



ATHENA
LEARNING TRUST



Governors Handbook





WELCOME

From the
Chair of Trustees



I extend a warm welcome as you consider a vital role in our educational governance. Your interest reflects a shared dedication to fostering excellence in education, and we eagerly anticipate the potential contributions you could bring to our esteemed team.

Becoming a governor is not just a responsibility – it's a commitment to shaping the educational landscape of our community. Your involvement will be instrumental in influencing policies, strategies, and initiatives that drive the success of our institutions.

This handbook offers comprehensive insights into the roles and responsibilities of governors within our governance structure. We hope it serves as an inspiring guide, encouraging you to take an active role in shaping the future of our family of schools and colleges.

Thank you for contemplating this important and fulfilling role. I look forward to the prospect of welcoming you as a valued member of our governance team.

Elaine Marshall
Chair of the Board of Trustees



KEY PEOPLE



Ben Parnell CEO

Ben Parnell is the CEO of Athena Learning Trust, a champion of knowledge,

creativity, and strategic educational improvement. With a deep and successful history in education leadership, Ben brings significant experience to his role. Prior to leading Athena Learning Trust, he served in positions such as Director of Education, Regional Director, and Executive Principal.

Passionate and results-driven, Ben has a proven track record of school improvement sustained even after his direct involvement has ended. He believes in creating environments of positive behaviour, structured teaching, robust support for students with special educational needs, fiscal responsibility, and exceptional governance.

Ben Parnell is a collaborative leader dedicated to the success of the students, educators, and communities served by Athena Learning Trust.



Georgina Fahey Head of Governance and Compliance

Georgina is passionate about working with

children and has spent her career leading in primary schools, most recently in Bristol. She was born and educated in Cornwall, holds a Masters Degree in Psychology, and is a qualified SENCO.

She currently serves as the trust Head of Governance and Compliance, and has held this role since September 2022. As the governance lead for the trust, she has restructured governance at a local level for our schools, and developed a robust committee structure for Trustees. In addition, Georgina supports schools with suspension and permanent exclusion procedures, and Trust compliance work including dealing with complaints, Subject Access Requests, and Policy reviewing.

ABOUT THE TRUST

Welcome to Athena Learning Trust

Founded in 2022, we are a family of schools championing wisdom, knowledge, and learning. Named after Athena, we stand for a world where every child attends a great school. Together, we learn from the best thinkers, striving to be a leading trust for knowledge-building.

Vision

At Athena Learning Trust, our vision is dedicated to delivering world-class support that transforms lives.

Our Ethos

We are committed to fostering ambitious individuals passionate about learning. Our priority is making a lasting impact for our students, colleagues, and communities. We collaborate across all levels, share expertise, challenge ourselves, and provide unwavering support.

Our Values

Children are our future, and we aim to inspire and empower them to dream big, take responsibility, and be kind.

Dream Big

We strive for world-class education, ensuring opportunities for extraordinary lives.

Be Kind

High support and ownership are central to our ethos, promoting kindness and integrity.

Take Responsibility

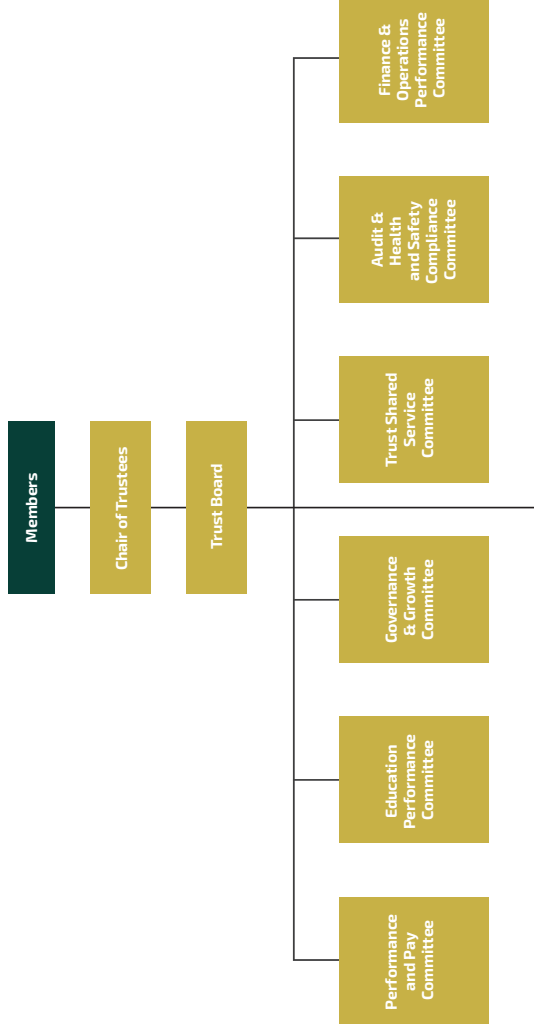
Each school has a unique identity, led by its Headteacher and Local Governing Body, collectively responsible for delivering a world-class education.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The governance structure is set out as follows:

Members

The members are akin to the shareholders of a company. They have ultimate control over the academy Trust, with the ability to appoint some of the trustees and the right to amend the Trust's articles of association.



Trustees

The trustees are responsible for the same three core governance functions performed by the governing body in a maintained school: setting the direction, holding the headteacher to account, and ensuring financial probity. Academy trusts are charitable companies and the trustees are company directors and must comply with company law requirements.

Local Governors

Individuals who sit on local governing bodies (LGBs) are referred to as 'local governors'. The Primary Cluster is a combined Governing Body, formed by our three primary schools; each school has two parent representatives and a staff representative.

This is because trustees can delegate governance functions to the local level.

Trustees have complete discretion over what is delegated to each LGB.

There are direct channels of communication between the Chair of Trustees and the LGB chair and central services. The Trust Governance Officer coordinates the various Boards and will hold contact details for all local governors of schools within the Trust.



ROLE OF A GOVERNOR

Overview

School governors in the Trust play a vital role in ensuring the best possible education for every student in their care. Delegated by the Board of Trustees, the Governing Body performs a non-executive function, providing strategic oversight and accountability.

Governor Responsibilities

Governors act collectively to uphold values, oversee school operations, and ensure compliance with our Trust policies. They hold school leaders accountable for educational and staff performance, financial management, and adherence to policies.

Key Principles

Governors abide by the Code of Conduct and Nolan Principles, acting in line with governance procedures. They work cooperatively within the governing body, valuing collective decision-making, and maintaining open, courteous relationships with stakeholders.

Governor Commitments

Governors actively contribute to meetings, engage with school staff, and stay informed about education developments. They take on specific roles, participate in training, and collaborate with other governing bodies in the Trust.

Volunteering vs. Governing

While governors are welcome to visit schools, engaging directly with staff outside of official meetings is considered volunteering, not governing. Decisions made in good faith, following the role description and Trust policies, protect governors from personal liability.

In essence, school governors at Athena Learning Trust contribute collectively to strategic oversight, accountability, and the promotion of the Trust's values for the benefit of students, staff, and communities.



BENEFITS OF BEING A GOVERNOR

Reasons to volunteer as a governor

Becoming a governor offers you a chance to make a difference in education by amplifying diverse voices and directly impacting children's lives. Through governance, you ensure inclusivity and equity while shaping policies that nurture the holistic development of every child. Additionally, serving as a governor provides invaluable opportunities for your personal growth and leadership development.

As a governor, you impact education by:

- amplifying voices
- shaping policies
- and nurturing children's development.

Gain hands-on experience in:

- leadership
- project management
- and budgeting, contributing to our educational community's growth.

Your journey is about making a difference while evolving professionally, and shaping the future of education.

HOW TO APPLY

Application Methods

Online Application

To apply online, please visit <https://www.athenalearningtrust.uk/gov-join-us> where you will find a dedicated form for governor applications. The online form is designed to capture essential information about your background, skills, and motivations for seeking a governor role. Follow the instructions provided on the website to complete the form accurately.

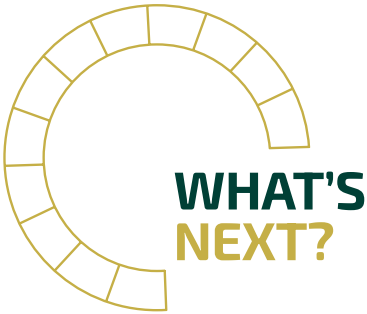
Paper Application

Alternatively, you may contact governance@athenalearningtrust.uk to obtain a paper copy of the application form. A member of the Governance Team will assist you in acquiring the necessary documentation and provide guidance on completing the paper application form.

Confidentiality

All information provided in the application process will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. We respect your privacy and adhere to data protection standards.

Thank you for taking the first step towards becoming a governor in our Trust. Your dedication to governance plays a vital role in the continued success of education. If you have any questions or need further assistance, feel free to reach out to the Governance Team.



The following steps are essential for integrating you into our governing body and ensuring effective governance of our school.

Next Steps:

- **ID Documentation for DBS Check:** If you're not a staff member, we'll request your ID documents for a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check. This ensures the safety and security of our school community.
- **Email Setup and Inclusion in Governors Email Group:** Your email address will be set up, and you'll be added to the Governors email group. This ensures smooth communication and collaboration among the governing body.
- **Provide Pecuniary Interests and Short Bio:** We'll ask you to provide information about any pecuniary interests you may have and a short bio. This information will be displayed

on the school website to promote transparency and accountability.

- **Addition to Websites:** You'll be added to relevant websites such as the National Governors Association (NGA) and GovernorHub. This allows you to access resources, connect with other governors, and stay updated on important information.

If you have any questions or need assistance with any of these steps, please don't hesitate to contact us.

We're here to support you every step of the way.

We value your interest and encourage you to reach out with any enquiries or to seek further information.

Please feel free to contact us using the provided details below:





Head of Governance

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governance@athenalearningtrust.uk

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Whether you have questions about the application process, governance roles, or would like more information about **Athena Learning Trust** – we are here to assist you.

Thank you for considering *Athena Learning Trust* as your platform for making a meaningful impact in education.

We look forward to hearing from you.



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