



# Governor Visits Policy

Phoenix Community Primary School

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## Introduction

The governing body has a statutory duty to oversee the policies and direction of the school, to monitor its standards and be held to account for its conduct and performance.

Visiting the school is not a statutory requirement but they can be extremely important to learn how it functions, and to keep under review how it operates so that you can increase the governing body's first-hand knowledge, informing self-evaluation and strategic decision making. It is recognised that the amount of time that a governor can commit to a visit will vary but in general governors should expect to make at least one visit a year. If governors cannot make this commitment they should question whether they can make a realistic and valuable contribution to being a governor.

Many governors worry about making a visit to school and particularly about visiting a classroom. This policy sets out a protocol that has been developed through consultation between staff and governors. It sets out how governor visits should be conducted to allow governors and staff to gain the most from the visit.

Governor visits should generally align to the priorities determined on the School Improvement Plan so that the governing body can monitor how these are progressing. The governing body should develop a plan of visits throughout the year to cover a wide range of school work and each visit should be agreed and have a clear purpose.

Governors should arrange their visits with the headteacher who has the responsibility of the day-to-day management of the school.

To be effective and useful Governor visits have to be planned in advance and the following elements should be considered.

## Purposes of a Visit

The potential benefits to governors:

- To recognise and celebrate success
- To get to know the staff
- To show themselves as part of the school
- To improve knowledge of the school, its staff, needs, priorities, strengths and weaknesses
- To monitor and assess the priorities outlined in the school improvement plan and observe policies in action
- To assist the governing body in fulfilling its statutory duties and demonstrate their role as critical friend
- To develop an understanding of issues facing the school to inform decision making
- To understand the environment in which teachers teach
- To find out what resources are needed and prioritise them

The potential benefits to teachers:

- 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

The potential benefits to students:

- To ensure governors understand the reality of the classroom and school life
- To get to know governors
- To understand better governor roles and responsibilities
- To give feedback about the school to the governors

The potential benefits to parents:

- To ensure governors understand the issues that parents have
- To get to know governors
- To understand better governor roles and responsibilities
- To give feedback about the school to the governors

## What A Visit Is Not About

A form of inspection to make judgements about professional expertise of the teacher

Checking on progress of individual children

Pursuing a personal agenda

An opportunity to tackle staff about specific issues

## Protocols or Ground Rules For Visits

Staff should know in advance the date and focus of the visit.

Staff should have the opportunity to explain the context of any lesson that a governor visits

Governors will not interrupt lessons by asking teachers questions

Governors may talk to students during lesson observations but must not ask questions about the teacher

## Annual Programme of Visits

A programme of visits should be planned and spread evenly across the school year in consultation with the headteacher. Visits should be planned on areas of the priorities that have been identified within the school plan. Regular analysis of this schedule enables governors to see what areas/activities receive visits and those that do not.

Visits can take the form of:

- Meeting with staff
- Classroom visits
- Pupil interviews
- Looking at pupils work
- Meeting with staff groups
- Reviewing areas and resources of the school.

## Visit Focus

Visits should be arranged which focus on the school improvement plan priorities to inform on progress. Although not an exhaustive list visits may focus on:-

- Particular subjects, key stages or classes
- The use made of the buildings or the site
- The condition and maintenance of the premises
- Additional educational needs
- Literacy and numeracy
- Impact of the religious character (in church schools)
- Lunch and breaktimes
- The use and condition of resources e.g. furniture or ICT equipment
- Deployment of staff, e.g. caretaker, office staff, teaching assistants
- The impact on the school of any changes e.g. reduced classes in a key stage

- Relative numbers of questions and responses to the teacher from boys to girls

## Informal Visits

Visits may also take place in an informal capacity. 'Discreet' information can be gathered on these visits which build on your knowledge of the school. It is vital that everyone is clear about the capacity in which they are visiting and not to confuse the role.

- The chair making a regular visit to see the headteacher
- To lend a helping hand with a school event
- To get information from the office relating to a committee meeting
- To help in a class
- To speak to a teacher in relation to your own child
- Attending a school function or educational visit
- Visit in relation to your position as the local priest or councillor

Informal visits should also be recorded in a shorter simple report that logs the fact that a governor has visited the school and any pertinent information needs to be shared with the headteacher and other governors.

## Monitoring and Review of School Visit Policy

The policy should be monitored and reviewed annually.

Are our visits achieving the potential benefits we identified?

Have there been any unexpected benefits?

How can we make our practice even better?

## Appendix 1 – Governor Visits – Good Practice

### Preparing for a Visit

Check the agreed policy for governors' visits

Clarify the purpose of the visit. Is it linked to the School Improvement Plan? What are the relevant school Policies? How does this determine the activities I am interested in?

Discuss the agenda with the headteacher well in advance and seek approval for your visit and agree a date that is suitable.

Find out if there is a prompt/question sheet/checklist, agreed by staff and governors, to guide governors' visits.

Discuss the proposed agenda with the staff involved. How do they want governors to integrate into the lesson? Would note taking be allowed? 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/class teacher if any supporting information is available – Ofsted report, improvement plan, performance data.

Ensure that you are familiar with health and safety procedures

### During the Visit

Remember you are making the visit on behalf of the governing body; it is not appropriate to make judgements or promises on behalf of the governing body.

Be punctual, keep to the agreed timetable but be flexible.

Remember you are there to learn, it is a visit not an inspection. Dress 'smart casual' so as not to be intimidating

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.

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.

Listen to staff and pupils, be courteous, friendly not critical.

Interact, don't interrupt.

Remember why you are there. Don't lose sight of the purpose of your visit.

## After the Visit

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, and positive.

Make notes as soon as possible after your observation while it is still fresh in your mind.

Complete the agreed visit proforma, once you have shared and agreed this with the headteacher pass to the clerk for circulation to the governing body.

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

Governors are expected to write a report on all of their visit to the school. A longer more formal report is expected for formal governor visits but a brief summary of what was observed on informal visits is also very useful to both governors and the

It would be polite to circulate a draft to the head and any staff involved as soon as possible after the visit for them to check the accuracy and clarity. Be prepared to amend it. Aim to achieve a report that is agreed by those involved.

Send the report to the clerk for circulation to the next appropriate committee/governing body meeting.