

Appendix 8 Advice for Governors on Visiting Schools

Visiting the school during the day is an important part of the governor's role because it enables him/her to develop an understanding of the school beyond the information gleaned at meetings.

The DfE's Governor Handbook states: "Governors need to know their school. Many governors find that visiting, particularly during the day, is a helpful way to find out about the school. Visits can also be an important part of robust school accountability. Through pre-arranged visits, governors can check that the school is implementing the policies and improvement plans they have signed off, and see for themselves how their vision and plans for the school are working in practice. Visits also provide an opportunity to arrange meetings with pupils, staff and parents about what they think of the school and how it is changing.

While it may be helpful to see classes at work, governors are not inspectors and it is not their role to assess the quality or method of teaching. 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."

A key role for governors is to monitor the performance of the school. Visiting school is one part of that role and can help governors in their strategic duty of holding the school to account and evaluating its performance by giving a first-hand appreciation of what goes on in school. Another key role is to support school and visiting can play a part in that role too.

Ofsted have a focus on teaching and learning and place a strong emphasis on visiting classrooms and talking to pupils. The leadership team in school is responsible for the quality of teaching and learning and they will have a planned programme of visits to classrooms to monitor and evaluate standards. The evidence gathered by the leadership team from classroom visits will be used in the school's self-evaluation and will be fed back to governors. Governors have a responsibility to validate the information they receive and visiting classrooms to see staff and pupils working, talking to pupils or undertaking learning walks can help to do this.

Visits to school should normally be linked to the School Improvement / Development Plan but governors may also visit school to monitor other aspects of school life. A governing body may wish to draw up an annual programme of visits or learning walks.

The Ofsted Report on School Governance "Learning from the Best" highlighted visiting school as an example of effective practice:

"In eight of the 14 schools visited, governors routinely attend lessons to gather information about the school at work. All the governors who were interviewed visit their schools regularly and talk with staff, pupils and parents. Clear protocols for visits ensure that the purpose is understood by school staff and governors alike. Alongside the information they are given about the school, these protocols help them to make informed decisions, ask searching questions and provide meaningful support."

The Purpose of Visits:

The purpose of a visit to school could be one or more of the following:

- To gain background information and to get to know how the school functions
- To see the school at work and understand the environment in which staff work and pupils learn. This is of particular importance for new governors and should be considered part of the induction process
- To get to know the staff and demonstrate the commitment of the governing body to the school
- To hold the headteacher to account (the “critical friend” role)
- To gather the views of pupils or parents
- To gain first hand information to assist with decision taking and policy making
- To see policies and decisions in action and to evaluate them
- To develop a specific link role (eg Safeguarding Link Governor)
- To monitor how resources are used
- To monitor health and safety and safeguarding practices
- To support the school by attending celebrations and events
- To recognise and celebrate the excellent practice in school

Protocol:

Governor visits should always:

- Be arranged with the headteacher in advance of the visit
- Have a clear focus which is understood by all involved
- Be an opportunity for learning
- Be a positive experience for all

Governors should not:

- Arrive with inflexible, pre-conceived ideas or pursue a personal agenda
- Inspect the school
- Make judgements on the quality of teaching
- Pursue issues which are operational and the responsibility of the headteacher and staff
- Make an unplanned or unfocussed visit

Before the Visit:

- Agree the focus, time and date for the visit
- Consider practicalities – parking, safeguarding arrangements etc
- Clarify any agreed etiquettes or expectations
- If appropriate and after clearance from the headteacher, liaise with the member of staff involved to gain an understanding of the activity being seen. For instance, you may be able to see a lesson plan
- Prepare any questions, with the headteacher
- Read any appropriate supporting information

During the Visit:

- Arrive on time and sign in
- Introduce yourself to any staff or pupils you meet

- If you are in a classroom, observe and only participate at the invitation of the teacher (if possible, talk to the teacher beforehand about what your role/input will be)
- Note and praise the positives of school life
- Be aware that constant note taking may be disconcerting to the member of staff – use a proforma to guide and limit notetaking
- Ask questions when the opportunity arises
- Remain focussed on the original purpose of the visit
- Enjoy the visit!

After the Visit:

- Remember to thank staff and pupils
- Meet with the headteacher to raise any issues. Prepare a written report using an agreed format if appropriate. This should be given to the headteacher in the first place before circulation to other governors and/or staff. There is room on the report format for comments from the headteacher.
- Reflect on the success of the visit – how did it go? Did the visit enhance your understanding? What would have been “even better if”? Have you helped the governing body fulfil its duty?

Possible focus for visits:

This list is not exhaustive and will be different for each individual school

- A priority from the School Improvement/ Development Plan
- A subject, key stage or class
- Literacy or numeracy
- Attendance
- Personal, Social, Health education (PSHE)
- Special Educational Needs provision
- English as an Additional Language (EAL) provision
- Differentiation
- Marking of work/ Assessment
- The use of the building(s)
- The condition of the building(s)
- Safeguarding
- Health and Safety
- The use of resources
- The condition of physical resources
- The availability and deployment of support staff (teaching assistants, learning support assistants, office staff, caretakers, other non teaching staff)
- The impact of any recent or impending change
- Lunch times and break times
- School meals and catering facilities

Governors are also encouraged to visit school in an informal capacity. Governors should inform the school if they are attending an event and should be clear about the capacity in which they are visiting.

Typical informal visits include:

- Attending school fairs
- Attending plays, celebration events, assemblies or carol services
- Attending trips, enrichment activities

Additional questions to consider when visiting a school:

When making any visit to school, governors will inevitably witness school life beyond the strict focus of their visit. It might be useful to include some or all of the questions below in the visit record form to capture the evidence.

Alternatively, these questions could form the basis of a conversation with pupils.

- Are there good relationships between staff (teachers and non teachers) and pupils?
- Are there good relationships between pupils?
- Are there high expectations of all?
- Is good work celebrated and praised?
- Do pupils behave well – are they ready to learn, do they behave well in lessons, in corridors and at break-times?
- Are teaching and learning enjoyable for staff and pupils? Is there enthusiasm and engagement?
- Are pupils proud of their work?
- Are the displays around school attractive and well kept?
- Are the school's values evident?
- Does the school promote positive attitudes to ethnic and cultural diversity?
- Is the space used well? Are the working conditions good? Do staff and pupils respect their environment?
- Are equipment and resources of good quality and deployed well?

Possible Visit Record Form:

Name	Date
Purpose of Visit (Previously agreed with the Headteacher)	
Links with School Improvement Plan (How does the visit relate to a priority in the plan?)	
Governor Comments (What did you see? What did you learn? What needs to be clarified?)	
Key Issues for the Governing Body (eg impact of a policy or action, questions over allocation of resources, issues around implementation of a policy)	
Is there any impact in this area of Pupil Premium spend?	
Any Suggested Actions?	
Comments from the Headteacher/Senior Leader:	
Date report taken to full governing body meeting:	
Additional Questions	
	Comments
Example - Are there good relationships between staff (teachers and non teachers) and pupils?	
Example - Are there good relationships between pupils?	
Comments from the Headteacher/Senior Leader:	