Governor Visits Policy

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Governor visits policy

The Governing Body has a statutory duty to oversee the policies and direction of the school, to monitor its standards and be held to account for its conduct and performance.

Visiting the school is not a statutory requirement but can be extremely important in order to learn how it functions, and to keep under review how it operates so that you can increase the governing body's first hand knowledge, informing self evaluation and strategic decision making. It is recognised that the amount of time that a governor can commit to a visit will vary but in general governors should expect to make at least one visit a year. If governors cannot make this commitment they should question whether they can make a realistic and valuable contribution to being a governor.

Many Governors worry about making a visit to school and particularly about visiting a classroom. Therefore, whilst it is not a statutory requirement, it is recommended that the governing body formulate a policy and protocols in consultation with the staff for school visits. This policy will outline how the visit should be conducted thus allowing governors and staff to gain the most from the visit.

Governors visits will generally align to the priorities determined in the School Improvement Plan so that the governing body can monitor how these are progressing. The governing body should develop a plan of visits throughout the year to cover a wide range of school work and each visit should be agreed and have a clear purpose.

Governors should arrange their visits with the Head of School who has the responsibility of the day-to-day management of the school. The following elements should be considered.

Purposes of a visit

The potential benefits to Governors:

- To recognise and celebrate success.
- To get to know the staff.
- To show themselves as part of the school.
- To improve their knowledge of the school, its staff, needs, priorities, strengths and weaknesses.
- To monitor and assess the priorities outlined in the school improvement plan and observe policies in action. It may be that a visit has a specific focus on a particular area of the plan and how this is being achieved.
- To assist the governing body in fulfilling its statutory duties and demonstrate their role as critical friend.
- To develop an understanding of issues facing the school to inform decision making.
- To understand the environment in which teachers teach.
- To find out what resources are needed and prioritise them.

The potential benefits to teachers:

- To ensure governors understand the reality of the classroom.
- To get to know governors.
- To understand better the governors' roles and responsibilities.
- To have an opportunity to reflect on practice through discussion.
- To highlight the need for particular resources.
- The ability to prepare in advance if the visit has a specific focus taken from the school improvement plan.

What a visit is not about

- A form of inspection to make judgements about professional expertise of the teacher
- Checking on progress of own children (or children within the family / children of friends)
- Pursuing personal agenda
- Monopolising school/teacher time

Protocols or ground rules for visits

A policy should be negotiated and agreed between the Governing body after consultation with the staff.

- Consider what should happen and what should not.
- Refer to Governor Code of Conduct.

How to feed back after the visit

- Governors should feed back to the Head of School and Governing Body
- Governors should feed back to the Head of School verbally and then via the governor's monitoring form before feeding back to the full governing body.
- Feed back should include positive comments, questions and constructive suggestions. Reports to the governing body should not identify individuals in a critical manner; this is not the role of the governors.
- Written record of visit using the agreed pro-forma (attached)

Annual programme of visits

A programme of visits will be planned and spread evenly across the school year in consultation with the Head of School. Visits should be planned on areas that have been identified within the school development plan. Regular analysis of this schedule enables governors to see what areas/activities receive visits and those that do not.

Visits can take the form of

- Meeting with staff.
- Talking to children.
- Reviewing areas and resources of the School.

Monitoring and review of school visit policy

The policy should be monitored and reviewed annually.

- Are our visits achieving the potential benefits we identified?
- Have there been any unexpected benefits?
- How can we make our practice even better?

Formal School visits - good practice

The following sections list examples of good practice.

Preparing for a visit

- Check the agreed policy for governors' visits
- Clarify the purpose of the visit. Is it linked to the School Improvement Plan? What are the relevant school Policies? How does this determine the activities I am interested in?
- Discuss the agenda with the Head of School in advance and seek approval for your visit and agree a date that is suitable.
- Be clear beforehand exactly what you are observing. Try to prepare questions for staff in advance.
- Discuss with the Head of School if any supporting information is available – Ofsted report, improvement plan, performance data.
- Ensure that you are familiar with health and safety procedures

During the Visit

- Remember you are making the visit on behalf of the Governing Body. It is not appropriate to make judgements or promises on behalf of the Governing Body.
- Be punctual and flexible.
- Remember you are there to learn, it is a visit not an inspection.
- Decide with the teacher how you will be introduced and what your role in the setting will be.
- Get involved with the children – you will be asked to record the children's voice after your visit.
- Observe discretely. Remember that excessive note taking can be disconcerting and may make your visit look like an inspection.
- Don't distract the staff member too much during the visit but be prepared to talk and show interest.
- Listen to staff and pupils, be courteous, friendly not critical.
- Interact, don't interrupt.
- Remember why you are there. Don't lose sight of the purpose of your visit.

After

- Discuss what you have observed with the member of staff. Use the opportunity to clarify any issue you are unclear about. For example, did your presence have any impact on the atmosphere in the classroom? If so, how?
- Refer to the purpose of the visit. Consider together whether it has been achieved.
- Thank the teacher for supporting you in your role as a governor. Be open, honest, and positive.
- Make notes as soon as possible after your observation while it is still fresh in your mind.
- Discuss your observations with the Head of School. Be prepared to take the comments of others on board.
- Agree with the Head of School how and when you will report on your visit to the Governing Body.
- Reflect: how did that go? Has the visit enhanced relationships? Have I learned more about the school? Have I helped the Governing Body fulfil its duties?

Reporting your visit

- Write a short summary (see example Appendix A) 'as a lay governor' of what you learned during the visit and the overall impression that was made. This will be easier if the visit had a focus.
- You should circulate a draft to the Head of School as soon as possible after the visit for them to check the accuracy and clarity. Be prepared to amend it. Aim to achieve a report that is agreed by those involved.
- Send the report to the Clerk for circulation to the next appropriate committee/governing body meeting.

Visit focus'

Visits should be arranged which focus on the School Improvement Plan priorities to inform on progress. Although not an exhaustive list visits may focus on:-

- Particular areas of learning
- The use made of the buildings or the site
- The condition and maintenance of the premises
- Outdoor provision
- The use and condition of resources e.g. furniture or ICT equipment
- Deployment of staff, e.g. caretaker, office staff, teaching assistants
- The impact on the school of any changes

Informal visits

Visits may also take place in an informal capacity. 'Discreet' information can be gathered on these visits which build on your knowledge of the school. It is vital that everyone is clear about the capacity in which they are visiting and not to confuse the role.

- The Chair making a regular visit to see the Head of School
- To lend a helping hand with a School event
- To get information from the office relating to a committee meeting
- To help in a class
- To speak to a member of staff in relation to your own child
- Attending a School function or educational visit

Appendix A **Record form for a Governor's school visit**

NAME	**DATE**
Purpose of visit	
Links with School Improvement plan	
Observations and comments by the Governor	
Observations on / comments from children during the visit	
Any key issues arising for the Governing Body	
Action following Governing Body meeting	
Signed:	**Governor**
Signed	**Head of School** **Date:**

Appendix B Policies: a guide for school governors and headteachers

Things you might consider when visiting a classroom – relate this to the focus of the visit and in your discussions with the headteacher or member of staff

- Relationship between staff and pupils.
- Relationships between pupils.
- Variety of teaching styles.
- Availability and role of support staff.
- Behaviour and attitude of pupils: does this match the policy, are they attentive, encouraged, engaged in their own learning, motivated, listening, questioning, responding, rewarded?
- Enjoyment and enthusiasm of both staff and pupils.
- How different abilities are supported and developed.
- Children's work and learning through play.
- Displays: is the school attractive?
- Parental involvement: is it evident that the school wants to work in partnership with parents?
- Ethos: the atmosphere and values that are evident (are high expectations, encouragement, praise, equality of opportunity apparent?).
- Environment and working conditions, what is the school like to work in? Is this a good place to work and play? What are the good points? What can be improved?
- Quality and quantity of equipment and resources.