

# Blackfen School for Girls



## Governor Visits Policy

Headteacher: Ms C Senior  
Chair of Governors: Mr S Fitz-Gerald

	Date	Name	Signature
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Lead Person	Vice Chair of Governors	Janet Phelps	
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Approved by	Chair of Governors	Stuart Fitz-Gerald	

Governors' 'Special Interest' links are in the process of re-allocation. When this exercise is complete, this policy will be updated with details of all governor links.

This policy draws on The Key's model Policy for Governor Visits.

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## 1. Aims

Staff and governors at Blackfen School for Girls recognise that visits to the school, both formal and informal, have an important role to play in helping the Governing Body to effectively undertake its statutory responsibilities. It aims to set and maintain the standards of conduct that we expect all governors to follow when making visits to the school.

This policy sets out the procedures which all governors are expected to follow when visiting Blackfen School and how they are expected to report back to the Governing Body on their visits. By creating this policy, we aim to ensure that all governors understand their role and the purpose of their visits so that these visits are a productive and positive experience for all involved.

Governors do not have an automatic right to enter Blackfen School for Girls. When they do so, they are invited guests.

Apart from visits to the school to attend meetings or school events, link governors are also expected to carry out regular visits to the school in order to meet the Governing Body's statutory obligation to monitor the school's effectiveness.

## 2. Benefits

The potential benefits of governor visits to staff and governors are: -

### Governors

- ❖ to understand the environment in which the school functions
- ❖ to recognise and celebrate success
- ❖ to ensure that they have a strategic vision of the school based on the visits they make
- ❖ to observe the implementation of school policies, and actions from the School Improvement Plan, Subject Leader Improvement Plans, and the 3-year Plan
- ❖ to challenge, and develop effective working relationships with the staff concerned
- ❖ to raise their profile with the staff and student body
- ❖ to take an active interest in the work of the faculty, the 'Special Interest' or the Leadership Team member who they are linked with

### Staff

- ❖ to get to know their link governor and establish effective relationships with them
- ❖ to better understand a governor's role and responsibilities
- ❖ to have their work acknowledged in terms of the school vision
- ❖ to highlight and celebrate success
- ❖ to ensure that governors support the positive ethos of the school

## 3. Guidance and scope

This policy takes account of best practice and guidance from the [Academy trust governance guide - Guidance - GOV.UK](#)

### 3.1 Governors are observers

Governors need to get to know their school well in order to develop and hold the school leadership to account. Through pre-arranged visits that have a clear focus, governors will:

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- ❖ observe whether school policies, targets and actions from the School Improvement Plan (SIP), the 3-Year Plan and the relevant Subject Leader Improvement Plan
- ❖ observe how these processes are working in practice

## 3.2 Governors are not inspectors or managers

**Governors' visits are not a form of inspection. Judgements relating to issues of professional expertise are tasks for the Headteacher and other educational professionals.**

### Governors:

- ❖ will not assess or comment on the quality of teaching and learning if they visit a classroom
- ❖ will not attempt to manage the school or its staff, nor interfere in its day-to-day operations.

For those governors who wish to visit a classroom, they must make their purpose clear to their link partner. For example, a governor's principal aim in a classroom visit might be to observe how a particular subject is taught, not to judge the competence of the member of staff concerned.

## 4. Visits Programme

Link governors will carry out at least two link visits per school year in order to meet the Governing Body's statutory obligation to monitor the school's effectiveness. The Governing Body may also establish a calendar for link governors to indicate when they should submit their reports. This will be intended to ensure a reasonable spread of reports across the Governing Body's annual timetable.

Governors linked with Health & Safety, SEND (Special Educational Needs & Disabilities), and Safeguarding will also attend ad hoc meetings as required on issues specific to their areas of responsibility.

## 5. Before a Visit

### Governors will:-

- ❖ be sensitive to the numerous demands staff have on their time
- ❖ make sure visits are scheduled for times that are mutually convenient
- ❖ clarify the purpose of the visit in advance with their staff link partner, and agree on the level of confidentiality
- ❖ send questions or topics in advance to their link partner and ask them whether they have any particular matters they would like to discuss with their link governor - so everyone is properly prepared
- ❖ ask their link partner for a copy of the latest School SIP (School Improvement Plan)<sup>1</sup>, the 3-Year Plan and the Subject Leader Improvement Plan (if applicable)
- ❖ be familiar with the school's safeguarding policies and procedures
- ❖ notify the Headteacher when a visit has been agreed, even if the Headteacher will not be involved in the visit. They should be made aware as a matter of courtesy
- ❖ Governors should ensure their visit does not cause any disruption for staff and students so that everyone gains the maximum benefit from the time spent at the school. Agreed structures for these meetings are contained in Appendix 2.

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<sup>1</sup> The school's SIP lays out the school's Key Performance Indicators which are: Quality of Education, Behaviour and Attitudes, Personal Development, Leadership & Management, and 6<sup>th</sup> Form. There are separate Action Plans covering these and other priorities.

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## 6. During a visit

Governors should ensure their visit does not cause any disruption for staff and students so that everyone gains the maximum benefit from the time spent at the school. **Agreed structures for these meetings are contained in Appendix 2.**

### Governors will:

- ❖ arrive at the school on time
- ❖ follow the procedures set out in this policy and feed back to the Governing Body
- ❖ use the INVENTORY system to sign in and out at reception
- ❖ wear a governor's security pass at all times
- ❖ remain observers; they are not there to pass judgement on staff or inspect them
- ❖ remember the importance of challenge, evidence and supplementary questions during the visit. For example, *How does your subject use assessment? What does your assessment data show? Where are the key progress gaps? What actions will be taken to narrow them?*
- ❖ make some notes during the visit and ask open questions to get the most helpful answers.
- ❖ avoid any misunderstanding over their note taking, by explaining that they are simply recording what they have seen and that they will clear their staff link partner a copy of the report in draft before it is finalised
- ❖ clarify any terms or acronyms they are not familiar with
- ❖ make sure all parties are clear about why a governor might wish to spend time in the classroom, should they ask to do so
- ❖ if a governor makes a classroom visit, the member of staff concerned should briefly introduce the governor to students & explain why he/she is present e.g., to learn more about how [subject] is taught
- ❖ check with their link partner before speaking to students
- ❖ if a governor has any safeguarding concerns, they must immediately report these to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), Headteacher, Carrie Senior, or another DSL i.e., Ruth Makepeace, Deputy Headteacher, Kim Brewer, Assistant Headteacher and Clare Glen, Student Welfare Manager
- ❖ if the governor has any other specific concerns, they should consult the Headteacher after their visit

### Governors will not:

- ❖ make comments on classroom practice or any specific incidents that happen, judge teaching methods, assess the quality of teaching, or comment on the extent of learning
- ❖ behave in a manner that would make staff feel that they are there to inspect e.g., sit at the back of a classroom with a clipboard
- ❖ raise serious concerns in the moment. Governors should note any other concerns they may have and raise them with the Headteacher and/or the Chair of Governors after the visit
- ❖ turn up at the school unannounced
- ❖ pass comment on classroom practice or any specific incidents that may occur, judge teaching methods, assess the quality of teaching, or comment on the extent of learning taking place in a classroom
- ❖ interfere with the day-to-day running of the school

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## 7. After a visit: Reporting back

When they have completed a visit to the school for a link meeting governors need to feed back their findings to the Governing Body. This will usually be done in the form of a short visit report using the proforma attached (appendix 3). This should be forwarded to the Headteacher, Carrie Senior and Chair of Governors (CoG), Stuart Fitz-Gerald and copied to the Vice-Chair of Governors, Janet Phelps. The report will then be distributed to other governors at the next Full Governing Body meeting.

### The report should:

- ❖ focus closely on the agreed reasons for the visit and its strategic role. It is important that these are strategic
- ❖ where appropriate, reference the strategic documents to which it relates e.g., the School Improvement Plan, Subject Leader Improvement Plan, and 3-Year Plan
- ❖ always use neutral language
- ❖ remain observational and describe what they have seen/heard on their visit. Remember, governors are not there to pass judgement on staff or inspect them – governors should remain observers
- ❖ governors should try to be specific in their reports and not get distracted by issues which are outside its focus
- ❖ not make qualitative judgements about what governors see on their visits. They should not make any observations on teaching or learning practice
- ❖ send their report in draft to their link partner to check for accuracy and any comments.
- ❖ a link governor has been in role for less than a year, they may wish to share the draft report with a more experienced governor for feedback before the report is finalized. If this is the case, the link governor is welcome to contact the CoG (Chair of Governors), Stuart Fitz-Gerald or Vice-Chairs, Janet Phelps and Bill Stone who will make the necessary arrangements.

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## Appendix I – Link Governor Meetings: Overview

**It is the responsibility of link governors to arrange meetings directly with their staff counterparts**

### Arranging a Visit

- ✓ Link governors should aim to visit their link person at least twice a year. A list of staff email addresses is available from the Headteacher's PA, Nicola Rogers on request
- ✓ when a link visit is being arranged, the link governor should note specific questions they want to ask their link partner based on the SIP (School Improvement Plan), the Subject Leader Improvement Plan (if appropriate) and the 3 Year Plan or points to be followed up from a previous visit
- ✓ they should share these questions in advance with the staff member they are visiting, so that both can be prepared
- ✓ they should also take account of any matters which the member of staff wishes to discuss with the link governor
- ✓ all visits should focus on the SIP and, where appropriate, the Subject Leader Improvement Plan

### Structure and focus of the meetings

Over the course of a school year, the aim is that governors and their link partners will have achieved the following:

- ✓ have a good understanding of each other in a professional sense
- ✓ have talked about the role/faculty area from a strategic point of view
- ✓ have discussed strategic planning linked with the school's SIP (School Improvement Plan Plan), 3 Year Plan and (where relevant) Subject Leader Improvement Plans
- ✓ have reviewed the school year from the staff link partner's point of view
- ✓ have discussed outcomes and self-evaluation for the area concerned
- ✓ have discussed staffing in the area

It is recognised that not all governors will be able to achieve these goals in the space of just one school year. This may be because of unforeseen matters such as changes in key staff, changes in school priorities, etc. The visits will however remain useful as part of the process of learning about specific areas of the school's work and the implementation of its strategies and policies.

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## Appendix 2 - Possible questions for link governors to ask

These questions can be tailored as appropriate for any link visit. They are not set in stone and governors are not obliged to ask every one – they are there as guidance so that governors can choose those which seem most appropriate for their visit. We have also included some basic questions to use when a governor has their first meeting with their staff link partner.

The Headteacher has also produced some questions which are specific to Safeguarding, Behaviour and Culture, and Subject links which have been saved in a separate file on the Governor hub entitled 'Governor visit questions by HT (Governor visits policy)'. They will be very helpful to governors in providing more focus and challenge. Governors should include some of these questions before finalising the details of their visit.

### Meeting 1 (suggested for Autumn term)

When you meet your link partner for the first time, we suggest you introduce yourself by briefly describing your background, saying what category of governor you are (e.g., Parent Governor, Appointed Governor), and what led to you becoming a governor. Follow up questions which governors might ask are below under broad headings:

#### Questions for Staff Link Partner

- ✓ how long have you worked at the school and what does your role entail?
- ✓ (for Leadership and Special Interest links) how does your role link to the vision of the school and the SIP (School Improvement Plan)?
- ✓ (for Faculty links) how does your role link to your Subject Leader Improvement Plan and the SIP?
- ✓ How does your role link with the school's key focus areas:–
  - To develop outstanding quality of education
  - To develop outstanding quality of behaviour
  - To develop exemplary provision for personal development
  - To provide exemplary leadership and management
  - To provide exemplary 6th Form provision

### Review of the previous school year (suggested for Autumn term)

Ask your link partner to evaluate the previous school year, for example:

- ✓ what went well?
- ✓ what did not go quite so well?
- ✓ What data do you use in making these judgements?
- ✓ what measures are you taking to bring about the necessary improvements?
- ✓ what staff are you responsible for?
- ✓ what barriers are there to the work you do as a Faculty Leader/Special Interest lead/member of the Leadership Team?
- ✓ What is the biggest challenge in managing behaviour at Blackfen for staff? How do you know?
- ✓ How are you and your colleagues dealing with this?
- ✓ How do you know as a school leader that students are safe at school?

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## Meeting 2 (suggested for Spring term)

### Achievement & Progress

- ✓ what data do you use in judging students' outcomes and progress?
- ✓ could you show me some of these data without breaching confidentiality?
- ✓ how is the data moderated?
- ✓ how do you ensure that the needs of all groups, such as the most able, Pupil Premium and those with SEN are being met?
- ✓ are standards rising or falling in these groups and with your students generally?

### Leadership of staff

- ✓ does the school have difficulty recruiting and/or retaining staff in the area you work in? What is being done by yourself and the school to aid recruitment and/or retention?
- ✓ could you tell me a bit about the strengths and areas for development of the staff you lead (anonymously)?
- ✓ what are the CPD (Continuing Professional Development) priorities for the staff you manage?
- ✓ What are you/the school doing in terms of succession planning in your faculty/area?

## Meeting 3 (suggested for Summer term)

### Planning for the new school year

- ✓ how did your department/faculty support students who took their GCSEs, NVQs and A levels this summer?
- ✓ to what extent does the disruption caused by the pandemic still impact students, especially those sitting external examinations? And staff?
- ✓ what actions are being taken to further raise standards?
- ✓ what progress has been made over the year with respect to your area of work? How does this relate to the SIP and/or Subject Leader Improvement Plan?
- ✓ what are the key strategic priorities for you and your colleagues next year?
- ✓ what do staffing levels look like in your faculty/area next year? Will there be a full complement of staff next year?
- ✓ professionally what are your next steps?
- ✓ how well is the school supporting your professional development?

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## Appendix 3 - Governor Visit Report Form: Blank for completion

This form should always be completed by a link governor on every visit. After the link governor has cleared their report with their link partner, the former should send a copy to the Headteacher and Chair of Governors, and Vice-Chair, Janet Phelps.

*Please remove the guidance in italics before starting to complete the form!*

<b>Date and time of visit:</b>
<b>Name of Governor:</b> <b>Person visiting:</b> <b>Reason for visit:</b>
<b>Relevant school objective or priority associated with the visit</b> <i>You could refer here to the relevant parts of the School Improvement Plan (SIP), the Subject Leader Improvement Plan, or the 3-Year Plan.</i>
<b>Agreed focus of the visit:</b> <i>Make sure you focus on the agreed reason(s) for your visit. This should have been agreed with your link partner in advance. Avoid getting distracted by other issues that haven't been agreed with the member of staff concerned.</i>
<b>Main areas covered during the visit:</b> <i>Include any priorities that your link partner raised as important for their area. You may have had a conversation with more than one person during the visit so it is useful to note here if other people had any input to the conversation. Mention any data that was given to you.</i>
<b>Governor's observations:</b> <i>You should note here the things that you noticed when visiting, including any lessons you might have seen taking place. Include any risks that you noticed or that were raised with you. Mention the main priorities of the member of staff you visited.</i>
<b>Follow up action points:</b> <i>You should include 3 key areas/action points, and the focus for and the date of the next meeting.</i>

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## Appendix 4 – Support for Governors making their first link visit

To support and guide governors making link visits, the support and guidance are available from more experienced governors and other sources:-

- ❖ Link governors may ask to ‘shadow’ an experienced link governor on one of the latter’s link visits.
- ❖ Link governors may ask an experienced link governor to sit in on the former’s first link visit.
- ❖ Link governors may ask a more experienced link governor to look at their report in draft before this is sent to the former’s link partner.
- ❖ Training and guidance on governor visits is also available from:-
  - The Key for School Leaders - [How to maximise the impact of governor visits | The Key Leaders](#)
  - The NGA (National Governance Association – [School visits: guidance, policy and planning tools | National Governance Association](#)
  - Bexley Governor Training & Development - [www.bexleyservicesnetwork.co.uk](http://www.bexleyservicesnetwork.co.uk) *sign up or log in*
  - Bexley Governor Services - Hannah Thompson, Governor Services Officer  
[hannah.thompson@bexley.gov.uk](mailto:hannah.thompson@bexley.gov.uk) 020 3045 4780

If requested by a new link governor, Janet Phelps or Carol Townsend can help to make the necessary arrangements for support to be provided by an experienced governor.

## How to register for The Key for School Governors & the National Governance Association (NGA)

### The Key for School Governors

1. Visit [How do I register for The Key’s Leadership and CPD products? – Help Centre | The Key \(thekeysupport.com\)](#)
2. Follow the link ‘New to The Key? [Sign up](#)’
3. Complete the short registration form and then you can start using The Key right away.

### Registration with the National Governance Association (NGA)

The School is a ‘Gold’ member of the NGA. The Head Teacher’s PA will register you and you will be issued with login details for the website ([www.nga.org.uk](http://www.nga.org.uk)) in due course.