

GOVERNORS' VISITS POLICY

The Department for Education's (DfE's) Governance Handbook (November 2015) states that:

"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".

Introduction

1. Visits to schools by those governing can be enormously useful in helping them carry out their role. That role is largely strategic, not operational, and includes ensuring vision is being turned into reality, ethos is being embedded and progress is being made against the strategic plan.
2. Governing boards have three core functions:
 - Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
 - Holding the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils, and the performance management of the staff
 - Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent.
3. In order to carry out these functions, governors will draw on a range of evidence, including their visits to the school.

Purpose

4. The purpose of governors' visits follow directly from the core functions of the governors.
5. The principal purposes are as follows:
 - To enable governors to ensure that progress is being made against the objectives and priorities in the school improvement plan
 - To enable governors to see for themselves whether the school is implementing policies approved by the governing body and how they are working in practice
 - To provide information about the use of resources to assist in decision-making on financial matters.
 - To enable governors with special responsibilities (e.g. SEND, English, etc.) to better understand issues related to those responsibilities
6. Other purposes are:
 - To ensure governors have an understanding of the operation of the school to support them in their strategic role
 - To provide governors with up-to-date knowledge of standards, content and teaching of the curriculum in school

- To enable governors to understand the environment in which staff work, and its impact on the emotional and physical safety of pupils
- To develop positive relationships between governors, staff and pupils.

Process

7. Each visit should have a clear, pre-arranged focus to help governors and staff to use their time productively. Most of the time, visits will focus on the principal purposes, but this will not necessarily always be the case, for example, a new governor may tour the school as part of their induction.
8. Governors should meet members of staff responsible for the area of interest in order to receive background information and context. Governors should also, if possible, speak to pupils or other staff members involved.
9. During visits, governors must remember that the role of the governing body is strategic, not operational. Acceptable activities, for example, would be to seek an understanding of how a particular policy is managed, how staff are made aware of the policy, whether any issues have arisen, how they have been dealt with, lessons that have been learned when things go wrong, how the policy is audited and how the findings are acted upon.
10. Examples of issues a visit could focus on include:
 - Monitoring progress towards specific targets from the school improvement plan, for example, meeting with the subject lead and learning about the strategy adopted and how this translates through to classroom practice and children's learning
 - Monitoring the implementation of a particular policy, for example safeguarding, homework, lesson planning
 - Gaining an understanding of a particular curriculum area or year group
 - Gaining an understanding of the process of assessment and tracking pupil cohorts
 - Gaining an understanding of how a particular issue is dealt with on a day-to-day basis, for example, provision of ICT, boys' achievement, literacy, etc.
 - Examining the use of resources, such as premises or a new teaching resource.
11. Governors will be expected to complete a minimum of 1 visit per year.
12. When the school improvement plan is approved, usually at the first full governors' meeting in the academic year, governors should ensure that responsibility for each section of the plan should be allocated to various governors so that some of their visits can be focused on those particular sections, as well as their subject responsibilities and any other relevant matters.
13. Governors will confirm with the headteacher the purpose of each visit at least 48 hours in advance of the visit.
14. Governors will complete promptly a report after each visit (see appendix 2) focused on the agreed purpose of the visit.
15. The initial draft report of each visit will be shared with the headteacher in the first instance. Once completed and agreed, it will then be shared with the full governing body.
16. The reports of governors' visits should be used as part of the evidence to review the success, or otherwise, of the implementation of the school improvement plan.

17. Types of question that governors can ask

- What impact does this have on the children's learning?
- Can you show me the impact of.....?
- How effective was this? How do you know?
- What are our strengths/weaknesses in this area?
- What do we need to do next to improve?
- Why?
- What would happen if we didn't.....?
- What are the cost implications?
- What support do you need?
- Can you tell me about....?
- What else would you like to tell me?

18. Types of questions that governors can ask the children

- What are you working on?
- What do you enjoy about school?
- What did you learn today?
- Can you show me a piece of work you're proud of?
- What do you do when you're stuck?

19. Reviewing the report: does it contain these features?

- Does the report have a clear and appropriate focus?
- Is it factual, non-emotive and non-opinionated?
- Does it comment on observations, not assumptions?
- Does it include challenge?
- Does it include support and thanks?
- Does the report contain data to support assumptions?
- Does the report have clear actions, that are allocated and have a time limit?
- Are actions from a previous visit referred to?
- Does the report address the original focus?
- Are the key messages clear?
- Does it include any comment about impact of governance?
- Has the report been signed and dated?

Do's and Don'ts

The table below provides a guide to what those governing should and shouldn't do before, during, and after a school visit.

	Do	Don't
BEFORE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Discuss the visit at a governing board meeting, including identifying a clear purpose. (It can be useful to think of the governing board as 'commissioning' the visit and delegating responsibility for carrying it out to individual governor/s) ✓ Arrange a mutually convenient time, avoiding sensitive times such as exam or assessment periods. ✓ Discuss the visit with the headteacher and ensure that any member of staff who will be involved in the visit understands the arrangements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Turn up unannounced. ✗ Approach staff directly without the approval of the headteacher
DURING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Present yourself in a way which matches the professionalism expected of school staff. ✓ Report to reception and follow procedures for visitors – even those familiar with the school should do this. ✓ Only enter classrooms and other areas of the school – including the staffroom – following invitation by a member of staff. ✓ Keep to the role agreed; only talk to students if invited to do so by the teacher ✓ Be flexible if something urgent crops up which means the arranged tasks cannot take place – always keep in mind that the education of the students is of overriding importance. ✓ Be courteous and professional throughout the visit, including thanking members of staff before leaving. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Don't turn up in shorts, immodest shirt, flip flops ✗ Give the impression that you are inspecting, for example by using a clipboard or making notes while visiting a classroom. ✗ Assume a different role to that agreed; parents and education professionals, in particular, should be mindful not to stray into these roles. ✗ Express personal opinions if pressed on a controversial issue – individuals should keep in mind that they are representing the governing board as a whole. ✗ Make assumptions – always ask for explanations of anything not understood at an appropriate time when it will not interrupt pupils' learning (this may be in conversation with the class teacher after the lesson or with the headteacher at the end of the visit). ✗ Check on the progress of individual children, including your own. ✗ Walk around the school unaccompanied or put yourself in situations where you are likely to be unaccompanied with pupils.
AFTER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Share any concerns, however trivial, with the chair and the headteacher. ✓ Complete a short visit report using a form like the one in appendix 2; a draft should be shared with any relevant members of staff and the headteacher, then taking their comments into account a final written report should be prepared and given to the governing board before the next meeting. ✓ Ensure that school visits is an agenda item at the governing board meeting and that any findings are discussed ✓ Send a thank you email to those that contributed to the success of the visit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Make comments regarding the teacher's conduct of the lesson or individual students. ✗ Refer to individual teachers or students in your report, even in a positive light. ✗ Gossip about your visit – what you have seen should be treated with the same level of confidentiality as any other governing board business.

APPENDIX 1: Model Visit Protocol

Introduction
<p>Governing boards have three core functions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction; ➤ Holding the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils, and the performance management of the staff; and ➤ Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent. <p>Governors, trustees and local governing committee members draw on a range of evidence in order to carry out these functions and one source of information is their own visits to their school.</p> <p>This protocol applies to school visits made for the purpose of governance and not to visits to the school site that individual may make in other capacities e.g. as parents or members of staff.</p>
Purpose
<p>All school visits will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Have a clear focus, linked to strategic priorities, which is agreed by the full governing board ➤ Be arranged with adequate notice through the headteacher and agreed with the relevant members of staff ➤ Be of value to the governing board which is demonstrable to outside agencies e.g. Ofsted or the LA <p>It is not the role of those governing to form judgements about the performance of school staff during visits and individuals will make every effort to avoid this impression.</p>
Conduct
<p>Those governing will comply with the school and governing board's codes of conduct and the standards of presentation expected of staff. They will be mindful that they are representing the whole governing board through their words and actions.</p>
Follow-up
<p>Those governing will have the opportunity to discuss the visit, including any concerns, with the Headteacher immediately or soon after the visit.</p> <p>The attached 'Governor Visit Report' will be completed after each visit. A draft will be shared with the headteacher and any other members of staff involved in the visit and, when agreed, a final version will be included in the papers for discussion in the next governing board meeting (this may be the full governing board or a committee, as appropriate).</p>
Confidentiality
<p>Confidentiality should be adhered to regarding visits. Comments should be limited to the headteacher or senior or middle leader with who the visit was arranged but not with other staff or with parents. Individual children or staff members (other than the member of staff involved with the visit) should not be identified in school visit reports.</p>
Frequency
<p>Governors, trustees and local governing committee members will undertake a minimum of one visit to the school per academic year but no more than once a term.</p>
Review
<p>This protocol should be reviewed by the governing board every academic year.</p>

APPENDIX 2: Model Visit Report

Name:	Date:
Focus of visit (link to strategy and school development plan)	
Summary of activities e.g. talking to staff and pupils, looking at specific resources, having lunch, etc	
What have I learned as a result of my visit? (relate this back to focus on visit)	
Aspects I would like clarified/questions that I have:	
Actions for the governing board to consider:	
Further comments:	
Signature:	