



## **Governor Visit Protocol**

### **Ofsted says:**

*"If governing bodies are to monitor and evaluate the school's work they need to visit the school. When handled well these visits build up trust and respect between staff and the governing body, and they allow governors to monitor the school's work in a way that is far more supportive than if they just attend meetings.*

*The visits to school by governors work well when the focus of the visit is agreed in advance and understood by all involved"*

### **Why Visit? Keeping yourself informed**

Visits to your school by you and fellow governors are just one way in which your governing body increases its knowledge of the working of your school and particularly how that knowledge and understanding better enables you to carry out your roles of strategic leadership, monitoring and evaluation and holding the school to account for its performance. Visits also provide a valuable opportunity for governors to take a more active part in the school self-evaluation process.

### **Visits are important:**

- To increase the governing bodies understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school.
- To show to staff and pupils that they are interested in the life, work and achievement of the school.
- To support the school's work.
- To enable governors to see evidence of the policies in action.
- As part of the governing body's monitoring role.
- To increase governors' understanding of the teaching and learning process.
- To enable the governing body to ask informed questions in governing body meetings by gaining first-hand knowledge of the working of the school.

Because the governing body can see resources purchased by the budget being used by the school community – particularly the pupils.

## **Types of Visit**

### **Informal**

- Some visits to the school will be less formal than others. It is important that your governing body maintains a profile at school events – the school fete or the school play, the Christmas carols or school band performance for example, so that both staff and pupils feel supported and your governing body can praise the work done by the school for the local community.
- However, more formal visits to the school – those “commissioned” by your governing body, where you and/or your fellow governors are acting as representatives of the governing body need more careful planning.

### **Formal**

- Formal visits should have a clear focus and should be linked to priorities in the school improvement plan; school self-evaluation and the opportunity to see policies in action. Seeing how the school’s values, vision or aims statements impact on the daily life and work of those in the school community may be the focus too.

### **Specific Responsibilities**

- Some visits will relate to specific responsibilities that you or fellow governors may have – SEND or Health & Safety, for example, or where individual governors are attached to a specific subject area.
- Visits to your school by new governors are an extremely important element of their induction programme. It is useful to see more formal lessons in classrooms and to see how they differ from lessons outdoors, for example
- Governors’ visits to school are not just about visiting classrooms. You and your fellow governors will need to familiarise yourselves with other areas in school like the school grounds, the playground and sports facilities; how pupils and parents act coming into and leaving school at each end of the school day.
- Shared space around the school – the school hall, the learning resource area/library and corridors are also useful places to visit. Those areas that are used for school admin or are the responsibility of premises staff should be visited to get an idea of the working lives of those people the school employs.

### **Classroom Visits**

- Your visits to the classroom are not about making judgments about the quality of teaching and learning in the school. That responsibility is properly the preserve of the Headteacher and senior staff as judgments are a specialist skill that you and fellow members of the governing body do not possess.

- Even if you or other individual members of your governing body do have those skills in your professional lives, judgements of this nature are part of the line- management and performance management processes in school and should not be undertaken by governors.
- Your governing body is entitled to have a clear view about the quality of teaching and learning in your school. This will be reported to you by the Headteacher often with regard to items from the school's self-evaluation process, and it will also be part of the School Improvement Partner (SIP) reports to the governing body.
- Whatever the focus of the visit, it should in some way increase the collective knowledge and understanding of the whole governing body.

### **Governing Body Policy for Visits**

- What do **you** think you should consider:
  1. Before the visit?
  2. During the visit?
  3. After the visit?
  4. The purpose and focus of the visit should have been agreed by the governing body and those governors going on the visit should be delegated to carry the visit out.
  5. The visit should be pre-arranged by all those involved.
  6. It should be seen as a positive experience for all.
  7. Ensure that there is a clear timescale for the visit – start and end times.
  8. Governors should see their visit as an opportunity to build positive relationships with staff and pupils.
  9. Governors should prepare by familiarizing themselves with relevant documentation.
  10. Ideally, the visit should start and finish with a short meeting with the Headteacher.
  11. It must be clear to all that this is not a school inspection – nor is it an opportunity to quiz pupils.
  12. Governors should know the names of those people who they are going to visit, and, if it is a classroom visit what they are going to see and how they will act in a lesson.
  13. Ensure that those people you are meeting are happy with the visit arrangements.
  14. Ask them what they expect of you during the visit.
  15. Agree on how they will introduce you to the class, where you will be in the classroom whether they mind if you join in, for example!
  16. Discuss possible "What ifs?" "What if you see a pupil misbehaving and you think the teacher hasn't seen it?" or "What if a pupil asks me to help them with their work?" Do you know what to do in those circumstances?

### **Making the Visit:**

1. Governors should arrive in good time for the start of the visit.
2. If the visit is to a classroom remember that you are entering teachers' professional space; the layout of the room is to promote effective learning not to entertain visitors.
3. Be aware that any visitor entering a classroom alters the dynamics of the relationship between teacher and pupils.
4. Try to meet with the staff before the lesson starts – do try to be there at the start rather than arrive in the middle of the lesson.
5. Governors should ask if it is alright to look at pupils work and discuss it with them.
6. There should have been an agreement about whether or not governors will make notes during the visit or make them afterwards.
7. Don't forget to follow the school's security procedures.
8. Look relaxed and interested.

### **Following the Visit:**

- Thank staff for hosting the visit – and any pupils you may have met.
- Discuss with the Headteacher any issues that may have arisen – things you did not understand or did not have an opportunity to talk to the staff about.
- Be very clear about the reporting protocols and how you will report back to the governing body.
- Ensure you know how to write a report which does not name individuals.
- Prepare your report promptly so that you don't forget what you saw.

If you are reporting to the governing body make sure you know if it is to be a written report or oral. If it is a written report be sure that it is in the required style and using the Governor monitoring form. Many governing bodies don't just want a narrative, but also some analysis of the main issues which the visiting governor wishes to draw to the governing body's attention.



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*Governors are required to monitor and evaluate the progress that the school is making towards the priorities and targets set out in the school improvement plan. Much of this monitoring will be done through the headteacher and other members of staff reporting to the governing body and its committees. However, it is also good practice for governors to visit the school during the school day to see at first hand the impact of their policies and plans on the school's performance. A carefully planned visit by a governor can generate evidence that will inform decision-making by the whole governing body or its committees. It is essential that governors and staff are clear about the reasons for such visits and have agreed the way in which they will be conducted. As with all other visitors to the school, governors should sign in on arrival. It is also important to adhere to current requirements on checks by the Criminal Records Bureau.*

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this protocol is to provide a framework for governors to make focused visits to schools so that they can build an effective working relationship with the staff and have a better understanding of the context in which they work. Governors will observe policies and plans being implemented on a day-to-day basis, and their findings should help the whole governing body and its committees make well-informed judgements about the progress being made towards the priorities and targets in the school improvement plan. This process will enable the governing body to recognise and celebrate the efforts and successes of pupils and staff and to identify further areas for development.

Visits are not about making judgements on the quality of teaching; that is the Headteacher's responsibility. Nor are they about checking on the progress of individual children or pursuing personal agendas.

## **Who was consulted?**

Staff and pupils contributed to this policy and will be consulted at least annually on its impact.

## **Relationship to other policies**

The focus of a visit could be on one or more of many of the policies in place in the school, especially assessment, collective worship, pupil discipline, race equality, and in teaching and learning.

## **Role and responsibilities of headteacher, other staff, governors**

The governing body will, with the help of the headteacher and staff, organise a schedule of visits throughout the year. The aim will be to achieve a minimum of one visit per governor per year. Visits may be conducted in pairs. The headteacher will guide the governing body on the areas of the curriculum, policies and school improvement plan priorities and targets to be covered each term.

**Individual governors or pairs of governors** will, with the guidance of the whole governing body, identify an aspect of the school's work to focus on. This will enable individual governors to develop a deeper understanding of a subject, a policy or policies, or a year group. They will focus on areas where they have an interest or expertise. The aim will be for them to get to know an aspect increasing their confidence and knowledge. It will help to maximise the effectiveness of the governing body team.

When organising and conducting a visit, governors will be courteous and considerate, at all times respecting the professional roles of the headteacher and staff. Working to the annual schedule agreed with the head and staff, they will confirm with the headteacher the date, timing and focus of each visit at least one week in advance. This will include agreeing what will be observed and to whom it would be useful to talk. If time permits they will discuss the proposed agenda with any staff involved. They will prepare by reading relevant documentation/guidance.

At the end of each visit, the governor(s) will discuss what they have observed with the teacher and clarify any points they are uncertain about. They will discuss their observations with the headteacher and agree how and when they will report to the governing body.

**Teachers and support staff** will at all times be courteous and considerate, recognising the contribution made by the governing body to the school. They will make practical suggestions on the focus for governors' visits so as to ensure that they are productive and enjoyable for all concerned. This will include specifying the evidence that could be shared with governors. Whenever practical they will invite their link/ curriculum governors to relevant staff meetings and training sessions. Questions will be invited from governors, while being sensitive to issues of confidentiality.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

Governors' visits will be an agenda item at the termly meeting of the governing body. By reviewing the minutes of meetings when reports of visits were discussed, the governing body will judge the extent to which the information gathered informed the whole governing body's understanding of the progress made towards meeting priorities and targets. Staff governors will feedback from colleagues. They will be asked to identify what worked well and what if anything needs to be reconsidered. They will also be asked to describe the extent to which their understanding of the governing body's role has been enhanced.

**Approved by Governors December 2015**