GOVERNOR VISITS PROTOCOL
GOVERNOR VISITS

The Governance Handbook states:

School visits

Governors need to know their school if accountability is going to be robust and their vision for the school is to be achieved. Many governors find that visiting, particularly during the day, is a helpful way to find out more about the school. Through pre-arranged visits that have a clear focus, governors can see for themselves whether the school is implementing their policies and improvement plans and how they are working in practice. Visits also provide an opportunity to talk with pupils, staff and parents to gather their views, though are unlikely to be sufficient for these purposes.

Governors are not inspectors and it is not their role to assess the quality or method of teaching or extent of learning. They are also not school managers and should make sure they do not interfere in the day-to-day running of the school. Both are the role of the headteacher. If governors wish to spend time within a classroom, they need to be very clear why they are doing so.

Purpose of protocol

As the governing board we have the responsibility for the direction, policies and standards of our school and we are accountable for its conduct and performance. Visiting the school is an excellent way to observe how it operates on a day-to-day basis but all governor visits should be focussed and relate to the priorities in the Strategic Improvement Plan. Governors should report back their findings, thus helping the whole governing body and its committees to make better informed judgements about the progress being made towards the priorities and targets in the School Improvement Plan and informing strategic decision making. The headteacher, who has the responsibility for the day-to-day management of the school, will guide the governing board on the areas of the curriculum, policies and Strategic Improvement Plan to be covered each term and will be set out in our improvement calendar. The policy and protocol for school visits is formulated in consultation with the staff.

Annual programme of visits

The governing board will organise a programme of visits with the help of the headteacher. These will be spread throughout the year, with the aim for each governor to achieve a minimum of one visit per term. In addition, new governors will make a general introductory visit of the school as part of their induction programme.

Purpose of visit

The focus of a visit could be on any policy in place in the school, e.g., teaching and learning, assessment, behaviour, collective worship. It could also focus on particular areas, such as the management of the school’s resources, the condition of the buildings, safeguarding, a particular year group or class.

Benefits to governors:
- To recognise and celebrate success of pupils and staff
- To build effective relationships with the staff and a better understanding of the context in which they work
- To get to know the students
- To recognise different teaching styles
- To monitor policies in action
- To inform decision making
- To find out what resources are needed and prioritise them

Benefits to staff members:
- 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
What a visit is not about
- Making judgements on the quality of teaching or professional expertise of the teacher, this is the role of the headteacher
- Checking on progress of individual children
- Pursuing personal interests and concerns
- Monopolising school/teacher time

Protocols for visits
Governors should, with the guidance of the whole governing board and head teacher, identify an aspect of the school’s work to focus upon. This will help to maximise the effectiveness of the governing board team.

When organising and conducting a visit governors will be courteous and considerate, respecting the professional roles of the headteacher and staff. Working to the annual schedule agreed with the head and staff, they will confirm in advance with the head teacher the date, timing and focus of each visit. This will include agreeing what will be observed, whom it would be useful to talk to and agreeing any protocols to be observed whilst in the school. 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 will discuss what they have observed with the teacher and clarify any points they are uncertain about. Comments should be limited to the focus of the visit. Governors visiting cannot make personal judgements or promises on behalf of the governing body. They will discuss their observations with the head teacher and agree how and when they will report to the governing body on the visit.

See Annex A for good practice when visiting a school and Annex B for the form to record and report on visits.

Teachers and support staff will be courteous and considerate, recognising the contribution made by the governing board to the school.

They will make practical suggestions on the focus for governors’ visits to ensure that they are productive and enjoyable for all concerned. This will include specifying the evidence that could be shared with governors.

Questions will be invited from governors while being sensitive to issues of confidentiality. See Annexes 3 and 4 for examples of questions which governors could ask.

Monitoring and evaluation of implementation and impact.
Governors’ visits will be an agenda item at the termly meeting of the full governing board. In our report to parents we will report the number of visits conducted and the areas of focus. The governing board will evaluate the extent to which visits have informed the whole governing board understanding of the school’s work. Staff governors will feed back from colleagues and describe the extent to which staff’s understanding of the governing body’s role has been enhanced.

The governing board can then consider:
- Are the visits achieving the potential benefits identified?
- What worked well?
- Have there been any unexpected benefits?
- How can we make our practice even better?

and make changes to the protocol that may be required.

Date established by governing board..................
Date for full implementation............................
Date for next review.................................
The following sections list examples of good practice. The opposite of each, could feature in a 'never' column.

**Preparing for a visit**
- Check the agreed policy for governors’ visits
- Clarify the purpose of the visit. Is it linked to the Strategic Improvement Plan? What are the relevant school Policies? How does this determine the activities I am interested in?
- Discuss an agenda with the headteacher well in advance. Make sure that the date chosen is suitable.
- Find out if there is a prompt/question sheet/checklist, agreed by staff and governors, to guide governors’ visits.
- Time permitting, discuss the proposed agenda with the staff involved. How do they want governors to integrate into the lesson? It might be possible for you to see a copy of the lesson plan beforehand.
- Be clear beforehand exactly what you are observing. Try to prepare questions for staff in advance. The teacher may be able to guide you on this.
- Discuss with the headteacher if any supporting information is available – Ofsted report, improvement plan, performance data.

**During the Visit**
- Remember you are making the visit on behalf of the governing board, it is not appropriate to make judgements or promises on behalf of the governing board.
- Be punctual.
- Keep to the agreed timetable but be flexible.
- Decide with the teacher how you will be introduced and what your role in the classroom will be.
- Get involved with the children if the teacher has agreed that this would be appropriate.
- Remember it is a visit not an inspection.
- Observe discretely. Remember that excessive note taking can be disconcerting and may make your visit look like an inspection.
- Don’t distract the teacher during the lesson from his/her work but be prepared to talk and show interest.
- Be courteous, friendly not critical.
- Interact, do not interrupt.
- Remember why you are there. Do not lose sight of the purpose of your visit.
- Listen to staff and pupils.

**After**
- Discuss what you have observed with the teacher. 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, positive.
- Make notes as soon as possible after your observation while it is still fresh in your mind.
- Discuss your observations with the headteacher. Be prepared to take the comments of others on board.
- Agree with the headteacher 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 ‘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.
- It would be polite to circulate a draft to the head and any staff involved for them to check the accuracy and clarity. Be prepared to amend it. Aim to achieve a report that is agreed by those involved.
- Circulate this at the next appropriate committee/governing board meeting.

**GOVERNOR SCHOOL VISIT FORM**
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**What I did:**

**What I learned:**

**What I need clarified:**

**What is the impact of what I saw:**

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Questions for Governors – Staff Discussions

The full governing board retains the responsibility for raising standards. For example, a nominated governor who takes a special interest in English or mathematics can help to ensure that associated issues remain on the governing board’s agenda. The following questions will help us to monitor and fulfil our responsibilities.

Our job, in partnership with the headteacher, is to provide a link between our governing board, its committees and the staff of our school.

1. **Achievements and attitudes**
   - What are the broad trends in the school’s achievement?
     - Compared to similar schools?
     - With the national rates of increase?
     - With the national picture in terms of gender?
   - Where have we improved? Do we know why?
   - Are there differences between the achievement of different year groups and if so why?
   - How do our results in English/maths compare with those in other subjects?
   - What aspects of the subject do pupils find easy/hard?
   - Are there significant differences in reading and writing between:
     - Girls and boys
     - Pupils with special educational needs
     - Very able pupils
     - Pupils with English as an additional language
     - Any other groups e.g. traveller families
   - In meetings with the Subject Coordinators can you tell how much progress pupils are making? For example, you could look at:
     - Key Stage 1 and 2 test results
     - A range of pupils’ work - average, below average and above average
     - Other evidence.

2. **Special Needs**
   - How are pupils with special educational needs integrated into the daily lessons?
   - How have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHC) been adapted to support children in their daily literacy/maths lessons?

3. **Management of the subject.**
   - How is the role of the subject coordinator developing?
   - Does the subject action plan match the identified needs?
   - What is the allocation of funding for this financial year?
   - How has it or will it be spent?
   - Is there a need for additional resources for any aspect of the work?
   - What further training do teachers and support staff need?
   - How much additional adult support does each class have?
     - What was the outcome of the local authority’s literacy/numeracy monitoring visit?
   - Does the school offer a range of reading books catering for all abilities, cultural backgrounds and tastes, especially boys? Are pupils using the library? What links does the school have with the local library? (English).
   - How does the school use all its resources (books, materials and displays as well as electronic media) to promote reading and writing/numeracy?

4. **Communication**
   - How are parents kept informed about pupil progress?
   - What steps are being taken to encourage parents to support their children in reading and writing at home?
   - How are governors kept informed about standards and progress of pupils?
   - How do governors celebrate the school’s success when things go well?
Questions for Governors – Pupil Discussions

Please remember the age of the child and ask the questions in an appropriate manner.

About the children and us as Governors:

1. Can you tell me your name and how old you are?
2. Have you any brothers and sisters in this school?
3. What’s your favourite thing that you do in school? Why?
4. What was your favourite year in school?
5. How do you think the school has changed since you’ve been here?
6. Does your family like to visit the school?
7. Have you got anything you would like to ask me about what I do?

Learning

1. Do you usually know what you are trying to learn?
2. How do teachers help you to get a real understanding for what you are trying to learn in lessons? Can you give me an example?
3. How does this affect how well you learn?
4. Do you know when you are being successful in your learning or have made progress?
5. What really really makes you work hard in school?
6. Do you read what the teacher writes in your book?
7. What kind of comments do you find most helpful?
8. Do you ever write back to your teacher?

Wellbeing

1. What makes you feel good in school?
2. Have you ever been bullied or seen bullying at school?
3. What happened? How was it dealt with? were you happy with that?
4. If something was really bothering you who would you talk to? Why?
5. Can you tell me the name of an adult who you look up to or admire?
6. How did you find out about that person?
7. Do you learn about different cultures in school? Can you give me an example?
8. How did learning about this make you feel?
9. Do you feel adults like you in school? How do you know?
10. Do you think you are treated with respect in the school? Can you give some examples?