

## Effective Chairing – What I Have Learned

This article provides reflections from an experienced Chair of Governors regarding things she wished she'd known before she started chairing.

There is no right or wrong way to chair a meeting or be a chair of governors or trustees. This is because what works for one person might not work for another and every board is different. However, there are a number of actions and attitudes that all effective chairs demonstrate over and over again.

Effective chairs all

- know and understand who is on the board
- know and understand the school
- develop positive relationships

### Use soft power to shape and influence

An effective chair will not control the narrative but will allow each member of the board, including school leadership, to contribute fully. They will influence appropriately, share effectively and manage distention with discretion. They will give space and opportunity for others to speak. They will allow the space for silence, other voices and for reflection. They should not use their influence in a negative way; coerce the board into making decisions inappropriately, early or outside their authority; and should always keep a record of their actions.

### Use the agenda to drive the strategy

An agenda is much more than a list of things to discuss at a meeting. By understanding individual governor or trustees motivations, beliefs and commitments; the short, medium and long term strategy and how the various elements of the strategy come together over time; and who is responsible and accountable, an effective chair will remain true to the purpose and not stray or be swayed by outside influences.

### Keep the school values at the heart of everything

Ensuring that school values are front and centre throughout the meeting, during link visits, in discussions and during reflections an effective chair will remind, reiterate and model the values through their meeting behaviours, consensus-seeking and communications.

### Work as a team player

An effective chair is first amongst equals and should listen, learn, be open to challenge and be challenged in return (held to account), support, model, distribute leadership, stay strategic; be invitational, humble, professional, available, avoid over stepping the management boundary, allow and enable others to grow, work with not against the leadership, develop a good relationship with the clerk, and not stay in the role too long (succession planning).

### Undertake professional learning

Chairing can be a time consuming activity often in challenging circumstances. An effective chair will take the time to consider their own learning and skills; perhaps by contributing to peer networks, attending school leadership events, or by undertaking programmes of study.

## **Ensure wellbeing matters**

An effective chair will remember that others as well as themselves need to invest time in their own wellbeing.

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