main barriers to recruiting governors from underrepresented groups is the perception among the local community that only parents can or should get involved in schools.

Some people are motivated by wider social commitments. They want to make a difference to society. They may not realise that being a school governor is a great way to make a significant impact on their community. If you can find people like these, you could be pushing at an open door. See tip 7, about using volunteer recruitment services.



“I thought it wasn’t for me”

Raja Miah is a long-term Tower Hamlets resident and is IT Manager at Manorfield School. He is currently

an associate governor at Bigland Green Primary School. He deliberately moved into the Whitechapel area to get involved in the community. Raja was asked to become a governor because of his IT skills, an example of someone bringing something different to the role. He wasn’t sure he would fit at first.

“I thought it wasn’t for me. I thought you needed to be very skilled with a wealth of experience and I would be out of my depth. But it wasn’t like that. Everyone in the governing body brings something to the table.”

Recruitment (continued)



Raja's expertise has allowed him to support the Head in commissioning and recruiting IT services and staff. He thinks the key barriers to recruiting

governors from underrepresented groups are lack of awareness of the role and perception that they would be too young or inexperienced.

"People have the image of governors being older, more senior in their careers. They think someone younger, at the start of their career, wouldn't contribute. That's not true."

He believes schools can help overcome barriers by providing information on how to approach the role, offering mentoring and support and actively developing a more inclusive environment.

People who have lots to offer will not always realise what a difference they could make. Even people who already work in and around education will not necessarily see themselves as a potential governor. So don't assume that people who are obvious 'governor material' to you are already taken. Even though they might need a little persuading.



"Am I qualified to do this?"

Avantika Taneja is a Tower Hamlets resident who works for a national education charity. She was recently co-opted

as a governor at Mayflower Primary School. She took on the role to get a top-down view of education.

Avantika talked about her early experience as a governor and the issue of 'imposter syndrome'. Despite her work background, she initially felt unprepared for the role of governor.

"Am I qualified to do this? I speak the language of schools, but I don't know how to spend the Pupil Premium. It's really important new governors are given time to learn their role without pressure to contribute straight away."

Avantika had some ideas about where schools can look for new governors from different backgrounds.

"I think parents in other schools are a good target group. Primary schools should work together to recruit governors and secondary schools could use their alumni relationship. I think many people would be motivated to give back to the school they went to."

Tip 5 Make it easier for people to sign up

Think about your application process. How welcoming and informative are you? How accessible is the language you use? The more barriers the process creates, the more unfamiliar it is, the more likely you are to end up with the same kind of people as you already have.



"Play to people's strengths"

Ken Thomas is a governor at St Francis Xavier Sixth Form College in Wandsworth. He became a governor

through his church and brings his experience as a youth and community worker to the role.

"I'm dyslexic and if I'd had to go through a more formal recruitment process I wouldn't be where I am. Schools need to make the role of governor more accessible to enable a wider cohort of people to be involved."

Ken suggested that governor meetings could be done in different ways to play to people's strengths.

"Schools should have less formal meetings, do more group work, have away days and try involving older pupils."

Recruitment (continued)



Keni also thought schools should adopt practices used by the voluntary and community sector to support people who get involved.

“Free childcare. Vouchers to cover expenses. Free transport if there are mobility issues. Refreshments at each session.”

When you're trying to recruit from a wider cohort, consider whether your current requirements are necessary or prohibitive.

- Are you putting too much emphasis on academic qualifications and work experience?
- Given DBS checking, do you need to ask for professional references?
- Make sure your expenses policy is available to potential governors – some people may rely more on them than others.
- Avoid application forms with complex and jargon filled questions – keep it simple. Tower Hamlets Governor Services offers an example of a [simple application form](#).

Tip 6 Use education charities and governor recruitment websites

Take advantage of both local and national organisations promoting involvement in education. Use ones that aim to recruit and match governors to the right schools.

- [The Switch](#) is a local organisation with extensive relationships with local businesses promoting involvement in Tower Hamlets schools.
- [Inspire](#) is another former Education Business Partnership working in central London.
- [Inspiring Governance](#) and [Governors for Schools](#) both specialise in recruiting and matching governors with schools.

Tip 7 Don't forget other volunteer recruitment services

There are also local and national organisations recruiting and matching people who want to contribute to their local community.

[Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets](#) actively targets and supports local residents from Black, Asian and Multi Ethnic backgrounds to become volunteers. The City of London runs a similar service.

[Queen Mary's University](#), [University of East London](#), [City University of London](#) and [London Metropolitan University](#) all run volunteer services aimed at both students and staff.

[Team London](#) is the Mayor of London's volunteer matching service. [HandsOn London](#) offer a similar service.

[Do IT](#) run a national database connecting volunteers to a wide range of organisations inside and outside London. [Reach Volunteering](#) is a national charity recruiting and placing volunteers. [CharityJob](#) offers volunteer opportunities, as well as paid jobs.



Recruitment (continued)

Tip 8 Have you seen the Tower Hamlets governor recruitment video?

If you haven't, **watch it now**. The council commissioned the video to promote the benefits of being a governor to potential applicants. Once you've seen it, you'll want to use it. You can link to it from your website, show it at school events, share it through your social media platforms and get it out there through personal and professional networks.

Tip 9 Get creative with social media

Remember, "A picture is worth a thousand words." Use clips from the recruitment video, or better still, make your own. Get pupils to film governors, staff, and other children saying why people from their community should become governors. Then, put them out on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. You could reach a whole new cohort of potential governors.

Tip 10 Don't despair!

The way to a fully inclusive and representative governing board is a staged process. It will be a journey to achieving more equal representation. Lessons will be learned along the way.



VIDEO CLIP: Recruitment Tips -



See how Tower Hamlets governors think you can get more people involved.

3.Retention

Investing in your board

When you've put so much effort into getting them on board, you don't want your new governors to fade away after a few meetings. This is particularly important when you've deliberately brought people on board who are unfamiliar with the world of education or have a different background to the majority of your board.

Tip 11 Do things differently

You may need to do things differently to ensure your new governors can thrive.

- Can meetings be run in a different way? Some meetings could be more informal. You could have some small group discussions to allow people with less experience to grow in confidence,
- Can some meetings be held online, or as hybrid meetings to allow people with commitments, like childcare, to attend?
- Can you present papers differently? Key points could be summarised or highlighted. Some people may prefer to read in a different language.
- Are there particular religious or cultural dates or days of the week that may need to be avoided for meetings? Fridays often clash with Muslim prayer times for example.
- Could questions be submitted in advance, so new governors get a feel for the kind of questions to ask? Although these questions shouldn't be answered outside meetings as it's important for new governors to hear discussion and debate within the meetings.
- The Chair should ensure everyone gets their say, bringing people along with them. They should be consciously giving people chances to share their views and experiences.
- Make sure new governors understand all the acronyms and insider language. Use the Jargon Buster in section 4.



Retention (continued)



“Look after your parent governors”

Mandla Shongwe is a co-opted governor at Ben Johnson Primary School in Mile End. He is a Network Lead Nurse at a local hospital. He started as a parent governor and has been a governor there for 15 years, working with four headteachers. When he started, he knew there was a lot to learn.

“It was overwhelming. A huge responsibility. Finances, curriculum issues, being a link governor, lots of papers and loads of data. I didn’t want to look stupid.”

Although there was informal support from other governors, he saw a big gap and took on the role of inducting new parent governors. When he stood back from this role due to work commitments, the then Head took on the role, but it didn’t work.

“You must look after your parent governors; they can be so much more. People need someone to hold their hand, a buddy or mentor, but the Head shouldn’t be a buddy, it needs to be a peer. A new governor might not feel empowered to question the Head.”

Mandla identified his ability to support black leaders and staff as a huge positive for the school. He has used his experience to facilitate the change.

“I thought about becoming a secondary school governor when my son left, but stayed to support a new black female head. It was a great success. Teachers loved her and parents from the local community were delighted to see a person from a Black, Asian and Multi Ethnic background as head.”

Mandla felt schools need to work harder to clearly articulate the role and get the message out to the local community, to get more people from Black, Asian and Multi Ethnic backgrounds involved.

“Schools need to create links to mosques and local businesses, as well as parents. The link to cultural and religious leaders can be particularly valuable when issues like Relationship and Sex Education can sometimes create divisions between the school and community.”

Tip 12 Give new governors a ‘buddy’

New governors need someone to support them when they start. They need a chance to ask questions without feeling stupid.

Creating a peer support or ‘buddy system’, linking new governors with more experienced governors for their first year in post is probably the most important thing you can do.

It’s important to get the right buddy. The Head or Chair may not be the right person. It needs to be someone who has the time to meet the new governor in advance of meetings, maybe also from a Black, Asian and Multi Ethnic background. If there’s no-one on your board, look elsewhere, maybe a neighbouring school.

Tower Hamlets Governor Services could help you find the right buddies for new governors in your school.



Retention (continued)



“It’s like starting a new job ”

Fatima Tejani is a parent governor at Lawdale Junior School in Bethnal Green. She volunteered at the breakfast club

before joining the board in the summer of 2021.

Talking about starting as a new governor, Fatima said, “It’s like starting a new job. You need to know it will get better over time. It was harder than I thought, getting to understand the jargon, but I had the Tower Hamlets Governor Services training and the staff governor to help me.”

Fatima wanted all new governors to be linked to a buddy, someone with more experience of the role to talk to and get support from.

“It doesn’t need to be someone in the school. They could be from another local school. New parent governors need help to take a wider view of their role.”

Fatima thought parent governors in primary schools should be prepared and supported to move onto secondary school boards.

“My older child is already at secondary school. I’d like to be a parent governor there, but I know there’s a big gap.”

Tip 13 Develop a shared culture

The induction process should include more than roles and responsibilities. It’s important to emphasise shared behaviours and expectations, like how to challenge and support. Don’t assume someone from outside education, from a different cultural background, will be used to the way you are used to working.

New governors should meet the chair at the start of their tenure. The chair should use this meeting to find out what they can do to ensure the governor can fully participate and grow in their new role.

Tip 14 Change perspectives

New Black, Asian and Multi Ethnic governors might be experts by experience, but everyone continues to share the responsibility for equality and diversity. Representing a minority group is not their only role on the governing board. Consider unconscious bias training for the whole board.

Tip 15 Learn from your governors

You probably know it’s good practice to do exit interviews when governors move on. You may need to change the questions to understand different perspectives. Use the results to learn what else you can do and change as necessary.

Tip 16 And finally

Getting a more representative board will bring in different views, but effective stakeholder engagement is still vital.

Don’t feel you’ve automatically covered diversity and inclusion by having a diverse board, it is an ongoing process, not a one-off. It involves being open to challenge and thinking outside the box.

Good luck!



4. Resources, references and useful websites

Know Wonder tools

Tower Hamlets Governor Recruitment Film – commissioned by the council to promote the benefits of being a governor to potential applicants from all our communities.

Jargon buster - an acronym demystifying tool for potential and existing governors.

Inclusive recruitment and retention handbook - guidance on reducing the influence of bias and discrimination in recruitment and retention of governors and staff.

GovernorHub

GovernorHub offers information, advice and practical tools for school governing boards. If your school is not already subscribed, you can get a one month free trial.

Tower Hamlets Governor Services

If your school has an SLA, Governor Services offer new governors guidance on their new governors page as well as a governor training package.

Find out more by contacting them at governors@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Department for Education information and resources

Governance handbook and competency framework

Online registration form for potential new governors

NGA tools and information

Everyone on Board: increasing diversity in school governance

Governing board diversity indicators form

Young Governors Network

Visible Governance in Schools and Trusts

Increasing participation in school and trust governance - A state of the nation report on recruiting and retaining volunteers

Interesting reading and listening

tenpencemore - Education from all directions 'Why getting diverse bums on seats is not enough'

BBC Radio 4 World at One - Conversations about race with school governors Yinka Ewuola, Aisha Nevers and Jordan Holder



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