

A model policy for Governor's visits to schools

Every governing body has a statutory responsibility to establish and monitor its schools policies and evaluate the effectiveness of the school and its curriculum. Governors are also held to account for their school's performance.

"The contribution of governors to the school's performance is evaluated as part of the judgement on the effectiveness of leadership and management" (page 27 Section 5 handbook – updated October 2017)

In making the judgement on Leadership and management in School

Inspectors will consider:

- The leaders' and governors' vision and ambition for the school and how these are communicated to staff, parents and pupils
- Whether leaders and governors have created a culture of high expectations, aspirations and scholastic excellence in which the highest achievement in academic and vocational work is recognised as vitally important

Inspectors will consider whether governors:

- Work effectively with leaders to communicate the vision, ethos and strategic direction of the school and develop a culture of ambition.
- Provide a balance of challenge and support to leaders, understanding the strengths and areas requiring improvement at the school"

One of the best and most effective ways in which a governing body 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.

If school visits are done well they will add to governor's understanding of their school, its staff and pupils.

This model policy draws on other model policies and best practice in some settings. It includes a sample governors' visit pro-forma, which will help provide discussion on the issues raised and also provide a formal record for OFSTED of the governors' structured and systematic involvement in the work and life of the school. It should not however, form part of any other evidence base (eg Performance management)

The policy should be agreed between staff and governors so there is a clear understanding of the process.

Why visit?

There is no "one size fits all". Governing bodies have a variety of ways of gathering first hand evidence to inform their work with the school. Some schools have link governors who are allocated subjects, classes or year groups as a way of monitoring the curriculum. Others organise focused "groups" or "working parties" (eg curriculum and standards / Behaviour and wellbeing) as this gives them more flexibility around the focus of the visit and around who is identified to carry out particular activities.

A number of governors may have specific responsibilities, for example maths, health & safety or special needs. Quite often this is linked to the School's main priorities identified in the School Development Plan.

Developing the role of link governor allows the governing body to focus in more depth on particular areas of school life:

- 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 or a particular year group or class

By visiting a 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
- In a good position to support the school within the community.

What are the benefits to governors and staff?

Governors	Staff
To establish and develop effective relationships with staff	To get to know and build positive relationships with governors
To have a greater understanding of pupil's needs	
To recognise and celebrate success	To feel valued
To monitor the implementation of the school development plan	To demonstrate progress against actions in the development plan
To increase 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 school
To see policies and schemes of work in practice	
To find out what resources are used, what resources are needed and prioritise them	To highlight the need for further resources
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 demonstrate that the school is working in partnership with governors
To develop individual governor's roles in terms of their specific responsibilities	To share an understanding of the specific area

What are governor visits NOT about?

Governors should be aware that visits to the classroom are not a form of Inspection. It is not the remit of governors to make judgements about the professional expertise of staff or the quality of teaching and learning.

A school visit is also NOT about:

- Checking on the progress of your own or known children

- Monopolising staff time
- Arriving with inflexible or preconceived ideas
- Pursuing personal agendas or issues

How often should link governors make visits?

This would be at the discretion of the school and head teacher and would probably depend on the number of governors available to take on each responsibility as well as the size of the school. It would be recommended that a rolling programme of visits was arranged. These visits might include a variety of approaches to information gathering.

Who schedules the visit?

This would be the Head teacher or the member of staff to whom the Head teacher had delegated this responsibility.

Visit preparation

An important part of the visit preparation is to establish the “ground rules” There is some suggested guidance attached to this policy. Agreeing protocols will save time.

What should and shouldn't happen

	Always	Never
Before	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review action points in the school development plan • Agree the purpose of the visit with the Head teacher or link teacher • Arrange details of the visit • Try to visit at different times of day over the year • Discuss with the head teacher the focus for the visit and the nature of the link governor involvement • Agree level of confidentiality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn up unannounced for a focused, formal visit • Expect to go into a classroom without prior arrangement and recommended minimum notice of one week • Visit during an examination week without the visit being authorised by the HT
During	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be prepared, organised and punctual • Report to the school office to sign in • Fulfil the purpose of the visit • Observe school/ class guidelines • Jot down discussion points 	<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 clip board and take copious notes
After	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank the member(s) of staff and pupils • Discuss your visit experience as soon as possible after the visit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leave without a word of thanks and without giving feedback • Discuss observation with other members of

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback appropriately to the Head teacher • Discuss Health & safety issues if relevant • Complete the visit form and give a copy to the Head teacher / copy to lead link governor • Keep the record of your visit to refer to before your next visit 	<p>staff, parents or individual governors (except the chair) unless given permission.</p>
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What should I do if you are visiting a classroom?

Before visiting there are some questions you should clarify with the Head teacher or teacher

- When I come into the classroom where would you like me to sit?
- What should I do if pupils ask for help?
- Would you like me to be involved in the lesson?
- What should I do if I see a pupil behaving inappropriately?
- Do you mind if I ask pertinent questions if I'm not sure about detail when helping (eg methods used for calculations)

Focus of the visit

A visit can be to see the school generally, to attend a meeting with the coordinator or other adults and pupils or a specific classroom visit

Visits can focus on

- The condition and maintenance of the premises/ use made of buildings and premises
- Security on site / monitoring of health and safety
- School systems – eg Assembly, Break and lunchtimes
- The use and condition of resources / environment and use of displays
- The deployment of support staff / specific intervention programs
- To see a class or teacher lead an Assembly / to attend a performance or special event / Join a class or year group on an educational visit
- Extra-curricular activities of training courses delivered at the school
- Attending a parent open evening – available to talk with parents and carers / gather views and promote the work of the school

The classroom

- Observation of particular curriculum areas
- To gain an understanding of the process of assessment and tracking pupil cohorts and their attainment
- Assessing a group of pupils working on a task

After the visit

It is essential that warm thanks are given and a comment on the focus agreed Remember that as a governor you are visiting 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.

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

Any expression of concern should be shared with the Head teacher / SMT as soon as possible

Oral and written feedback should be given to:

- The member of staff involved
- The Head teacher
- The appropriate committee or lead link governor

It would be best if written feedback could be completed with the member of staff present or at least sent to the member of staff to be checked for accuracy.

The written reports should be discussed with the Chair of governors, filed and made available to the appropriate committee or whole governing Body.

Monitoring and evaluation of the governing Body's policy

Governors should review this policy annually. The review should consider:

- Are we doing what we set out to do? Are we achieving the benefits outlined in the policy?
- Have I learned more about the School?
- Are we better informed and able to make good decisions?
- Do staff feel affirmed and valued as a result of increased governor involvement?
- Have I helped the governing body fulfil its' duties? Is it helping us to review School development priorities?
- How can we make the policy and practice even better?

Governing Body School Visit Policy

Pre and post-visit checklist for the School and Governor

School	Governor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we know why the governor is visiting? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I made a formal appointment with the Head teacher / SMT?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we know what the governor is expecting to see? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do I know the specific purpose of the visit?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the focus for the visit also a focus in our School Development plan? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I arranged my time so that I can be sure to be punctual?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have we drawn up a timetable for the visit? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I thought about how I will approach the teacher in the classroom or the subject lead?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do individual members of staff know when they are going to be visited? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I thought about what I will actually do while I am in the school?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have other key members of staff been informed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will I give feedback to staff, Head teacher and Governing Body?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the appropriate documentation ready and available? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can I build on this for the next visit?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did I address any difficulties I met?

GOVERNING BODY SCHOOL VISIT POLICY

Governor's visit Form

Name:	Governor responsibility:	Date; Duration of visit:
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Areas of school / staff visited:

Purpose of visit (follow-up from previous visit):

Link with School Development Plan /School self- evaluation / subject action plan priorities;

Brief notes:

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Comments from link teacher :

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Any key issues arising for the governing Body?

Focus for next visit:

Signed: Governor: -----
Staff member(s) -----
Head teacher / SMT -----

GOVERNING BODY SCHOOL VISIT POLICY

Governor's visit Form

Name: Anonymous	Governor responsibility: Teaching & Learning	Date: March 5 th Duration of visit: 2 hours
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Link to SDP / Self-evaluation / Action plans

- SDP 3- Raising standards in writing – ensuring children have opportunities for writing across other subjects / SEF – Teaching & Learning

Purpose / focus for this visit (follow-up from previous visit)

- To join the Y3 class for part of their history lesson – sit with the lower ability group
- Talk with the Literacy lead (Y3 teacher) about cross-curricular writing links for Y3 children

Governor comments:

- The Y3 class were really interested in the topic on Egyptians – The group described the research they'd done and showed me some models they'd made which were on display. They were very proud of these
- There were some lovely books available –fiction and non-fiction though some were a bit dog-eared. A few of the words were quite hard for a few children but they wanted to know the names of objects and tried hard to read.
- The teacher had used some objects at the beginning of the lesson and the children said what they'd found out. I was impressed with what they knew
- The children wrote a diary entry. They were keen to write and said they liked it when the subject was exciting and they knew lots about the Egyptians

Teacher comments:

- I try to provide practical stimulus and use a lot of books as a stimulus for writing lessons so that children have something to write about. I also like to get visitors in and to take children out on visits but it isn't always possible
- History links seemed to be going well but it is more difficult in some subjects

Possible focus for next visit:

- Meet with the coordinator to discuss resources and progress with literacy links with other subjects
- Support visit to local museum

Key messages for governors

- Budget resources spend –some new books and practical resources to support writing in other subjects
- Use of Pupil premium to fund some creative activities to widen pupil's experiences

Signed:

-----Governor

-----Member of staff

-----Head teacher