



# Laurence Jackson School

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## Link Governors' - Visits to Laurence Jackson School

### Why do governors need to visit the school during the working day?

Governors' visits to schools during the school day give insights that you can acquire in no other way. If you are to carry out your strategic, monitoring, executive and accountability roles as a governor, you need to have an understanding of the way schools work and a feel for the dynamics of your school. There is no better way of gaining this information than by visiting during the working day. Being a governor should be an exciting, rewarding and productive experience and visiting our school should be part of this.

First hand experiences of the school help to bring governing body meetings to life. They introduce a reality that can otherwise be missing. The experiences can prompt questions to the headteacher and enable governors to be more effective in the role of critical friend. Visits allow governors to develop relationships with staff, pupils, parents and members of the local community. This provides a two-way flow of ideas that helps to inform governors' decision-making.

Visits can be designed to monitor the implementation of the school improvement plans and as part of the school's self-evaluation processes. Governors need to have first-hand experience of the impact of the strategic plans they have worked on with school leaders.

Some governors need to visit the school to make regular checks on critical aspects of the school's work, such as financial procedures; special educational needs provision; health and safety; and child protection.

Ideally every member of the governing body should visit school at least once a year. Schools always appreciate having governors present at key events such as end of term concerts, but these do not replace the need for visits during the normal school day.

Governors visit the school in different roles. Some are a regular presence, such as parent governors who usually bring and collect their children daily. Others may only be able to visit occasionally, for example those with full time jobs far from the school. Visits therefore may range from the very informal to the formal, mandated visit on behalf of the governing body, but governors should always be conscious of how their presence may be seen by other people and act accordingly.



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## Formal visits

It is good practice for governors to follow a protocol for school visits. This protocol, is laid down in the Governor Roles and Responsibilities document. The sequence is as follows:

- Prior to arranging a formal visit to the school the Link Governor should contact the Chair of Governors to discuss the focus for the visit. The Chair of Governors is responsible for arranging the visit with the headteacher so that a formal programme can be produced by the SLT representative and department Head.
- Once the formal programme has been agreed, the Link Governor should be contacted by either the SLT representative or department head who will facilitate the visit.

Link Governors should be clear about:

- Why they are visiting
- What they are looking for
- How they will feed back to the school and to the governing body.

An example of our standard reporting form with specific headings is at the end of this document.

## Informal visits

Informal visits take place when governors may 'pop in' or be on site because of their child or their job. These visits give governors a picture of the general to and fro of school life and a good idea about how the school works. However, governors should be careful how they use this information. It is difficult to switch roles completely: others will always see you as a governor, even if you think you are just being a parent.

## What sort of things might governors do during school visits?

### Classroom visits

All governors should have opportunities to observe the core business of schools, which is teaching and learning. Governors will be interested in the roles of teachers and teaching assistants. Spending 10-20 minutes in any one classroom is usually sufficient. Classroom visits can take different forms, for example:

- Visiting a sequence of classrooms in pairs to get a feel of classroom life. The protocol agreed might allow governors to chat with children once they are working independently or in pairs/groups.
- Visiting classrooms to observe the impact of a recent school improvement initiative.
- At all times the Governor will be accompanied by either a member of SLT or department Head.

### Meetings with groups of pupils, staff or parents

A half hour meeting with a representative group can provide governors with an invaluable opportunity to gather information and opinions as well as develop relationships with members of the school community. The focus for the meeting and the questions need to be planned in advance. This can be a particularly good way to gather information about the impact of department action plans. For example, a meeting with a group of middle leaders could be a good way to gather information about their role and their impact they our having on driving change.



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## Breaks and lunchtimes

Planning opportunities for governors to spend time informally with staff and students during breaks and lunchtimes adds to any visit. These times can be crucial to the development of good personal relationships which underpin all effective governing bodies. This can include time to:

- visit the playground and/or canteen and chat with children and supervisors.
- sit in the staffroom and have a coffee with the staff.
- spend time in the school office getting to know the office staff.

## Touring the learning environment

A tour of the school and grounds is an opportunity to observe the displays, resources, and specialist teaching equipment. Link Governor visits can also include opportunities to observe a wide range of other activities including: staff meetings and training sessions; leadership team meetings; sports competitions; assemblies; music and drama performances.

## The framework for Link Governor visits

Link Governor visits work best when there is a planned programme or when governors come into the school in pairs or small groups. This allows governors to discuss what they have seen. The programme should ensure that there are opportunities for governors to monitor specific aspects of the school, to follow up lines of enquiry and to develop a general idea of the needs of the school community. The headteacher actively supports governor visits and ensures that governors' time in school is used well. It is also important that governors carry out their commitments: there is always disappointment and loss of confidence when the headteacher makes arrangements for a visit only for the governors to fail to turn up.

## Preparation

Agree a convenient time and date with the headteacher and/or the member of staff you are linked with. Avoid stressful times such as test or exam weeks. Decide on what the visit is for and, if you will need any paperwork, make sure that the relevant person is aware of this. Inform yourself about the aspect you will be observing by reading relevant documents such as the school improvement plan, school self-evaluation or the last Ofsted report. Dress suitably – practical lessons can be messy!

## Start and Briefing

Governors should arrive punctually and observe school protocols for signing in and wearing a visitor badge. Effective visits start with a meeting with the headteacher or deputy head to clarify the nature of the visit, what governors are to see and do and any protocols to be followed by governors.

## During the Visit



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Remember that you are not an inspector: don't give the impression that you are looking for faults. Governors should not make judgements about what they observe, especially when they are watching lessons. Bear in mind that governor visits are about gathering information and developing relationships. They are not about the day-to-day management of the school, which is the headteacher's responsibility. Your link staff member may have planned an itinerary for you and will probably want to introduce you to the class or other colleagues. You may want to offer praise and this is entirely acceptable. However, governors should not offer advice or criticism directly to the staff – any such comments should be made to the headteacher separately. Keep note-taking to a minimum and pay attention to what is going on around you. If appropriate, join in with the student activities. Don't make any promises on behalf of the governing body – unless you have been given specific delegated power to do so. Thank everybody for their hospitality, including the students where appropriate.

## Follow-up

It would be helpful to include a de-briefing at the end of your visit so that you can clarify any issues and share your experience with the headteacher and/or relevant members of staff. Remember, do not criticise any member of staff in their presence. A little note or card to say thank you is always welcome. If there are any urgent actions needed following your visit, such as a health and safety issue, these should be raised with the headteacher in the first instance and could be referred to a committee or the Chair. If you have any concern about Child Protection, report it to the headteacher immediately. A brief report back to governors is an important part of your visit, especially if you were looking at a specific area of school life. Write up your observations and submit to the Chair of Governors who will circulate to members of the governing body and headteacher. There is a template below for reporting back at the end of your visit.

### LJS – LINK GOVERNOR REPORT

<b>Name</b>	<b>Date of Visit:</b>
<b>Focus of Visit :</b>	
<b>Classes/Staff Visited:</b>	
<b>Summary of Activities</b>	
<b>Links to School Improvement Plan</b>	
<b>What I have learned as result of visit</b>	
1. .	
<b>Comments re focus</b>	
<b>Aspects for Clarification/ questions to ask</b>	
<b>Ideas for Future Visits</b>	
<b>Any other comments</b>	
<b>Signed</b>	



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