



# Governors' Visits to Schools Policy



## GOVERNORS' VISITS TO SCHOOLS

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 their own 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.

We believe if school and classroom visits are done well they will add immeasurably to Governors' understanding of their school, its staff and its pupils.

This policy has drawn on other schools' policies and has been shared with school staff and Governors prior to approval. It also includes exemplar Governors' Visits report pro-forma which will help provide discussion on the issues raised and also provide a formal record for OfSTED of the Governors' structured involvement in the work and life of the school. It **will not**, however, form part of any other evidence base eg a member of staff's performance management.

In our Multi Academy Trust we see the responsibility for monitoring individual schools is undertaken by Local Governing Boards (LGB). Directors will be invited to each school to familiarize themselves with the schools and to attend significant events in the school year.

Schools will support Governors with their monitoring role by inviting different staff to present at each LGB meeting in response to School Improvement Priorities and in response to requests from LGB members. All formal visits will be agreed with the Headteacher prior to them taking place.

Four types of Governor visits are suggested

| Types of Visit                | Governors Involved | Staff Involved | Frequency                                  | Responsibility for Organising    |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|--|----------------------------------|
| The school in operation       | All members of LGB | All staff      | As often as possible.<br>Formal & informal | Governor<br>Relevant staff       |
| Classroom visit/learning walk | Named governor     | Relevant staff | At least once a year                       | Governor<br>Relevant staff       |
| School Improvement Focus      | Named governor     | Relevant Staff | Following LGB meeting with particular foci | Named Governor<br>Relevant staff |
| Quality assurance             | Named governor     | Relevant staff |  |                                  |

## WHY VISIT?

**A Governing Body has a duty to oversee the direction and policies of the school, to monitor its standards and to be held accountable for its conduct and performance.**

Visits should be undertaken as:

A. Part of the strategic programme to-

- Improve Governor knowledge of the school, its staff, needs, priorities, strengths and weaknesses.
- Monitor and assess the priorities as outlined in the development plan.
- Help the Governing Body fulfil its statutory duties.
- Acquire knowledge to enable the Governing Body to challenge as appropriate.

B. Critical Friend -

- Monitoring, and evaluating plans, budgets, standards of education and achievement.

C. Accountability

- Annual reports and meetings, publication of minutes, surveys of parental views.

Members of our Local Governing Board are linked to School Improvement Priorities and a Safeguarding Governor is identified in each school. This crucial role reflects the individual's experience in that field.

This will involve individual Governors visiting the school and classrooms and taking the opportunity to discuss issues with the Headteacher and relevant subject leader.

**It also allows Governors, however, to focus on particular areas, eg:**

- the management of the school's resources
- the condition of the building and its use
- the development of teaching and support staff
- a specific subject area
- a particular year group or class.

**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 bring to the Board of Directors any matters of concern
- in a good position to support the school in its community.

### **The main purpose of school visits**

A Governor visits school to:

- learn so that you can increase the Governing Body's first-hand knowledge base, informing strategic decision making
- keep under review the way in which the school is operating
- experience the impact and progress of the implementation of the school improvement plan and school policies
- demonstrate to staff that the Governing Body takes its responsibilities very seriously
- establish and develop good professional relationships with staff, especially those that are linked with your individual area of responsibility, e.g. literacy, numeracy, Special Needs or Health and Safety.
- see in context some of the monitoring systems employed by the school
- demonstrate that the Governing Body is contributing to the school's self-evaluation process
- show support and encouragement to staff and children.

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO GOVERNORS AND STAFF?

| <b>Governors</b>  | <b>Staff</b>   |
|---|--|
| To establish relationships with the staff   | To get to know staff and establish positive relationships with them        |
| To understand pupil's needs   |  |
| To recognise and celebrate success  | To feel valued   |
| To monitor the implementation of the School Development/Improvement Plan  | To appreciate and value the role and responsibilities of all Governors     |
| 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 ensure Governors understand the reality of the classroom and the school |
| To see policies and schemes of work in practice   |  |
| To find out what resources are used, what resources are needed and to prioritise                                    | To highlight the need for further resources                                |
| To show support and encouragement to staff and pupils   |  |
| To demonstrate that the LGB 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 e.g. Special Needs, Safeguarding | To share an understanding of the specific area.                            |

## WHAT ARE GOVERNORS' VISITS NOT ABOUT?

The main point to emphasise is that Governors' visits to classrooms are **not a form of inspection** in terms of making judgements about the professional expertise of members of staff, especially with regard to the quality of teaching.

A school visit is also not about:

- Checking on the progress of your own or known children
- Monopolising staff time
- Arriving with inflexible or pre-conceived ideas
- Pursuing personal agendas or issues.

## HOW OFTEN SHOULD I VISIT?

This will essentially depend on the number of Governors available to take on the responsibility and the size of the school staff.

## WHO SCHEDULES THE VISITS?

Visits should **always** be agreed with the Headteacher or a member of the senior leadership team.

## VISIT PREPARATION

An important part of the visit preparation is to establish the protocols that are to be observed or more simply '*the ground rules*'.

It is essential that a disproportionate amount of time should not be spent on planning and arranging visits. If you plan in advance what should always and never happen before, during and after a visit, the ground rules will be firmly established and should avoid any problems and hopefully make the visit more beneficial and enjoyable.

A number of Governor's Visit Forms have been attached to this policy at Appendix 1a and 1b and can be partially completed before the visit. Reference should be made throughout the process to the 'Pre and Post Visit Checklist' which is attached at Appendix 2.

## WHAT SHOULD AND SHOULD NOT HAPPEN?

|   | <b>Always</b>  | <b>Never</b>  |
|---|--|---|
| <b>Before</b><br>(at least one week prior to visit) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the action points in the School Improvement/ Development Plan</li> <li>• Agree the purpose of the visit with Headteacher or a member of the Senior Management Team</li> <li>• Arrange details of the visit</li> <li>• Try to visit at different times of the day</li> <li>• Headteacher/relevant member of staff draws up a schedule for visit - When? Where? With whom? Duration? Time for feedback?</li> <li>• Discuss with the Headteacher or Senior Management Team what is to be visited in school or the context of the lesson to be visited and possible involvement</li> <li>• Agree level of confidentiality</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turn up unannounced for a focused, formal visit</li> <li>• Expect to go into a classroom without prior arrangement and a recommended minimum notice of one week</li> <li>• Visit during a SATs or test week without the visit being agreed by the Headteacher or member of the Senior Management Team</li> </ul> |
| <b>During</b>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be prepared, organised and punctual</li> <li>• Report to the school office and sign in</li> <li>• Fulfil the agreed purpose of the visit</li> <li>• Observe school/class guidelines</li> <li>• Jot down discussion points</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monopolise Staff</li> <li>• Interrupt the teaching or talk to the teacher while he/she is teaching</li> <li>• Behave like an Inspector!</li> <li>• Walk in with a clipboard and take copious notes</li> </ul>  |
| <b>After</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thank the member(s) of staff and pupils</li> <li>• Discuss observations as soon as possible after the visit</li> <li>• Feedback appropriately to the Headteacher</li> <li>• Discuss Health and Safety Issues if relevant</li> <li>• Complete the Visit Form and give a copy to the Headteacher</li> <li>• Prepare to present records of your visit at the next meeting</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leave without a word of thanks and giving some feedback</li> <li>• Discuss observations with other members of staff, parents or individual Governors (except the Chair) unless given permission</li> </ul>   |

## WHAT SHOULD I DO?

A week before a classroom visit there are some questions you should clarify with the Headteacher or teacher:

- When I come into the classroom, where would you like me to sit?
- What should I do if a pupil asks for help?
- Would you like me to be involved in the lesson?
- Do you mind me asking pertinent questions if I'm not sure about detail when helping e.g. 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 I am concerned about anything I see?

## THE FOCUS OF THE VISIT

Remember a visit can be either to see the school generally in operation or a specific classroom visit.

Visits can focus on the following:

### *The School in Operation*

- 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 e.g. furniture and subject equipment
- Office procedures e.g. budget monitoring
- To see a class or teacher led assembly (to see how well-information is provided)
- Pupil behaviour around the school

### *The Classroom Visit*

- Observation of particular curriculum areas i.e. English/ Mathematics etc.
- The implementation of the curriculum
- Gain an understanding of the process of assessment and tracking pupil cohorts and their attainment
- Assessing a group of pupils working together on a task
  - The impact of learning on educational visits
  - To see the impact of the religious characteristics in Church schools
  - The impact of class sizes
  - The deployment of support staff
  - To see a class or teacher led assembly (to consider SMSC)

- Pupil Voice
- Behaviour for Learning
- Work Scrutiny

### ***School Improvement Priority***

School Improvement meetings will include quality assurance of the information provided in the LGB meetings, discussions with the Leadership Team, relevant staff children etc.

- how well leaders, managers and pursue excellence, modelling professional standards in all of their work?
- What is the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation?
- How does the school use performance management and effectiveness of strategies for improving teaching, including the extent to which the school takes account of the 'Teachers' Standards'?
- how well leaders and managers ensure that the curriculum raises outcomes for children?
- how well leaders and managers demonstrate the capacity to bring about further improvement?
- what is the impact of middle leadership and what is the extent to which schools are adequately developing their middle leadership / succession planning and the development of future leaders in the school
- what is the impact of governance?
- how effectively does school promote the confidence and engagement of parents, including by encouraging the use of Parent View
- what is the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements to ensure that there is safe recruitment and that all pupils are safe?

### ***Learning Walks***

The Board of Directors oversees the strategic operation of the school so it is important that its members have a clear understanding of how the school works and how children are learning. To do this, it is suggested that governors undertake Learning Walks. These should be planned beforehand, be part of an annual schedule and be integral to the monitoring and evaluation calendar. Confidentiality should be emphasised and maintained at all times e.g. during the planning, the implementation and in any follow-up discussions.

The purposes of Learning Walks are to;

- Increase *Governors'* knowledge and understanding of the school through seeing at first-hand how it operates.
- Experience the impact of plans and policies.
- Demonstrate to the school community that *Governors* are taking their roles and responsibilities seriously.
- Establish and develop good working relationships.
- Be able to contribute effectively to the school's self-evaluation.
- Show support and encouragement and be able to celebrate successes and achievements.
- See evidence of work matching the individual needs of pupils.
- Be able to see that resources and the learning environment are adapted to meet the needs as appropriate.

There are different types of Learning Walks, which should be tailored to the priorities of the individual school.

### **General**

Often a first visit/ new Governor e.g.

- Introductory sessions, viewing the entrance and reception areas along with corridors and administrative areas.
- To see the playground in operation.
- To visit classrooms and look at displays and 'Learning Walls'.
- To talk with children.

### **Specific subject focus**

e.g. focus on

- A specific priority or strand within the School Development / Improvement Plan
- How children learn maths; how children learn in English; how well a particular programme is working or how children use ICT to learn etc.
- Displays, resources and equipment used in that subject area.
- Staff's contribution to that subject area.

### **Specific aspect**

e.g. focus on

- How Health and Safety is carried out and how policies are adhered to.
- How the school ensures that it complies with all the requirements regarding Statutory Assessments (SATs, Teacher Assessment, returning papers).
- Behaviour.
- Pupil Premium and its impact.
- Inclusion and Disadvantaged Pupils.
- Use of support staff to support children's learning.
- Lunchtimes and break times.
- Breakfast Club or after school activities.
- How the school develops children's thinking skills.

Following Learning Walks it is vital that there is feedback to key staff and that a record of the visit is completed and shared with the Local Governing Body. Examples of Learning Walk checklists can be found at Appendix 3a and 3b.

The list is by no means exclusive or exhaustive.

## **AFTER THE VISIT**

We all need feedback after we have been visited or observed. This can be a sensitive area but it is essential that warm thanks are given and a comment on the focus agreed.

Remember as a Governor you are making the visit on behalf of the Local Governing Body and not in a personal capacity. It isn't appropriate to make either judgements or promises on behalf of the Local Governing Body.

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

Any expression of concern should be shared with the Headteacher as soon as possible. Comments should be limited to the focus of the visit unless health and safety is being compromised. This should always be reported immediately.

Oral and written feedback should be given to:

- The Headteacher
- The Chair of the Local Governing Body

Brief feedback should be given to the member(s) of staff at the end of the visit.

Governors should agree with the Headteacher the level of detail that should be fed back to the member of staff.

Written feedback using the Governor's Visit Form (see Appendix 1a) should be completed as soon as possible and copies given to the Headteacher who would make a copy available to the member of staff.

The reports will be discussed with the Local Governing Body and made available via the school's Governor Hub site.

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE GOVERNING BODY'S POLICY

The Local Governing Body will review this policy in line with its agreed cycle/procedures. The review will consider:

- Are we doing what we set out to do?
- Are our visits achieving the potential benefits identified in the policy?
- Have I learned more about the school?
- Are we better informed and enabled to make sensible decisions?
- Have we developed a further method of direct communication with staff?
- Do staff feel affirmed and valued?
- Have I helped the Local Governing Body fulfil its duties?
- Have there been any unexpected benefits?
- How can we make the policy and practice even better?

## GOVERNING BODY SCHOOL VISIT POLICY

## Governor's Visit Proforma

|  |              |
|--|--------------|
| <b>Governor Name:</b>  |              |
| <b>Date of Visit:</b>  |              |
| <b>Focus of Visit:</b>   |              |
| <b>Area of the school visited:</b>   |              |
| <b>Sources of Information:</b><br>E.g.: head teacher, class teacher subject leader, talking to children etc. |              |
| <b>General Comments:</b>   |              |
| <b>Summary of information learnt:</b>  |              |
| <b>Points to discuss at the next LGB meeting:</b>  |              |
| <b>Signed:</b><br>Received and discussed with Headteacher<br>Received by Local Governing Body                | <b>Date:</b> |

GOVERNING BODY SCHOOL VISIT POLICY

**Pre and Post Visit  
Checklist for  
School and Governor**

| <b>School</b>  | <b>Governor</b>   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do we know why the Governor is visiting?</li> </ul>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have I made a formal appointment with the Headteacher?</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do we know what the Governor is expecting to see?</li> </ul>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do I know the specific purpose of the visit?</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the focus of the visit also a focus in our school development?</li> </ul>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have I arranged my time so that I can be sure to be punctual?</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have we drawn up a timetable for the visit?</li> </ul>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have I thought about how I will approach the member of staff?</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do individual members of staff know that they are going to be visited?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have I thought about what I will actually do during the lesson?</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have other key members of staff been informed?</li> </ul>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How will I give feedback to the staff, Headteacher and Local Governing Body?</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the appropriate documentation ready and available?</li> </ul>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have I remembered that what I see or hear or might find out is confidential and not for sharing with other Governors or parents in general?</li> </ul> |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How can I build on this for the next visit?</li> </ul>   |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How did I address any difficulties I met?</li> </ul>   |



| <b>Chair of the Local Governing Body Impact Summary</b>  |  |  |                   |
|--|--|--|-------------------|
| <b>Governor Role</b>   | <b>Key topics and governor activity since last meeting</b> | <b>Impact of Governors Involvement</b> | <b>Next Steps</b> |
| <b>Strategic</b><br>(Contributing to school's vision and strategic aims)   |  |  |                   |
| <b>Critical friend</b><br>(Monitoring and evaluating performance, challenge and support of Headteacher)                    |  |  |                   |
| <b>Accountability</b><br>(Ensuring that the school is accountable to pupils, local community, staff and those who fund it) |  |  |                   |

Approved Date:

Review Date:

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_