

## Blackfen School for Girls



# Governor Visits Policy

Head Teacher: Mr M Brown

Chair of Governors: Mr S Fitz-Gerald

|               | Date                    | Name               | Signature |
|---------------|-------------------------|--------------------|-----------|
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| Lead Person   | Head Teacher            | Matthew Brown      |           |
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| Verified by   | Vice-Chair of Governors | Janet Phelps       |           |
| Approved by   | Chair of Governors      | Stuart Fitz-Gerald |           |

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## Rationale

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 their statutory responsibilities.

## 1. Aims

This policy aims to set and maintain standards of conduct that we expect all governors to follow when making visits to the school.

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, most governors will also carry out regular link visits in order to meet the board's statutory obligation to monitor the school's effectiveness. 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.

## 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, Faculty Improvement Plans, and the Governing Body Action 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, or the school leader they are linked with or the staff involved with a governor's 'Special Interest'.

### Staff

- ❖ to get to know the link governor and establish effective relationships with them
- ❖ to better understand the governors' 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 [Governance Handbook](#) (section 3.4.2).

### 3.1 Governors are observers

Governors need to know their school well in order to sustain accountability. Through pre-arranged visits that have a clear focus, governors will:

- ❖ Observe the school's implementation of school policies, targets and actions from the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and other strategic documents, such as Faculty Improvement Plans and the Governing Body Action Plan.

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- ❖ Observe how those procedures are working in practice.

## 3.2 Governors are not inspectors or managers

**Governors' visits are not a form of inspection; they can however be very wide ranging. Note that judgements relating to issues of professional expertise are tasks for the Head Teacher (HT) and other educational professionals.**

### Governors:

- ❖ Will not assess or comment on the quality of teaching and learning in the 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 spend time in a classroom, they will make it clear to those concerned about their purpose in doing so. For example, a governor's principal aim in a classroom visit would be to observe how a particular subject is taught.

## 4. Procedures

In order that governors' visits are effective, the following protocols will be observed.

| ALWAYS   | NEVER  |
|--|--|
| Arrange details of visit<br>Agree level of confidentiality<br>Agree purpose of visit<br>Ask the faculty or senior leader for a copy of the latest Faculty Improvement Plan (if applicable) & obtain a copy of the School SIP from the Head Teacher's PA. | Turn up unannounced<br>Ask to see individual teachers' lesson plans or record keeping<br>Make individual judgements on lessons, etc. |

- ❖ Governors must ensure that they sign in and out for every visit. This must be done at Reception using the governors' signing in book.
- ❖ Governors must wear their security pass or a visitor's badge at all times
- ❖ During and after a visit, governors should follow the procedures set out in this policy to feed back to the Governing Body.
- ❖ If governors visit classrooms, the teacher concerned should briefly introduce the governor to students & explain why he/she is present e.g. to see how [subject] is taught.
- ❖ If a governor has any safeguarding concerns, they must immediately report these to the Head Teacher, who is currently the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).
- ❖ The governor will write a short-written report using the proforma attached (appendix 3a) and forward it to the Head Teacher and Chair of Governors (CoG).
- ❖ The content and outcomes from these reports will be discussed on a regular basis by the HT, Chair of Governors and Vice-Chairs.
- ❖ The report will then be distributed to other governors at the next Full Governing Body meeting.
- ❖ Faculty/Special Interest/Leadership link governors should aim to visit their link person at least twice a year. Agreed structures for these meetings are contained in Appendix 2.
- ❖ Governors with Faculty links will write a summary of their visits annually according to an agreed timetable (see Appendix 4). Reports will then be submitted to a meeting of the full Governing Body for their consideration.

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## Key roles

**Faculty and Special Interest Links:** Governors with Faculty or Special Interest links are responsible for organising at least two link visits a year. FLs (Faculty Leaders) and Special Interest link staff should cooperate fully with the visiting governor and arrange relevant visits to classrooms, meetings with staff etc.

**Leadership Links:** Members of the Leadership Team are responsible for initiating at least two leadership link meetings a year with their link governor(s) and should liaise directly with the link governor(s) concerned to organise these meetings.

After scheduling any link visit, governors should pass the details on to the Head Teacher, even if the Head Teacher will not be involved in the visit. This just as a matter of courtesy.

## 5. Reporting back to the Governing Body

- ❖ When they have completed a visit to the school for a link meeting on a specific area, governors need to feed back their findings to the Governing Body. This will usually be done in the form of a school visit report.
- ❖ There is a template for the report, together with guidance notes attached as Appendix 3a. There is also a sample report for further guidance at Appendix 3b.
- ❖ While carrying out a visit, it is usually helpful to make some notes and to try to ask open questions to get the most helpful answers. *Open questions begin with 'what', 'how', 'when', 'how often', 'why', 'who' and 'where', etc.*
- ❖ To avoid any misunderstanding, when making notes at link meetings, governors should explain that they are doing so for the purpose of producing a report after the meeting, which will be given to the member of staff concerned for checking before it is finalised.
- ❖ During the visit, governors should not be afraid to clarify any terms or acronyms they are not familiar with.
- ❖ In their reports, governors should always try to use neutral language and always check what they have written with the person/people that they met with before it is shared with others.
- ❖ If a new governor would like a more experienced governor to look at their draft report before it is finalised, they are welcome to contact the CoG or Vice-Chairs who will make the necessary arrangements.
- ❖ It is important for governors to remain observational and to 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.
- ❖ The report should focus on the agreed reasons for the visit. It is important that these are strategic<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ It is not helpful to make qualitative judgements about what governors see on their visit. They should not make any observations on teaching or learning practice.
- ❖ Governors should try to be specific in their reports and not get distracted by issues which are outside its focus.

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<sup>1</sup> **Governors** work **strategically**, by focusing on the long-term vision for the school. They hold the Head Teacher to account for the implementation of the vision and strategy. The Head Teacher implements the school's vision and strategy, and reports to governors on progress. As well as working strategically, the Head Teacher also works **operationally**, and focuses on the day-to-day management of the school.

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## Appendix I – Link Governor Meetings: Overview

It is the responsibility of link governors to arrange Faculty and Special Interest link meetings by contacting their link partner(s) direct.

It is the responsibility of the relevant member of the Leadership Team to arrange Leadership Link meetings by contacting their link governor(s) direct.

### 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 Vice-Chair of Governors, Janet Phelps, 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 Faculty Improvement Plan or points requiring follow up from a previous visit.
- ❖ They should share these questions in advance with the staff member they are visiting, so the staff member can prepare.
- ❖ All visits should focus on the SIP and, where appropriate, the Faculty Improvement Plan.
- ❖ Governors with faculty links should also focus on the Faculty Improvement Plan and actions related to this document.
- ❖ While a faculty link governor should complete a written report on each Faculty link meeting, one of their reports each year should provide a broader summary of the governor's meetings with their Faculty link partner and the discussions involved. This report should be submitted in time for the relevant Governing Body meeting. See appendix 4 which provides a timetable for submitting these reports.

### 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) and to Faculty 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 and for governors to choose from.

### **Meeting 1 (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 (eg Parent Governor, Appointed Governor), and what led to you becoming a governor. Follow up questions which governors might ask are below under broad headings:

#### **Role of 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 Faculty Improvement Plan and the SIP?
- ✓ How does your role link with one of the school's key focus areas – behaviour and safety, teaching and learning, leadership and management or raising attainment?

#### **Review of the previous school year (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 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 are your thoughts on behaviour in the school? Are you involved in any initiatives such as the Behaviour Working Group?

### **Meeting 2 (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 additional educational needs are being met?
- ✓ Are standards rising or falling in these groups and with your students generally?

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## **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 (Summer term)**

### **Planning for the new school year**

- ✓ How were students taking GCSEs, NVQs and A levels this summer supported?
- ✓ 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 Faculty Improvement Plan?
- ✓ What are the three 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 3a - Governor Visit Report Form: Blank for completion

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

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

|  |
|--|
| <b>Date and time of visit:</b>   |
| <b>Name of Governor:</b><br><b>Person visiting:</b><br><b>Reason for visit:</b>  |
| <b>Relevant school objective or priority associated with the visit</b><br><i>You could refer here to the relevant parts of the School Improvement Plan (SIP), the Faculty Improvement Plan, the Governing Body Action Plan, etc.</i>   |
| <b>Agreed focus of the visit:</b><br><i>Make sure you focus on the agreed reason 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><br><i>Include any priorities that your link partner raised as important for their area.<br/>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.<br/>Mention any data that was given to you.</i> |
| <b>Governor's observations:</b><br><i>You should note here the things that you noticed when visiting, including any lessons you might have seen taking place.<br/>Include any risks that you noticed or that were raised with you.<br/>Mention the main priorities of the member of staff you visited.</i>   |
| <b>Follow up action points:</b><br><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 3b - Governor Visit Report: Example

*The completed form below is just an example of what might be included in a governor's report*

This form should always be completed by a visiting governor on every link visit or other meetings with staff and whenever they visit the school. After the visiting governor has cleared their report with their link partner, they should send a copy to the Head Teacher and Chair of Governors.

|   |
|---|
| <b>Date and time of visit:</b> 28 February 2023 at 3pm  |
| <b>Name of Governor:</b> Janet Phelps<br><b>Person visiting:</b> Fiona Minnis, Deputy Head Teacher<br><b>Reason for visit:</b> Leadership link meeting  |
| <b>Relevant school objective or priority associated with the visit</b><br>The visit links to Priority 1 of the SIP (Effective Leadership & Management) and priority 4 of the Governing Body Action Plan (Governor links & visits)   |
| <b>Agreed focus of the visit:</b><br>On Fiona's advice, we concentrated on the roles of the two Assistant Head Teachers who Fiona is responsible for, one of whom is at the point of retirement, and on succession planning.  |
| <b>Main areas covered during the visit:</b><br>We spoke about the development of Simon Neil's responsibility for Early Career Teachers (ECTs) – formerly known as NQTs (Newly Qualified Teachers). ECTs now have to follow a two-year programme at the start of their careers, involving formal teaching and university level modules.  |
| <b>Governor's observations:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Simon Neil's teaching load has been reduced - to enable him to concentrate on developing this area of work which he is passionate about.</li><li>• Andy McGee, who is retiring, has held responsibility for producing the school timetable for many years. This is an absolutely crucial role and it has been decided that SMART curriculum Ltd will take on this work. A consultant has already been assigned to the school and Andy has been working closely with her. He is pleased with the approach she has taken.</li></ul> |
| <b>Governor's observations:</b> <p>It was interesting to have a more detailed insight into the work of the two Assistant Heads who work so closely with Fiona and fulfil some of the most important roles in the school.</p> <p>The cost of outsourcing the construction of the timetable is £8,000 a year which seems to me to be cost effective.</p>  |
| <b>Follow up action points:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I will attend the SIP-RAG rating meeting on 1 March 2023.</li><li>• Fiona will send me the most up to date version of the SIP.</li><li>• Fiona will contact me in due course regarding our next meeting.</li></ul>  |

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## Appendix 4

### Governor Faculty Visit Reports

Timetable for submission of Reports to Governing Body: School Year 2023/2024

#### **Governing Body Meeting 14 December 2023**

- English (Janet Phelps)
- Mathematics (Stuart Fitz-Gerald)

#### **Governing Body Meeting 25 March 2024**

- Humanities (Carol Townsend)
- Science (Tim Harris)
- Expressive Arts (Michèle Yianni)

#### **Governing Body Meeting 11 July 2024**

- Vocational, Social Sciences, and Sixth Form (all areas to be allocated)

Governors should send their reports to Matthew Brown, Head Teacher and Stuart Fitz-Gerald Chair of Governors at least 2 weeks before the relevant Governing Body meeting. This will give these colleagues time to review any action points and for the reports to be sent out to governors in a timely way.