

The Role of the School Governor in
setting, monitoring and evaluating the
School Development Plan priorities.

‘The Critical Friend’

(To be read in conjunction with the Governor Visit
Policy)

This resource has been created to support members of the Local Advisory Board in their role to challenge and support Head teachers/Heads of Provision across the Rivermead Inclusive Trust. Your role as 'Critical Friend' is vitally important not only for the strategic direction of the school but is also essential for meeting the expectations from Ofsted, DfE and the RSC.

Later in this booklet you will see some examples of key questions the LAB should/could pose to the Head teacher/Head of Provision to demonstrate their effectiveness in their role and to better understand the school, with a specific emphasis on the School Development Plan.

The School Development Plan (SDP) is a strategic plan for improvement. It should bring together, in a clear and simple way, the school priorities, the main measures it will take to raise standards, the resources dedicated to these, and the key outcomes and targets it intends to achieve.

Your headteacher and the SLT will draft the actual document and the LAB should use it as a way of holding school leaders to account. It is meant to be a practical tool for driving improvement and advancing your school's long-term strategy.

The governor's role in school improvement planning starts before the SDP is drafted. It starts with setting a strategy for the school with 3 core functions and should set out where you want to be as a school as well as providing a robust framework for:

Setting priorities

Creating accountability

Monitoring progress

The following flowchart is an illustration of how this could work in practical terms:

Flowchart: Governors' role in school improvement through the year

(second half of the summer term) Governors and SLT meet to review the past academic year. They will look at data and documents to determine the key areas for school improvement for the next year



After consulting with the SLT, the LAB establishes objectives for the SDP



(Start of autumn term) The Headteacher and the SLT draft the SDP and present to the LAB at the first meeting in September.



- Governors and SLT make sure they have a shared understanding on what the outcomes of the objectives will be and how the school will measure progress
- Governors evaluate the SDP, question the SLT and the Headteacher on the draft and agree alterations as needed



The LAB will approve the SDP



The LAB will monitor progress on the SDP throughout the year



SDP objectives are assigned to link governors. Governors carry out learning walks and meet with relevant members of staff to get updates on progress



Link governors report back to the LAB as required. Best practice is to make monitoring visits and report to the LAB termly.



The LAB should expect Headteachers and SLT to evaluate progress towards SDP objectives and report to the board at the end of every (old) term.



(second half of summer term) The Headteacher reports to the LAB on full-year progress and achievements towards the SDP and answers questions from governors.



School Improvement planning begins for the next year

As part of the strategic leadership of the school, it is your role to move the school forward in a way that aligns with your vision and strategy.

During the initial planning meeting in the summer term the SLT and the LAB should consider information and data to feed into these objectives, such as:

- Pupil performance data
- Financial data
- Results of staff, parent and pupil surveys
- Previous SDPs and their outcomes
- The self-evaluation form (SEF)
- Your last Ofsted inspection report

This meeting should determine those key areas for improvement and the objectives to set for the next year.

As a starting point governors should consider the following questions:

THE 'CRITICAL FRIEND' QUESTIONS TO ASK

Listed below are some suggestions of possible questions that could help identify or clarify issues. However, they should be used as a guide and not as the basis of an interrogation of head teachers! Remember the role is that of critical friend – how and when the questions are asked is as important as what is asked!

Taking a strategic overview:

- Is there a clear vision for the school?
- Where are we now? Where are we going? How will we get there?
- Is the vision identified in a statement of aims, values and manageable objectives?
- What are the key priorities?
- Are there resources in place to support the SDP?
- How is this monitored?
- Who is responsible for doing what? By when?
- How and when are school policies reviewed, evaluated and revised?
- Does the LAB receive regular reports on the outcome of monitoring and evaluating?

- How does the LAB plan ahead to be proactive rather than reactive?
- Is school improvement and raising standards at the top of the governors' agenda?
- Do agenda items reflect the priorities in the SDP?

Monitoring and Evaluation

- How do this year's results compare overall and by subject with those of previous years?
- How do they compare with National standards and local standards?
- How do they compare with similar schools?
- Do they show an upward or downward swing?
- How well do different groups of pupil's progress?
- Are some parts of the school more effective than others?
- Are some groups of pupils doing better than others?
- How does the school cater for pupils who do better or worse than expected?
- How do the teachers set their expectations for what children can achieve?
- Are the targets set for pupils challenging yet realistic?
- What is the current rate of exclusions in the school?
- What is the attendance rate like?
- How does the headteacher monitor the quality of teaching?
- How many children are on the SEN Audit?

Accountability

- How does the LAB make itself accessible to parental enquiries?
- How are parents consulted about major developments in the school?
- Are the papers from governors' meetings readily available for parents (apart from confidential items)?
- Is there a clear policy for dealing with complaints from parents?
- How does the LAB deal with staff appointments, grievance, disciplinary, capability and redundancy matters?

Preparing for Ofsted

- What were the key issues from the last Ofsted inspection?
- How far has the school progressed towards addressing these?
- What are the school aims?
- How do governors monitor what happens in school?

- What evidence, in addition to the headteacher's reports is available to governors?
- What are the school's strengths and weaknesses?
- Is Performance Management in place throughout the school?
- How does the SEN governor monitor SEN provision and the progress of pupils?
- How do governors ensure that the financial planning reflects the priorities of the school?
- How is the budget monitored?
- How are Health and Safety issues dealt with?
- What progress has been made with the last Post-Ofsted Action Plan?
- Has this been reported to parents?

Support and Challenge

- Is there an agreed policy for governor visits to school?
- Are governors linked to a year group or department?
- Do members of the LAB attend school functions?
- How and when does the LAB praise success of pupils, parents and staff?
- How are the strengths of the school communicated to parents and the wider community?

As mentioned in the flow chart it is best practice for governors to be linked to areas on the SDP and be able to report back on these at LAB meetings. Below you will find some suggested key areas that governors could be attached to as part of their link role, however this will *depend* on the outcome of the conversations around what the SDP priorities are for the year ahead.

- Safeguarding and Looked After Children
- Behaviour, Mental Health and Well-being
- Additional Local Funding: Pupil Premium Grant, Sports Catch-up, Year 7 Catch-up and High Needs
- Quality of T&L: Reading, Writing and Mathematics, Cultural Capital, Equality
- Stakeholder voice: Pupil, staff and parents
- Early Years Foundation Stage

Visits and Impact Reports

The role of the LAB is an intrinsic part of the leadership of the school, although often unseen by parents and other community stakeholders. You are here to oversee the school is providing the best for each child to the best of their capabilities.

An impact statement is one way in which the you can articulate your role in school leadership, the impact you have had on school improvement, whilst being transparent about your activities.

*Please refer to the Governor Visit Policy for protocol around how to undertake a visit and see appendix 1 'Governor Monitoring Report' and Appendix 2 'Governor Learning Walk Report' on the relevant documentation to be completed.

**The schedule for the year to ascertain when visits should be carried out will be discussed at the first meeting in September.

**A bank of monitoring templates attached to different areas of responsibility can be found in Governor Hub to support you in your role.