

**Parkwood Primary School**

**Link Governors**

# Introduction

# Link governors play a very important role in keeping the governing body informed on the work of the school as well as enabling the governing body to monitor key areas of school development and improvement plans.

Link governors are also a useful way for the governing body to develop positive links with staff and to maintain a visible and professional profile within the school.

The DfES *recommends* that each school has a link governor for child protection, literacy, numeracy and special educational needs. Additionally, governing bodies in Hackney have been asked to consider having a link governor for ethnic minority achievement and for governor training. At Parkwood, we have found it helpful, as a small school, to link governors with individual year groups which they follow through the school.

The link governors for 2014-15 at Parkwood are:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Area** | **Link governor** | **Lead member of staff** |
| Nursery | Dr. Sam Alsford | Lara Thomas |
| Reception | Sarah Jacobs | Layla Ibrahim |
| Year 1 | Sean Cundy/ Jon Homan | Andrea Sumner |
| Year 2 | Tanya Addison | Olivia Lucas |
| Year 3 | Michelina Popioloek-Szulczewska | Virginia Baron |
| Year 4 | Kathleen Walsh | Rumana Rafique |
| Year 5 | Father Daniel Sandeman | Doug King |
| Year 6 | Brian Bell | Andrew Ferguson |
| Safeguarding | Brian Bell |  |
| Literacy | Kathleen Walsh | Andrea Sumner |
| Mathematics | Tanya Addison | Virginia Baron |
| Science & Computing | Dr. Sam Alsford | Andrew Ferguson |
| Special Educational Needs | Fr Daniel Sandham | Tanya Pugh |

**What does a Link Governor do?**

**A link governor:**

1. Takes a special interest in their particular area of responsibility.
2. Keeps abreast of local and national developments that affect their area of special interest.
3. Checks that the school is meeting any statutory requirements in their special area of interest.
4. Keeps in regular contact with the person(s) within the school with responsibilities in their particular area of interest, and uses this contact to:

* develop an understanding of how the area fits into the school’s improvement/development plans and of any agreed improvement/achievement criteria/targets;
* discusses with the relevant staff the implications and whether there are any perceived difficulties in implementing policies adopted by the governing body;
* monitors how well relevant policies adopted by the governing body are operating within the school and asks for timely progress reports.

1. Acts as advocate/raises the profile of their special area of interest within the governing body, for example commenting on proposed budget allocations.
2. For governors linked with year groups, makes a half-day visit to the school once a year, and report back findings to the full governing body or relevant committee.
3. For governors linked with subject areas, makes a visit once a year to meet relevant staff, and report back findings to the full governing body or relevant committee.
4. For governors linked with other areas (e.g. Child Protection, SEN), visits the school to meet relevant staff at least once a year, and report back findings to the full governing body or relevant committee.

**Link governors might be expected to:**

* attend relevant training courses;
* attend events for parents (e.g. parents’ evenings);
* sit in on classes;
* help identify when it might be appropriate to invite school staff to give more in-depth reports/presentations to the governing body or appropriate committee.

**Further information on governor visits can be found in Appendix A, ‘Guidelines for Governor Visits’**

Governors do not have a statutory right of access to the school. However the DfES *recommends* and Headteachers often encourage governors to visit the school during the day to observe it in operation. Governors should remember that visits can create quite a lot of extra work for staff and that some teacher might be apprehensive when governors sit in on lessons. **Governors should always remember that they are visiting the school as a critical friend and a source of support to staff.**

Whilst not a statutory requirement, the DfES *recommends*that the governing body draws up a policy/code of conduct for governor visits to the school.

1. Visits should be undertaken as part of a strategic programme to:

* improve governor knowledge of the school, its staff, needs, priorities, strengths and weaknesses;
* monitor and assess the priorities as outlined in the school improvement/development plan;
* assist the governing body to fulfil its statutory duties.

1. Before visiting the school the governor(s) should:

* inform the school of the visit and seek approval of the arrangements (including any requests to meet with individual members of staff and classroom observations);
* share with the relevant staff any questions or issues that they would like to raise;
* ensure that they are familiar with health and safety procedures including what to do in the event of a fire.

1. After visiting the school the governor(s) should:

* complete a visit report outlining the objectives and results of the visit (Appendix B);
* report back to the committee or governing body as appropriate;
* provide constructive feedback to school staff as appropriate.
* Feedback upon any identified training needs, particularly in respect the well-being of pupils
* Make note of any risks observed during the visit and inform staff accordingly

It is important that governors remember that the purpose of Governors’ visits is not to assess the quality of teaching provision, nor to pursue issues that relate to the day to day management of the school other than as agreed with the Headteacher/SMT.

**Appendix A provides a Code of Conduct for governor visits**

**What type of questions should link governors ask?**

Governors should have a clear focus or objective for the visit. Within this context they should prepare for the visit and think about whom it might be appropriate to meet, what questions might be asked and what activities to request, for example observing a lesson, talking to a group of pupils or attending a school council meeting. At this point it may be useful to do one or more of the following:

* talk to other governors (including the Headteacher);
* look at past governors’ reports/papers relevant to the area;
* look at guidance on the internet (see section on useful links)

**General questions might include:**

* Are there any statutory requirements for this area of work/responsibility?
* What are the main improvements/objectives/targets of the school in this area?
* What actions are you taking to meet these improvements/objectives/targets?
* How are you monitoring the school’s progress in this area?
* How will you know when you have met the improvements/objectives/targets for this area?
* Are there any barriers to meeting the improvements/objectives/targets?

### Does the school have a procedure/policy for this area?

* Who should be aware/implement this procedure/policy?
* Who is accountable for/monitors whether the procedure/policy is effective ***or*** how do you know the procedure/policy is working?
* What issues are there for staff/ senior managers in this area of work?

**Additional subject/area related questions can be found attached at Appendix C**

**Date: October 2015**

**Review Date: September 2017**

**Appendix A**

**Code of Conduct: Guidelines for Governor Visits**

**Introduction**

All governors need to spend time getting to know the school during the school day. Governors will be treated as welcome visitors if the visit is approached sensibly with a clear focus.

**Purpose**

The Governing Body has extensive influence over the school’s development. Visits enable governors to gain a better understanding of the work that goes on in the school and so become better informed when exercising their responsibilities.

Individual governors on visits have no authority as individuals but act as representatives of the governing body.

**Focus of Visit**

Governors have a responsibility for the oversight of the school, but are not inspectors or advisers; nor is it for governors to assess the professional competence of individual teachers. Visits should relate to a person’s responsibility as a governor and capacities as an individual. A visit will give a snapshot of the school and not necessarily a full and balanced picture. Any concerns which arise as a result of a visit should be checked and revised in the light of other information and discussed with the Headteacher.

It is important, therefore, that each visit **has a focus or objective** that is agreed in advance, perhaps by establishing a framework for governor visits:

1. to gain background information and to get a 'feel' of the school
2. to look at a specific class, subject area or activity
3. to see how well a policy is being implemented
4. to look at the school premises or administration

**Frequency**

Governors should visit their year group or area at least once a year. As a Governing Body we recommend that governors visit at least once a term, according to the nature of their link. Visits should be spaced so as not to overburden staff.

**Duration**

Depending on the focus, an ordinary visit should last for a half-day, including lunch. Session times are:

a.m. xxam to xx am/pm

p.m. xxpm to xx pm

**Arranging to visit**

Contact the school office to arrange your visit, which should be agreed with SLT. The office will liaise with the relevant member/s of staff. New governors should contact the office to arrange an introductory tour of the school.

Visits must be made in accordance with the guidelines agreed by governors and the Head:

1. agree the focus/objective, date and time of the visit with the Head in advance
2. remind the Head of the focus of the visit if agreed early in the year
3. agree the format of a class visit with the Head
4. the programme may include a short slot with the Head or Deputy to recount immediate impressions and help set the experience in a whole school context
5. once a visit is fixed, it should not be called off unless this is absolutely unavoidable.

The Governing Body may decide to agree a focus for a visit each term.

**Preparing for the visit**

For new Governors it helps to have a basic knowledge of the school in advance of the visit. This can be gained from the current prospectus or from a look at the last Head’s report or the annual report to parents. If your visit is for a more specific purpose, make sure you have reviewed any relevant paperwork.

**During the visit**

A basic programme could look like this:

1. call at the office to say you’ve arrived
2. follow the programme agreed
3. the teacher will have been briefed on the visit - but have a word with the teacher before the lesson to ensure all are clear about the purpose of the visit and how it relates to your responsibilities
4. if attending lessons, go in at the start of the lesson and stay for the whole lesson
5. do **not** take notes during the lesson
6. thank the teacher before leaving the lesson

**Do not**

1. do not use the occasion to criticise staff
2. do not make judgements during a visit
3. do not promise to take issues up with the governing body. On an issue of substance the right course is to mention the matter to the Head

**Do**

1. behave as if you were the school’s and the teacher’s invited guest
2. allay any fears staff may have about governors visits
3. be positive and supportive at all times
4. join in when invited

**If**

* If a member of staff raises a professional issue, refer them to the recognised arrangements for raising professional or administrative matters
* If you see or overhear things which are professionally confidential (they relate to an individual pupil), they should remain confidential

The following general points may also be useful in terms of what to look for when visiting classes

1. look at the whole picture of the class at work e.g. attitude to work, ethos, organisation
2. look at displays of pupils’ work and ask children to talk to you about them
3. focus in on a specific topic
4. ask children what they are doing
5. talk to staff outside the lesson
6. if possible, attend an assembly and/or to get a flavour of the wider school community

**Report to the Governing Body**

A formal visit should enrich the understanding of all members of the Governing Body on the work of the school. You should submit a report (using Appendix D) to the Chair of Governors and Headteacher soon after your visit, to be distributed to governors at the next meeting. This can be quite simple and may state your reactions to what you have observed or learnt. If there are issues for discussion, these should be raised with the Head before reporting to the Governing Body. Individuals should never be named in either written or verbal reports. **Conclusions** reported to the Governing Body should relate to the agreed focus/objective of the visit. If there are any specific criticisms these must be made to the Head who will follow them up.

NOTES

Before agreeing guidelines for visits the governing body and Headteacher should recap on how they see the role of the governing body in monitoring school performance, for example, through:

1. the Headteacher’s report to governors;
2. setting and monitoring development plan targets, etc;
3. presentations on curriculum/SATs;
4. committees and their terms of reference;
5. governors’ links with class or subject/curriculum areas.

The guidelines present a framework only; the governing body/head will determine the focus for these visits.

**Appendix B**

**Specific link governor roles/responsibilities**

**Literacy/Numeracy**

* Take a particular interest in literacy/numeracy, perhaps attending parents’ events or visiting during a lesson.
* Take an interest in reading/mathematics recovery and other initiatives in the school linked to literacy and numeracy.
* Help the governing body to understand and own its school literacy/numeracy targets.
* Make sure the governing body has a monitoring process in place.
* Remind the governing body about their subject when setting the budget.
* Attend appropriate governor training.

### **Special Educational Needs (SEN) Link Governor**

* Ensure that the school has an SEN policy and that the governing body keeps it under review.
* Meet with the SEN coordinator (perhaps two or three times a year) to monitor the number, age and progress of pupils on the SEN register, to check that the governing body is making arrangements for pupils who have statements of SEN and to learn how pupils’ needs are being met.
* Report this information back to the full governing body or ask the Headteacher or SEN coordinator for a regular report.
* Help the governing body understand about SEN and make sure that SEN is considered when setting targets, making policies, reviewing exclusions and monitoring achievement.
* Keep up to date with SEN issues, attend relevant training sessions and ask the chair of governors for the DfES SEN newsletter.
* Ensure that the annual report to parents includes details of SEN provision including how much money was given to the school for SEN, how it was spent and the impact of that spending.

### **Subject Link Governor**

* Take a particular interest in your subject and be a champion for that subject.
* Ask the staff and pupils what the governing body can do for them.
* Visit the school to support and learn and be clear about the purpose of your visit.
* Join staff for part of their in-service training sessions held at the school.

**Health and Safety or Looked After Children or Child Protection**

The link governor should ensure that:

* the governing body understands and fulfills its statutory responsibility;
* the designated member(s) of school staff responsible to the area are appropriately trained and have access to appropriate resources;
* the school is aware of relevant guidance and where applicable has an appropriate policy/procedures and monitoring mechanism in place

**Appendix C**

**Suggested question that link governors might find useful when investigating their area of interest**

**General - For school managers/coordinators of specific areas**

* How is the management/coordinator’s role developing?
* Does the SDP/SIP match the children’s needs in your area of responsibility?
* How much funding is allocated – is more needed?
* How are support staff deployed?
* Has provision been monitored by The Learning Trust?
* Does the school have a range of resources?
* How is new technology used?

**Literacy/Numeracy Link Governor**

* How is the literacy/numeracy strategy being implemented?
* How have children responded?
* Does it work better with some classes/groups than others?
* What aspects do children find easy/difficult?
* What are the outcomes?
* Are there any differences in the responses of boys and girls?
* Do standards vary from year to year and are reasons for variation identifiable?
* Are there differences between key stages?
* How does the school compare to other/similar schools?
* What training does staff receive?
* How much additional support is there for each class/group?
* Are resources used effectively and are additional resources required?
* How are parents kept informed of progress?
* What are the priorities for the future?

### **Special Educational Needs (SEN) Link Governor**

* How many children are on the SEN register?
* How many children are at each level?
* How is support for children with SEN co-ordinated?
* How are pupils with SEN integrated into daily lessons?
* Is there a general awareness amongst all staff of how to respond to those children who need specialist support?
* How have their Individual Education Plans been adapted to support these lessons?
* Does the school receive additional support from other agencies, for example, social services?
* Are resources used effectively and are additional resources required?
* Does the school have an up-to-date, parent friendly policy for SEN?
* How are the needs of more able children addressed?
* Are there any issues that need to be resolved?

**Subject Link Governor**

* Is there a school policy on this subject and how is it being implemented?
* How is the teaching of the subject organised in the school?
* How much time each week is devoted to the subject?
* What learning experiences are provided?
* Are there schemes of work based on the requirements of the national

curriculum?

* Are there lesson plans?
* What use is made of computers to support teaching?
* What resources are allocated, for example, accommodation, staff,

equipment?

* How can resources be improved?
* How is the quality of pupil work monitored?
* What records are kept of pupil achievement?
* What is the system for ensuring continuity and progression?
* What are the broad trends in the school’s achievement in this subject:
  + compared with similar schools;
  + compared with national rates of increase;
  + compared with national gender picture?
* Are their significant differences between
  + boys & girls;
  + pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN);
  + very able pupils;
  + pupils with English as an additional language;
  + other vulnerable groups (e.g. travelling families, children in public care)?
* Are there differences in year groups?
* How do results compare with other subjects?
* What have we improved? Do we know why?
* What do we need to improve on, and what action is being taken to do this?
* How are we monitoring whether these actions are working?
* How are pupils at all levels of attainment enabled to participate fully in the

subject?

* Are equal opportunities provided for all children?
* Are appropriate links made between this curriculum area and others?
* What training do staff receive?

**Communication (how are parents kept informed)?**

* How are parents encouraged to support children’s learning at home?
* How are governors kept informed?
* Do governors celebrate the school’s successes?

**Appendix D**

**Governor Visit Report Form**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Name:** | **Date:** |
| Focus of visit | Classes/staff visited |
| **Summary of activities e.g. talking to staff and pupils, looking at resources, had lunch etc.** | |
| What have I learned as a result of my visit? | Positive comments about the visit |
| **Aspects I would like clarified/questions that I have:** | |
| **Ideas for future visits:** | |
| **Any other comments:** Signed \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Signed \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ **(Governor)** | |

Email/send this form to the Chair of Governors and Head teacher as soon as possible after your visit

**Appendix E**

**Useful Resources**

**NGA classroom visit guidelines**: <http://www.nga.org.uk/can-we-help/free-governance-resources/Governance-tools/school-visits-form.aspx>

**DofE**: <http://www.education.gov.uk/a0056644/specific-roles-within-the-governing-body>

**Ofsted on School Governance**: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/school-governance>