

# The Orchard School



## Governor Visits Policy

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Chair of Governors:

Headteacher :

# Governor Visits Policy

## Protocol and Procedures for a Committee Based Governance Model 2018-19

### Context

The governing board 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.

#### **The governance handbook states on the role of governor school visits:**

*Boards need to know their school if accountability is going to be robust and their vision for the school is to be achieved. Many boards 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, the board 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.*

*Boards 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 executive leaders. If boards wish to spend time within a classroom, they need to be very clear why they are doing so.*

As seen above, visiting the school is not a statutory requirement but they are extremely important in order to know and to learn how it functions and operates; seeing the ethos, culture and values in action; its strengths and weaknesses and thereby increasing the governing board's first-hand knowledge, informing self-evaluation and strategic decision making against its core functions.

The national governance association and governance handbook both note references to not interfering in the day-to-day operational running of the school and the impact too many governor visits may have on the operational school day.

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 and no more than 3 visits unless the school circumstances necessitate i.e. school category of RI or inadequate. There is the expectation the statutory delegated governors for safeguarding; health & safety; SEND; careers guidance (secondary); finance (KCC maintained schools) will visit the school three times a year. Whole Governing board days in school can also be a valuable tool in knowing your school with a planned focus and feedback. If governors cannot make this commitment they should question whether they can make a realistic and valuable contribution to be a governor.

This policy sets out the protocol and procedures which have been shared with staff. It sets out how governor visits should be conducted to allow both governors and staff to gain the most from the visit.

Governor visits should generally align to the priorities determined on the School Improvement Plan, against an agreed monitoring visit schedule, so that the strategies,

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interventions and impact can be seen in action. The governing board should develop a schedule of planned visits over the year, appointing governors with reference to their skillset, to cover the school priorities and the delegated statutory governor monitoring roles. Each visit should be agreed and have a clear purpose.

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

The governing board should review their school visits policy, protocols and procedure annually to ensure its effectiveness with the approved policy circulated to all staff.

## **Governing Board Monitoring Visits Policy**

### **Introduction**

This policy applies to school visits made for the purpose of governance and not to visits to the school site that any individual may make in another capacity e.g. as parents, priests, professional advisers, volunteers or members of staff.

### **Purpose**

All school visits will:

- Have a clear focus, linked to strategic priorities and delegated statutory governor roles and be timely, planned and on the approved monitoring schedule which is agreed by the full governing board
- Be arranged with adequate notice through the headteacher who will agree the visit with the relevant members of staff
- Be of value to the governing board which can be demonstrably evidenced to outside agencies e.g. Ofsted or the LA

*It is not the role of those governing to form judgements about the performance of school staff during visits and individuals should make every effort to avoid this impression.*

### **Governor Conduct**

Governors undertaking visits 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. The governing boards code of conduct will contain reference to the governor board monitoring visits policy.

### **Training**

Governors should ensure they understand their monitoring remit, undertaking relevant training to keep up to date with best practice and latest statutory and legislative requirements. Role descriptors would aid governors in their understanding and expectations in carrying out their monitoring visits.

### **Governor reports following visit**

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Governors undertaking their visits will have the opportunity to discuss the visit, including any concerns, with the headteacher immediately or soon after the visit. 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 for any comments; a final version will be sent to the clerk to be included in the agenda and as a supporting paper for discussion in the next governing board meeting or committee meeting as appropriate from the monitoring schedule.

### **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality should be adhered to regarding visits. Comments should be limited to the headteacher with whom 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 the governor visit reports.

### **Frequency of Visits**

Governors, trustees, local governors/ academy committee members will undertake visits as agreed in their approved monitoring schedule with a minimum of one visit to the school per academic year but no more than three times a year unless the school circumstance necessitates.

### **Review**

This policy, protocol and procedure should be reviewed by the governing board every academic year alongside the code of conduct.

## **Purposes of a governor visit**

The benefits to governors:

- To see the strategies in action as outlined in the school improvement plan e.g. meeting with the subject lead of an area for improvement, seeing first hand and learning about the adopted strategy and how this translates through to classroom practice and children's learning
- To improve knowledge of the school, its staff, needs, priorities, strengths and weaknesses
- To develop an understanding of issues facing the school and how they are dealt with on a day to day basis to inform strategic decision making
- Gaining an understanding of the wider curriculum or a particular curriculum area.
- Gaining an understanding of the process of assessment and tracking pupil cohorts.
- To see in action the impact of specialist funding i.e. pupil premium, sports premium (primary), year 7 literacy and numeracy catch up (secondary)
- To see the use of resources and how the premises are utilised, understanding the environment for teachers and pupils
- To recognise and celebrate success

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- To show themselves as part of the school and to gain stakeholder engagement with pupil, parents, staff or the wider community e.g. Pupil voice, school council, parent forum, parent evenings.
- To evidence the governing boards ethos, vision and values in action
- To observe the impact of policies in action including monitoring the implementation of a particular policy e.g. safeguarding, behaviour, health and safety, SEND, careers guidance.
- To assist the governing body, especially the delegated governor roles of safeguarding; health and safety; SEND; careers guidance ( secondary); finance (KCC maintained schools) in fulfilling its statutory duties and demonstrating their accountable role as both supportive and challenging.

The potential benefits to staff:

- To ensure governors understand how school priority strategies are embedded in practice, understanding the reality of the classroom and environment.
- To get to know and build positive relationships with governors.
- To understand better the governors' roles and responsibilities.
- To enhance the continuous professional development of middle and subject leads.
- To feel valued.
- To have an opportunity to reflect on the impact of policies and procedures through discussion.
- To highlight the need for/ impact of particular resources.

The potential benefits to students:

- To ensure governors understand the reality of the classroom environment, broad curriculum and school life
- To get to know governors
- To understand better governor roles and responsibilities
- To give feedback about the school and their views of the impact of policies to the governors

The potential benefits to parents:

- To ensure governors understand the issues that parents may face
- 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**

- Visiting classrooms to observe a lesson, unless as part of an accompanied learning walk against a specific school improvement priority. This prevents

any confusion on a class visit being confused as a form of inspection to make judgements about professional expertise of a teacher.

- Undertaking a staff operational role e.g. touring the school undertaking health and safety checks, even if professionally qualified in this area.
- Checking on progress of individual children
- Pursuing a personal agenda
- An opportunity to tackle staff about specific issues

### **Protocols or ground rules for visits**

- Ensure the visit has a clear focus linked to the school improvement plan, strengths and weaknesses, impact of policies or responsible areas of the individual statutory governor required roles i.e. safeguarding; SEND; Health & Safety; careers guidance (secondary); finance (KCC maintained school).
- Governors to remember that during any visit their role is strategic not operational.
- Governors to ensure in preparation for their visit they have undertaken relevant training and read any relevant policy or supporting documentation.
- The headteacher will liaise with the member of staff responsible for the school/ priority/policy objective to arrange the meeting.
- Staff should know in advance the date and focus of the visit arranged via the headteacher.
- Staff should have the opportunity to explain the context of any lesson on the rare occasion that a governor visits a classroom
- Governors will not interrupt lessons by asking teachers questions on the rare occasion that they may visit the classroom.
- Governors may talk to students during learning walk visits to lessons, about their understanding and learning journeys, but must not ask questions about the teacher's conduct of the lesson.
- Governors will ensure that they are familiar with the school's code of conduct as well as that of the governing board, with expectation that they follow the same behaviours; understand how they will be addressed and how to address others as well as appropriate dress code as outlined within both codes of conducts.
- A breach of the governor monitoring visit policy will be dealt with by following the process of a breach of the board's code of conduct.
- Governors will formally write reports on their visits using the governing board approved templates ensuring that draft reports are sent to the Headteacher for proof reading and comments prior to the final report being produced.
- Monitoring visit reports will be circulated, via the clerk, to either the relevant committee or Governing board meeting to enable discussion, triangulation and key questions to be raised with minute evidence documented showing the impact of the visit.

## **Annual programme of visits**

A programme of visits (monitoring schedule) should be planned, using the school improvement plan and subsequent approved, priority and statutory delegated monitoring governor roles, spread evenly across the school year in consultation with the headteacher. Regular analysis of this schedule enables governors to ensure they are monitoring, evaluating and triangulating against the current school priorities, knowing the school in terms of being able to describe to Ofsted or other outside agencies. The number of visits by each governor should be a minimum of once a year and not more than three times a year, unless the school situation necessitates.

### **Visits can take the form of:**

- Learning walks with members of staff
- Pupil voice in the class or interviews in groups
- School council
- Parent forum
- Visiting break and lunchtimes
- Looking at pupils' work against marking policy
- Monitoring implementation of a policy e.g. behaviour, equality
- Gaining an understanding of the broad curriculum, or particular area
- Gaining an understanding of the impact of spend of funding with spending leads
- Ensuring finance processes are in place
- Monitoring the boards culture, ethos and values and for Church schools, the distinctive Christian character is maintained against agreed expectations.
- Monitoring the British values
- Monitoring the preparation for the next stage of education
- Seeing in action deployment of staff and impact of any change e.g. reduced class sizes/ split classes
- Reviewing the environment, the condition and maintenance, use made of the buildings or the site and resources of the school
- Focussed whole governing body days in school

## **Monitoring and review of school visit policy**

The policy should be monitored and reviewed annually.

Areas we should consider when reviewing are:

- Are our visits achieving the potential benefits we identified?
- Are our visits timely against the school improvement plan
- Do we have the right governor monitoring roles against the current school priorities?
- Do governors understand their role, are appointed due to skillset and are keeping up to date with best practice and latest statutory/ legislative requirements.

- Are we better informed and can evidence the accuracy of Headteacher and SLT reports?
- Have there been any unexpected benefits?
- How can we make our practice even better? Is there anything we need to change in how visits are conducted from feedback from stakeholders?

## **Governor Visits - Good Practice**

### **Preparing for a visit**

- Check the agreed policy and schedule for governors' visits
- Arrange a mutually convenient time to visit, within the monitoring schedule window, with the headteacher.
- Discuss the visit and agreed timetable with the headteacher and ensure that any member of staff who will be involved in the visit, understands the arrangements.
- Clarify the purpose of the visit as outlined within the monitoring schedule and undertake any background reading preparation required. Understand your strategic monitoring role.
- Review the action points in the School Improvement Plan? What are the relevant school Policies associated to this area? How does this determine the activities I am interested in seeing in action? What questions do I want to ask?
- Discuss with the headteacher/staff lead if any new supporting information is available, e.g. Ofsted report, improvement plan, performance data, subject lead report, policy.
- Ensure that you are familiar with safeguarding and health and safety procedures
- Read the Governing board code of conduct and staff code of conduct to ensure understanding of the professional behaviours required.

### **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, reporting to reception and signing in as a governor. Wear a badge to identify you. Keep to the agreed timetable but be flexible to the school needs.
- Decide with the headteacher how you will be introduced and how you will address staff and pupils
- Be courteous and professional throughout the visit, friendly not critical, including thanking members of staff before leaving.
- Remember you are there to learn, it is a visit not an inspection.
- Keep to the role agreed; only talk to students if invited/ agreed to do so.



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- Observe discretely. Remember that excessive note taking can be disconcerting and may make your visit look like an inspection.
- Interact, don't interrupt.
- Remember why you are there. Don't lose sight of the purpose of your visit.
- Respect confidentiality
- Meet the Headteacher at the end of the visit and discuss what you have seen, including any issues or concerns you may have. Refer to the purpose of the visit. Consider together whether it has been achieved.
- Ensure you have signed out

## After

- Share any concerns with the headteacher and chair, however trivial. Use the opportunity to clarify any issue you remain unclear about.
- Thank the staff by email via the headteacher for contributing to the success of the visit and 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 template proforma (see appendix A).
- Draft the report ensuring individual children or staff members (other than the member of staff involved with the visit) are not identified in school visit reports.
- Send the draft to the headteacher and once you have taken their comments into account send the final written report to the clerk for circulation at the appropriate committee or governing board meeting.
- Ensure that your visit is included as an agenda item at the next appropriate committee or governing board meeting.
- 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? What will the governing board want the next visit to follow up on following discussion? Do I need to undertake training to increase my skillset to fulfil the monitoring role effectively?

## Informal Visits

Visits may also take place in an informal capacity for less formal occasions such as school plays, sports day, and celebration events. 'Discreet' information can be gathered on these visits which build on your knowledge of the school. Visiting governors should ensure that they follow the governor visits protocols as appropriate and report using the informal template (Appendix B)

For example, times when governors may be visiting the school as governors not against an agreed monitoring schedule

- The chair making a regular visit to see the Headteacher
- To get information from the office relating to a committee meeting

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- New governor tour of the school
- Attending working groups, committee or board meetings
- Invited to attend prize giving or celebration events

**Areas not considered as a governor monitoring visit**

It is vital that everyone is clear about the capacity in which they are visiting and not to confuse the role.

For example, times when governors may be visiting the school **NOT** as a governor

- To help in a class as a volunteer
- To lend a helping hand with a school event as a volunteer
- To speak to a teacher/ Headteacher in relation to your own child
- Attending a school function or educational visit as a volunteer
- Visit in relation to your position as the local priest, councillor, member of staff, professional capacity. E.g. advising on finance, amending/ devising the school website etc

## Record of a governor's visit to the school - Formal

<b>NAME:</b>	<b>DATE:</b>
<b>Focus of visit, links with the School Improvement Plan.</b> <i>(How does the visit relate to a priority in the School Improvement Plan?)</i>	
<b>Areas and summary of planned activities. Including departments or areas of school visited, staff and pupils that the governor met during the visit</b> <i>(Previously agreed by the governing body with the Headteacher)</i> <i>(Governors should refer to staff by their role or job title and not by name)</i>	
<b>Observations and comments by the governor</b> <i>(e.g. what you saw; what you learned relating to the focus of the visit; how long the visit lasted)</i>	
<b>Aspects I would like clarified and 3 key questions I would like to raise</b> 1.  2.  3.	
<b>Actions for the governing board to consider</b> <i>(e.g. the way resources are allocated; the way the school communicates; progress in implementing a key policy)</i>	
<b>Signed: Governor</b> <b>Meeting to be considered at:</b>	

## Record of a governor's visit to the school - Informal

<b>NAME:</b>	<b>DATE:</b>
<b>Focus of visit</b> <i>(event, celebration, parents evening, function)</i>	
<b>Observations and comments by the governor</b> <i>(e.g. what you saw; what you learned)</i>	
<b>Any key issues or questions arising for the governing body or leadership team</b> <i>(e.g. the way resources are allocated; the way the school communicates; progress in implementing a key policy)</i>	
<b>Signed: Governor</b>	