



Guidance for on Role of Link Governors & Protocols for Visiting School

Introduction

Governors have a responsibility to monitor and evaluate the progress of their school and contribute to the school self-evaluation process. This can be done through a variety of methods including reports from the headteacher and senior staff, analysis of statistical data and, perhaps most importantly, through first hand observation.

During recent years governing bodies have been encouraged to appoint link, or nominated, governors. A link governor takes on the responsibility to liaise with identified areas such as Sex Education; There are those nominated with specific responsibility such as SEN, Literacy, Numeracy, Health and Safety, Child Protection and Safeguarding and Children in Care. Schools will sometimes request a link with a current initiative within school. Other useful and productive "links" are those between individual governors and individual teachers and classes, subject areas, priorities within the School Development Plan.

If we think of a governing body as a closed chain, a link (or nominated) governor is an individual governor who has been asked to link up with a teacher or 'responsible person' outside the chain. An efficient governing body is one in which responsibility is shared amongst all its members, so that it really is performing as a team. Ideally, every governor would be asked to fulfil a link role in order to involve all members of the team.

The Role

Clearly there is great scope in appointing appropriate links within schools, however what should be remembered is this should not only be seen as an area a governor has a particular interest in but as a strategic appointment to improve the monitoring and evaluating process.

Most governing bodies agree their link areas and nominate governors at the first meeting of the academic year. This should be promptly followed up with an agreed timetable for visits otherwise before you know it a year will have flown by before the governing body has had time to consider what the links have achieved before going through the same process again! Once the agreement has been reached as to appropriate links it should be made clear what it expected and activities identified. A record of any visit or activity should be kept and kept in a file maintained for that purpose.

Activities and purpose will clearly not be the same for all 'links' but might include:

- Making focused visits to school
- Exploring specific aspects within the link area to gain deeper understanding of relevant issues
- Establishing regular contact with person(s) within the school with responsibility for the governors chosen 'link' area
- Providing support and encouragement and a listening ear for staff member with whom they are linked
- Monitoring provision of equipment and use of school facilities
- Attending at relevant training, including relevant INSET days
- Being involved with establishing/monitoring/evaluating relevant policies adopted by the governing body within their chosen link area
- Considering ways to encourage parental involvement
- Participating, as agreed, with subject leaders/Headteacher in the preparation of the Self Evaluation Form
- Becoming familiar with areas within School Development Plan
- Reporting back, following visit, making recommendations as appropriate either via committees or full governing body meetings
- Keeping abreast of developments both local and nationally.

Governors are busy people and may find it difficult to visit school during the school day, if the links are to be productive, governors must find an efficient way of "fitting it in" and, most importantly, the teachers need to be prepared and fully informed about the purpose of these links. **The role of the 'Link Governor' is not to supervise or line manage school staff, this is the responsibility of the Headteacher and senior staff.**

The benefits of links are far reaching:

- They allow governors to see first-hand the resources used in school, the fabric of the building etc, so that they can make informed decisions about future budget allocations

- They constitute part of a strategy to monitor and evaluate regularly the progress of the School Development Plan
- They are a means to build up relationships, based on mutual trust and respect
- They provide OFSTED with concrete evidence about the involvement of the governors in the school
- Contribute to inform the schools self-evaluation process.

Perhaps the most important thing required for the links to work is goodwill both on the part of teachers, who have no contractual obligation to liaise with individual governors, and on the part of governors, who, as volunteers, have no contractual obligation at all (but do need to fulfill their monitoring and evaluating roles).

Mutual tact and consideration are the basis for this goodwill, and an understanding that the governor/teacher link is intended to be strong and supportive, and certainly not a taut link that could snap at any time!

Governing bodies that have established effective link roles will have an improved understanding of how the school works, its strengths and weaknesses and will improve their effectiveness in addressing school improvement issues. Ofsted will work on the assumption that governors know the strengths and weaknesses and will 'test' that assumption during the inspection.

Reporting

It is important that a report is prepared and received by the governing body at either committee or full governing body level so they can be discussed. Where trends or patterns can be identified the governing body should put them into the context of the School Development Plan and act on them if appropriate. This could take the form of a written or verbal report and could be presented by the link governor or as a joint presentation with the linked member of staff.

Suggested Link Governors and their Responsibilities

As suggested, it is a matter for each governing body to decide on the appropriate links to enable it to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their school. The following is a list of link roles to be considered taken from both recommendations within current regulations. Some areas can be combined such as Child Protection, Safeguarding and Looked After Children. (Suggested 'job descriptors' for the following roles are available.

Specific roles:

- SEN
- Child Protection/Safeguarding
- Looked After Children

- Training and development of governors (this could also include Staff CPD (continuous professional development))
- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Health and Safety

Other suggested areas:

- ICT
- Educational visits
- Y6/Y7 transition
- Pupil Council
- Target Setting
- Healthy Schools
- PSHE
- Security
- Inclusion
- Sex and drugs
- Curriculum areas
- Class links - each governor links with a year group or class – this builds positive relationships with staff and pupils

Part 2

Visiting the school

In the main, this section covers the structured visits for monitoring and evaluating however governor's may also visit informally to attend or participate in assemblies, sports days, celebration events, school council meetings or assisting in areas in which they may be skilled e.g. reading. These visits will usually be arranged via an invitation. In all cases governors should make it clear when visiting if they are there as a visitor, parent, helper etc or if it is a more formal 'link role' visit.

The Guide to the Law states that;

'Individual governors do not have an automatic right to enter the school whenever they wish. But they need to be able to visit from time to time in order to develop their understanding of the school to enable them to fulfil their statutory responsibility for the conduct of the school. Governors should arrange their visits with the Headteacher, who has responsibility for the day-to-day management of the school. It is often useful to draw up a policy on governors visits to cover things such as giving notice, constructive feedback and handling concerns. The governing body should plan visits to cover a wide range of school work and each visit should have a clear purpose. Visits by governors can be useful and informative. They do not replace professional inspection or the monitoring and evaluation carried out by the Headteacher'.

Visiting policy: See separate policy