



Candidate Pack for Chair of Governors Portfield School



Welcome

Dear Candidate,

Thank you for your interest in becoming a Chair of Governors for Portfield School.

This is a really positive and pivotal time for Autism Unlimited. It's an exciting time to join as we enter an ambitious period of strategic growth and expansion.

We are one of the largest regional charities in the UK, supporting people living with autism and their families and educating children and young people. In the past three years we have expanded our services and reach, and we know that we have the capacity to double our impact over the next strategic period.

This ambition and sense of purpose is what drives us all and we have exciting plans to develop and grow our school.

Our School Governing Body is central to our success, and we are lucky to have a supportive and challenging group who work closely with us to deliver improvement in our school. We want our governing body to help, guide and hold the senior leadership team to account for improving our school offer. We are particularly keen to meet people living with autism who might be interested in this role.

You do not need to have been a governor before, but chairing or leadership experience would be very useful. All we ask is that you use your professional insight, your strategic and leadership talent, and your determination to create an aspirational education for children living with autism.

If this excites you, we hope you enjoy reading more about who we are at Autism Unlimited and will consider making an application.

We would love to hear from you.

Best wishes,

Julie Catanach, Director of Education



About us

Autism Unlimited exists to support and empower those living with autism. Autism affects around 700,000 people in the UK and if you include their families, autism is a part of the daily lives of 2.8 million people.

We recognise the challenges for children, adults and their families and work with them as partners to find solutions and create opportunities through tailored learning and support. The environment we aim to create in education is fun, friendly, and joyful – we see the possibilities and opportunities, not barriers and boundaries.

We are a progressive organisation with an ambitious vision; from a charity founded by parents of autistic children, who held our very first school in their garden shed, to now 50 years later delivering a range of services to adults, providing advice and information, bringing groups together to share experiences and support each other, educating children from 4 to 19 years.

Portfield School

Portfield School is a thriving non-maintained school for 137 pupils across two sites, one in Parley Lane, Christchurch, and the other, a brand new Sixth Form, based in the heart of a business park and co-designed with students. We aimed for our new Sixth Form to be the funkiest sixth form on the south coast if not the UK - students tell us - it is!

Our Governing Body

The school is managed through the Executive team of Autism Unlimited, overseen by the Director of Education.

As our school philosophy is one which combines psychotherapeutic approaches underpinned by an understanding and sensitivity to behaviour as a communication process, then those with interest and knowledge of approaches such as these and with experience of their application, would be most welcome and encouraged.

You can read about our school and governing body here: <https://www.autism-unlimited.org>



Vision, Mission, and Values

Our values

We believe that every student can achieve success. Our diverse community is built on the values we share – Resilience, Partnership, Courage, Care and Curiosity. We embrace and celebrate the differences among us, recognising them as the individual gifts that make each person truly unique.

Our vision and aims

Portfield School provides specialist autism education, with the aim of empowering each and every student to achieve their full potential. Our focus is on equipping our learners with the necessary skills for every stage of their lives. We believe in exploring the potential of each student and tailoring their curriculum to meet their individual needs and stage of learning. This includes academic, social, physical, moral, and spiritual aspects. Our dedicated team delivers a therapeutic and student-centred curriculum that places emphasis on communication and social development.

Throughout their school journey, students learn important skills such as effective communication, collaboration with others, emotional literacy, building and maintaining healthy relationships, and fostering independence. We prioritise the mental health and well-being of our learners, providing them with opportunities to engage in a wide range of activities that boost their self-esteem, confidence, and ability to self-regulate.

Our ultimate goal is to equip every student with the ability to make choices and embrace change in their own lives. We strive to remove barriers, create a safe environment, and encourage students to take risks so that they can truly thrive.

At Portfield School, we foster an inclusive school community that celebrates diversity. We value the unique strengths of each student, preparing them for life after school and to become valued and positive contributors to the wider society.

In order to achieve these aims the school is committed to:

- Raising aspirations for every student.
- Providing a broad, balanced, relevant, and flexible curriculum.
- Teaching in a way that motivates, engages, and inspires a love of learning.
- Offering learning beyond the school walls.
- Endeavouring to discover innovative approaches that enable students to access every opportunity.
- Working in partnership with parents, carers, and professionals to secure the best support for each student.

Job description

Job title: Chair of Governors

Role purpose:

The Chair has overall responsibility for leadership of the Portfield School Governing Body (“the SGB”), in line with the strategic direction of the Charity, and its delegated powers. The SGB is composed of volunteers, including trustees, staff, community, and parent members and collectively they are accountable for the school’s overall performance. The Chair’s main role is to provide leadership and direction to the SGB so that it can focus on its core functions.

The Chair is accountable for:

- Ensuring that the governing body’s affairs are conducted in accordance with the law.
- In conjunction with Autism Unlimited (AU), setting the strategic direction for the school in line with the charity’s strategic plan agreed by the Board of AU.
- The SGB’s agreement of the School Development Plan and keeping this continually under review.
- Ensuring that there are effective systems in place for the SGB to monitor and evaluate progress towards development objectives.
- Reporting and providing assurance as appropriate to the Board of Autism Unlimited.

Main responsibilities:

Visible leadership within the school:

- Championing Portfield School’s values, vision, and aspirations.
- Fostering productive relationships between governors and school staff.
- Acting as an ambassador for the Governing Body and for the school.
- Attending school functions and community events.
- Being accessible to other governors, staff, and parents.
- Dealing with complaints when appropriate, and according to the school complaints policy.

Leadership of the Governing Body:

- In conjunction with the Clerk, oversee the appointment of new governors, as and when required, in accordance with the constitution and delegated powers.
- Ensuring suitable induction for new governors and ensuring that existing ones keep their training up to date.
- The allocation of specific roles to governors in line with national requirements and the specific needs of Portfield School.
- Setting clear expectations for governors, including their time commitment, training, and adherence to the code of conduct.
- Providing regular feedback to governors.
- Ensuring that the governing body works as a team for the benefit of all learners.
- Developing succession plans for specific roles, including the Chair.
- Co-ordinating the governing body’s input in preparation for statutory inspections.

Management of Governing Body Meetings

The Chair will work with the Clerk to:

- Plan the annual cycle of meetings.
- Agree the agenda for individual meetings.
- Disseminate papers, along with other relevant information and materials in good time.
- Ensure effective running of meetings, with a focus on priorities and good time management.
- Keep good order in meetings.
- Ensure decisions of the governing body are accurately recorded, and distributed in a timely fashion with clear actions, owners, and timelines.

Being a critical friend for the Headteacher:

- Establishing an effective relationship with the Headteacher based on trust and mutual respect for each other's roles.
- Providing a sounding board, encouragement, and constructive challenge as appropriate.
- Respecting confidentiality.
- Liaison with Autism Unlimited:
 - With the Headteacher's line manager, the Director of Education, to provide feedback and seek advice as appropriate.
 - With the Chief Executive of the charity, in relation to non-delegated functions that impact on the performance of the school.
 - With the Chair of Autism Unlimited in relation to strategy and to provide assurance and/or raise concerns on behalf of the Governing Body.



Person specification

Knowledge and experience

- Experience within an educational setting, and the ability to focus upon the fundamental questions of 'How well are pupils learning and how do we know?'
- Experience and understanding of the importance of effective safeguarding, including the development of safeguarding policies and procedures.
- A track record of senior leadership at the executive or non-executive level. Ideally, experience of leading or collaborating with multi-skilled non-executive boards and of fostering inclusive and diverse boards.

Skills and abilities

- Strategic thinking and the ability to contribute to long-term planning and vision to deliver impact.
- A proven track record of actively facilitating discussion, summarising points of discussion to support decision making, and resolving potential areas of conflict to build consensus.
- Exceptional interpersonal and communication skills, with the ability to act as an ambassador in a diverse range of environments.

Styles and behaviours

- High levels of emotional intelligence with a collaborative and highly inclusive style. You will bring a low ego and high personal credibility, fostering trust and valuing different perspectives.
- The confidence to challenge and be challenged.
- High ethical standards and commitment to upholding Portfield School's values.
- An engaging style which inspires confidence.
- Solution-focused, with an ability to see the big picture and be pragmatic.



Terms of Appointment

Remuneration & Time Commitment

This role is offered on a voluntary basis. Reasonable expenses will be reimbursed.

There are 6 or 7 meetings per year and in addition school visits and attendance at school events. Overall, the time commitment equates to around 10 days per annum.

Location

All meetings are held in person at
Portfield School.
Parley Ln,
West Parley,
Christchurch BH23 6BP.

We encourage in person meetings but on occasion there is the option to meet via MS Teams.

How to apply

We hope you will consider making an application. If you have questions about the appointment and would find it helpful to have an informal conversation, please contact Szymon Podgorski at Szymon.Podgorski@starfishsearch.com and we will be happy to arrange a call. To make an application, please go to <http://starfishsearch.com/jobs/autism-gov/> and click on the apply now button, with the following prepared:

- Your CV (no more than three sides).
- A supporting statement (no more than two sides) that sets out why you think this role is the right move for you and how you meet the knowledge and experience criteria.

We would also be grateful if you would complete the Equality and Diversity monitoring form on the online application process. This form is for monitoring purposes only and is not treated as part of your application.

Closing date:	Friday 28th June 2024
Preliminary interviews:	w/c Monday 8th July 2024
Final Panel interviews:	w/c Monday 15th July 2024

