

# School visits policy

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## Preamble

The governing body is the 'accountable body' in a school – accountable to parents, pupils, the local authority and central government through Ofsted. It is responsible for everything including health and safety, child protection, the school budget, teaching and learning and pupil progress. Since governing bodies have a statutory responsibility to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the school and its curriculum, governors need to know what progress is being made towards targets set out in the Raising Achievement Plan (RAP). Visiting the school can help to support this process.

Ofsted inspection assumes that governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school. This depends on governors assessing performance data presented to them by the Senior Leadership Team in the context of understanding what happens in the classroom.

It is also important to Ofsted that the governing body make an impact on school improvement, and visiting the school to see it in operation and being aware of standards and progress are important aspects of this crucial role.

Formal visits will have a clear focus, linked to priorities in the RAP or items discussed and identified in governing body meetings.

Governors' school visits will not be confined to the classroom. Governors will consider a series of different types of visits, some of which will be focused on the classroom and some of which might include the playground, the school environment, health and safety, parents'/carers' consultation evenings, meetings with senior staff, pupil progress meetings, attending a school assembly, or reporting on the school's extra-curricular activities.

## Visiting the classroom

Governors are not qualified to assess standards but they need to visit lessons in order to:

- Appreciate and understand work of teachers and support staff and how pupils are learning
- Be aware of pupils' response to their work and check that pupils are aware of what they are learning
- Be aware of resource issues
- Be able to ask appropriate questions and hold sensible discussions with teachers and support staff
- Understand as fully as possible meaning of results of monitoring reported to them
- Develop an understanding of school's strengths and weaknesses
- Support school's work
- Contribute to governing body's monitoring role
- Ask informed and challenging questions at governing body meetings
- Help other governors understand teaching and learning process
- See policies in action

- Demonstrate to staff and pupils that governors are interested in what goes on in school
- Develop an enhanced sense of identity with school and people who work in it

N.B. Governors are not inspectors and are not present in a lesson to make judgements about professional expertise of teachers - that remains a task for head and/or other education professionals. It would be inappropriate, therefore, for governors to:

- Make judgements about quality of teaching
- Report on progress of individual children
- Pursue personal agendas
- Monopolise teachers' time
- Arrive with inflexible pre-conceived ideas

Governors will agree a basic structure for visits before any individual visits take place. This will include:

- Setting a timescale for visits
- How many governors need to visit each term, half term, year etc
- What happens during a visit
- How it is to be organised
- Arrangements for feedback to the whole governing body

## **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality should be adhered to regarding classroom visits. Observations and comments should be shared with the teacher concerned, and with the headteacher, but not with other staff or with parents. The approach of a governor should be to ask for explanations of anything not understood, not to make assumptions.

Reports to the governing body should not identify individuals in a critical manner: this is not the role of a governor.

## **Minimum commitment**

Individual governors have differing amounts of time to commit to an exercise such as classroom visits. It is important, however, that all governors should try to make visits at some time, beyond the initial general visit to the school when newly appointed to the governing body. A governor should aim to make a class visit at least once a year, but preferably more regularly and ideally once in each term.

## **Ground rules for school visits**

It is useful to follow some basic rules in planning visits.

### **What is the purpose of visit?**

- What has prompted my decision to visit?
- Who has prompted my decision to visit?
- Is reason specific or general?
- What are my/other people's expectations?
- How can my visit benefit teacher/support staff?

### **How shall I carry it out?**

- What particular areas of school am I interested in?
- What particular activities am I interested in?
- What particular age-group(s) am I interested in?
- Are there any questions that can be answered by observation?
- What questions should I ask?
- Who should I ask?

### **Did I achieve my aim?**

- To what extent did I address reason for my visit?
- Which of my questions did I answer?
- To what extent did I fulfil my own/other people's expectations?
- What difficulties did I meet and why?

### **Is there any follow-up?**

- Have I recorded my experiences?
- Did I report back to head and staff?
- Have I prepared a short report for next governors' meeting?
- How can I build on this for next visit?

	<b>Always</b>	<b>Never</b>
<b>Before</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrange details of visit</li> <li>• Agree purpose of visit</li> <li>• Discuss context of lesson to be observed</li> <li>• Agree role within lesson (eg participation/involvement with pupils)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turn up unannounced</li> <li>• Turn up unprepared</li> </ul>
<b>During</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep to role agreed</li> <li>• Keep questions for teacher until after visit is over</li> <li>• Remember confidentiality</li> <li>• Stick to times and purpose agreed</li> <li>• Be courteous and friendly; not critical</li> <li>• Listen; do not talk too much</li> <li>• Observe discreetly; take minimal notes</li> <li>• Be sensitive to mood in classroom and expectations of children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assume a different role</li> <li>• Walk in with clipboard</li> <li>• Distract pupils from their task</li> <li>• Comment to teacher concerned on conduct of lesson or individual pupils</li> </ul>
<b>After</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thank teacher and pupils</li> <li>• Discuss visit with teacher at their convenience</li> <li>• Draft short written report while visit still fresh in mind</li> <li>• Discuss observations, including any concerns, with headteacher, SMT member or other appropriate member of staff</li> <li>• Show draft report to headteacher, SMT member or appropriate member of staff so that they can check accuracy and advise on potential sensitivities</li> <li>• Feedback to governing body</li> <li>• Reflect on how well visit went to do better next time</li> <li>• If any issues remain unresolved, discuss with chair of governors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leave without acknowledgement</li> <li>• Break rules of confidentiality</li> <li>• In your report, make judgements on teachers or individual pupils</li> </ul>

## Governor Visit Report

Governor name:
Date:
Focus of visit:
Classes/staff visited:
Summary of activities (eg talking to staff and pupils, looking at resources, having lunch etc):
What have I learned as a result of my visit?
Positive comments about the visit:
Aspects I would like clarified/questions that I have:
Ideas for future visits:
Any other comments:
Signed: