

Governor Visits to School

Every Governing Body has a statutory responsibility to establish and monitor its school's policies and evaluate the effectiveness of the school and its curriculum. Governors are also held to account for the School's performance. The Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) assumes that Governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school, and will test that assumption during a school inspection.

One of the best and most effective ways in which a Governor can get to know about their school is to visit during the school day and see it at work, talking to staff and pupils and finding out what happens in the school and the classrooms.

When school and classroom visits are conducted well they will add considerably to Governor's understanding of the school, its staff and its pupils. This Policy has drawn on other school's policies and also includes a Governor's Visit Report pro-forma which will help provide discussion on the issues raised and provide a formal record of the Governor's structured involvement in the work and life of the school. It should not however, form any part of another evidence base, for example the performance management of a member of staff.

The purpose of visits to the School

The Governing Body has linked individual Governors to certain subjects and areas. Monitoring the curriculum for the area should involve individual Governors visiting the school and classrooms and taking the opportunity to discuss issues with the Head Teacher and relevant subject co-ordinator.

Visits allow Governors to focus on particular areas, for example:

- Management of school resources
- Condition of the building and its use
- Development of teaching and support staff
- Specific subject areas
- A particular year group or class

Some Governors have specific generic responsibilities like Special Needs, Health and Safety, Race Equality or Child Protection. These responsibilities reinforce the need to visit not just the school in general but the classroom too.

By visiting school and becoming better informed Governors will be:

- More aware of the needs of the school
- More able to approach staff to meet those needs
- Well placed to raise any matters of concern
- In an informed good position to support the school in its community

The benefits of visits

Governors	Staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To establish and develop effective relationships with the staff and demonstrate commitment • To have a greater understanding of pupils' needs • To recognise and celebrate success • To monitor the implementation of the School Development Plan • To increase their first hand knowledge of the school which will inform strategic decisions • To understand the environment in which staff work and teachers teach • To see policies and schemes of work in practice • To find out what resources are used, what resources are needed and prioritise them • To show support and encouragement to staff and pupils • To demonstrate that the Governing Body is contributing to the school's self evaluation process • To develop links with a class, year group or subject area • To develop individual Governor's roles in terms of their specific responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To get to know and build positive relationships with Governors • To publicise and celebrate success • To feel valued • To appreciate and value the role and responsibilities of all Governors • To ensure Governors understand the reality of the classroom and the school • To highlight the need for further resources • To help develop individual Governor's roles in terms of their specific responsibilities • To share an understanding of the specific area.

What Governor visits are not about

Governors visit school as lay people. Visits to classrooms are **not** a form of inspection (even where there is personal expertise in a subject area) and are especially not for making judgements about the professional expertise of members of staff and the quality of teaching. A visit is only ever a snapshot and may not provide a full and balanced picture of the true state of affairs, which is why it is important that impressions and information gained are checked in consultation with the Head Teacher and appropriate member of staff.

A school visit is also **not** about:

- Checking on the progress of your own or known children
- Monopolising staff time
- Interfering in the running of the school
- Engaging with staff on professional matters
- Arriving with inflexible or pre-conceived ideas
- Pursuing personal agendas or issues.

Frequency of visits

Each non-staff Governor should aim to conduct a visit of the school **once per term**

Scheduling the visit

Visits should always be agreed with the Head Teacher in advance.

Preparing for the visit

An important part of the visit preparation is to establish the protocols that are to be observed or put more simply '*the ground rules*'. A short amount of time spent pre-planning the visit is never wasted especially to plan in advance what should and what should not happen. A sound principle to apply is one of 'no surprises'. Ground rules should be agreed for the 3 phases of *before*, *during* and *after* the visit which will make the visit more beneficial and enjoyable for everyone:

The Ground Rules

In advance of a classroom visit there are some ground rules that should be agreed with the Head Teacher and the class Teacher. Governors may like to ask:

- When I come into the classroom, where would you like me to sit?
- If I need to leave before the lesson ends, how would you like me to do that?
- What should I do if a pupil asks for help or asks me a question?
- Would you like me to be involved in the lesson or simply observe?
- Do you mind me asking pertinent questions if I'm not sure about detail when helping eg If I'm not sure about the spelling policy, the methods used for calculations, how to help pupils read unknown words?
- What should I do if I see a pupil behaving inappropriately?
- What should I do if the teacher has problems controlling the class?
- The arrangements for post visit oral feedback
- Agree with the Head teacher on the level of detail that should be fed back to the member of staff.

Visit Focus

A visit can be either to see the school generally in operation or to visit a specific classroom. Visits can focus on:

The School

- The condition and maintenance of the premises
- The use made of buildings and premises
- Security on site
- Break and lunch times
- The monitoring of Health and Safety
- The use and condition of resources eg furniture and subject equipment
- The impact of class sizes
- The deployment of support staff
- Office procedures eg budget monitoring
- To see a class or teacher led assembly

Or

The Classroom

The visit should have a specific focus, some examples are listed below, but it is not an exhaustive list

- Observation of particular curriculum areas
- The implementation of the curriculum
- Gain an understanding of the process of assessment and tracking pupil progress and their attainment
- Assessing a group of pupils working together on a task
- The impact of learning on educational visits
- Assessing the impact or implementation of a School Policy
- To see the impact of the religious characteristics in Church schools

The **Governor's Visit Form** attached to this policy at **Appendix A** can be partially completed at this stage and reference should be made throughout the process to the 'Preparation Checklist' which is attached at **Appendix B**.

What should (and shouldn't) happen

	Do	Don't
Before (about a week prior to visit)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the action points in the School Improvement and Development Plan Agree the purpose of the visit with Head Teacher Arrange details of the visit Try to visit at different times of the day Arrange for the Head Teacher draw to up a schedule for visit if appropriate (When? Where? With whom? Duration? Time for feedback?) Discuss with the Head Teacher or Deputy what is to be visited in school or the context of the lesson to be observed Agree level of involvement in the lesson Agree the level of confidentiality Get to know a little about the subject is there any literature you can read? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Turn up unannounced for a focused, formal visit Expect to go into a classroom without prior arrangement Expect to be able to visit at short notice Visit during a time of SATs, tests or examinations without specific agreement from the Head Teacher.
During	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be prepared, organised and punctual Report to the school office and sign in Fulfil the agreed purpose of the visit Observe school/class guidelines Jot down depersonalised discussion points Be mindful of your visitor status Discuss anything that worries you with the Teacher in the first instance Support staff where appropriate Listen Ask questions sparingly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monopolise Staff Interrupt the teaching or talk to the teacher while he/she is teaching Behave like an Inspector! Walk in with a clipboard and take copious notes Interfere with the running of the school Assume a management role Enter the Staff Room without invitation Talk too much Distract the Teacher by asking too many questions
After	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thank the member(s) of staff and pupils Discuss observations as soon as possible after the visit Feedback appropriately to the Head Teacher Discuss Health and Safety Issues if relevant Complete the Visit Form and give a copy to the Head Teacher Be prepared to answer questions at the next Governing Body Are there issues for the Governing Body to consider? Reflect on the visit to make the next one better 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leave without a word of thanks and giving some feedback Discuss observations with other members of staff or parents unless given specific permission

After the visit

Feedback after the visit is a really important part of the process. This can on occasions be a sensitive area but it is essential that due thanks are given for being allowed to visit and a comments on the previously agreed focus of the visit are made.

Governors should remember that the visit is made on behalf of the Governing Body and not in a personal capacity. It is not appropriate to make either judgements or promises on behalf of the Governing Body. Any expression of concern should be shared with the Head Teacher as soon as possible. Comments should be limited to the focus of the visit with the exception of Health and Safety matters where a compromise should in normal circumstances be reported immediately.

Staff should be mindful that individual Governors are not able to address everyday matters that would normally be sorted out as a matter of good line management.

Feedback should be given to:

- The member(s) of staff involved at the end of the visit
- The Head Teacher
- The relevant Committee or Governing Body as appropriate

Simple written feedback using the **Governor's Visit Form (Appendix A)** should preferably be completed with the member of staff present and a copy given to the Head Teacher and member(s) of staff at the time. If this is not possible, the report should be completed **within 2 weeks of the visit** and given to the Head Teacher. The completed reports will be filed centrally at the School and made available to other Governors, the appropriate Committee and Governing Body.

Monitoring and Evaluation of this Policy

The Whole Governing Body will review this policy annually in the Spring Term. In particular the review will consider:

- Are Governors fulfilling the need for visits
- Is the expected number of visits right?
- Are we doing what we set out to do?
- Are our visits achieving the potential benefits identified in the policy?
- Have Governors learned more about the school?
- Have Staff learned more about the Governors?
- Are Governors better-informed and enabled to make better decisions?
- Have the visits improved direct communication with staff?
- Do the staff feel affirmed and valued?
- Have the visits helped the Governing Body fulfil its duties?
- Have there been any unexpected benefits?
- How can we make the policy and practice even better?

Governor's Visit Form

Name:	Governor responsibility:
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Date of visit:	Duration:
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Area of School/Staff/Class visited:
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Purpose of visit: (Objectives)

Governor's comments:

Staff comments:

Headteacher's comments:

Signed:

Governor:

Staff Member(s):

Head Teacher:

Date:

Visit Checklist

School	Governor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we know why the Governor is visiting? • Do we know what the Governor is expecting to see? • Is the focus of the visit also a focus in the school development and improvement plan? • Have we drawn up a timetable for the visit? • Do individual members of staff know that they are going to be visited? • Have other key members of staff been informed? • Is the appropriate documentation ready and available? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I made a formal appointment with the Head Teacher? • Do I know the specific purpose of the visit? • Is the focus of the visit also a focus in the school development and improvement plan? • Have I arranged my time so that I can be sure to be punctual? • Have I thought about how I will approach the teacher in the classroom? • Have I established the ground rules? • Have I thought about what I will actually do during the lesson? • How will I give feedback to the staff and Head Teacher? • Have I thanked the teacher and Pupils? • Have I remembered that what I see or hear or might find out is confidential and not for sharing with parents or staff in general? • How can I build on this for the next visit? • How did I address any difficulties I met? • Are there any issues for the Governing Body to consider? • Have I filled in the Visit Report Form?