

# **POLICY FOR GOVERNOR VISITS TO SCHOOL**

# WHITNASH PRIMARY SCHOOL

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## GOVERNOR VISITS TO SCHOOL

Every Governing Body has a statutory responsibility to establish and monitor key school policies and evaluate the effectiveness of them in practice. The governing body is also responsible for ensuring the school delivers a broad and balanced curriculum and are held to account for the school's overall performance.

The Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) assumes that Governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school, and will test that assumption during a school inspection.

One of the most effective ways in which a Governor can get to know the school is to make planned visits during the school year to see the school at work, talk to the headteacher and staff and find out first-hand what happens in the school and in the classrooms.

If school and classroom visits are conducted effectively they will add immeasurably to Governors' understanding of their school, its staff and its pupils.

There are four main types of governor visits:

<b>Type of Visit</b>	<b>Governors involved</b>	<b>Staff who may be involved</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Responsible for Organising</b>
<b>To observe the School in Operation</b>	All Governors linked to the planned monitoring schedule	Teaching Staff Office Site Manager	As agreed through the governor's termly monitoring schedule	Chair of Governors / Committee chairs With headteacher or relevant staff
<b>The Classroom Visit</b>	Named Governors with curriculum oversight responsibility eg. EYFS/Maths/literacy etc	Subject Leaders	Termly as set out in School Improvement Plan	Named Governors with named Subject Leaders
<b>School Improvement Focus (SIF)</b>	All Governors as identified in the monitoring schedule	Headteacher or Senior School Leaders	Termly or as required	Chair of Governors or the Committees, other Governors as required and Headteacher
<b>Learning</b>	All Governors	All relevant	Twice a year	Chair of

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Walk		staff		Governors with the headteacher
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## WHY VISIT?

Visits should be undertaken as:

### A. Part of the strategic programme to-

- Improve Governor knowledge of the school, its staff, needs, priorities, strengths and weaknesses
- Monitor and assess the priorities as outlined in the School Development Plan
- Help the Governing Body fulfil its statutory duties.
- Acquire knowledge to enable the Governing Body to challenge as appropriate

### B. Critical Friend to enable –

- Monitoring, and evaluation of plans, budgets, standards of education and pupil achievement

### C. Accountability

- To gather information to allow Governors to evaluate the work of the school as referred to in reports and minutes, or surveys e.g. of parental views

Whitnash has Governors linked to core subjects, and also to key school priorities. Gaining a thorough understanding of the work of the school will involve individual Governors visiting the school and classrooms and taking the opportunity to discuss issues with the Headteacher and other staff members

## The main purpose of school visits

### A Governor may visit school in order to:

- increase the Governing Body's first-hand knowledge base, informing strategic decision making
- keep under review the way in which the school is operating
- experience the impact and progress of the implementation of the school improvement plan and key school policies
- demonstrate to staff that the Governing Body takes its responsibilities very seriously
- establish and develop good **professional** relationships with staff, especially those that are linked with individual area of responsibility, e.g. English, Maths, Special Needs or Health and Safety.
- see in context some of the monitoring systems employed by the school
- enable the Governing Body to contribute to the school's self- evaluation process
- show support and encouragement to staff and children

**Organising a visit**

	<b>Always</b>	<b>Never</b>
<b>Before (at least one week prior to visit)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the area for focus in the school improvement plan to understand details of the area of the visit</li> <li>• Agree the purpose of the visit with Headteacher or a member of the senior leadership team</li> <li>• Arrange the details of the visit:</li> <li>• Try to visit at different times of the school day</li> <li>• Agree a schedule for the visit with the Headteacher- When? Where? With whom? Duration? Time for feedback?</li> <li>• Discuss with the Headteacher or Senior Management Team exactly what is to be visited in school or the context of the lesson to be visited and any possible issues to be considered</li> <li>• Agree level of confidentiality needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turn up unannounced for a governor visit</li> <li>• Expect to go into a classroom without the headteacher's permission, prior arrangement with a recommended minimum notice of one week</li> <li>• Visit during a SATs or examinations week without the visit being authorised by the Headteacher or member of the senior leadership team.</li> </ul>
<b>During</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be prepared, organised and punctual</li> <li>• Report to the school office and sign in</li> <li>• Fulfil the agreed purpose of the visit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monopolise Staff before, during or after the visit</li> <li>• Interrupt the teaching or talk to the teacher while he/she is teaching</li> <li>• Behave like an Inspector including</li> </ul>

## WHITNASH PRIMARY SCHOOL

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observe school/class guidelines</li><li>• Jot down discussion points</li></ul>	walking in with a clipboard and taking copious notes  Remember that the staffroom is the space in school set aside for staff use. It is important that this is respected. It is inappropriate for governors to assume access to this space without invitation from a member of staff
<b>After</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Thank the member(s) of staff and pupils for their time</li><li>• Discuss observations as soon as possible after the visit with the Headteacher and ensure that any major concerns are raised at that meeting</li><li>• Discuss Health and Safety issues with the Headteacher and Chair of Governors</li><li>• Complete the monitoring form and send a copy to the Headteacher and Chair of Governors</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leave without a word of thanks and giving some feedback to the headteacher</li><li>• Discuss observations or concerns with other members of staff, parents or external persons unless given permission to do so</li></ul>

### WHAT ARE GOVERNORS' VISITS NOT ABOUT?

The main point to emphasise is that Governors' visits to school are **not a form of inspection** in terms of making judgements about the professional expertise of members of staff, especially with regard to the quality of teaching.

A school visit is also not about:

- Checking on the progress of your own or known children
- Monopolising staff time
- Arriving with inflexible or pre-conceived ideas
- Pursuing personal agendas or issues.

### HOW OFTEN SHOULD GOVERNORS VISIT?

This will essentially depend on the number of Governors available to take on the key

responsibilities identified in the monitoring schedule and the size of the school.

## **WHO SCHEDULES THE VISITS?**

The governing body will agree a termly monitoring schedule in line with that set out in the School Improvement Plan. This will form the basis of the visiting programme. Visits should always be agreed with the Headteacher or a member of the senior leadership team.

## **VISIT PREPARATION**

An important part of the visit preparation is to establish the protocols that are to be observed or more simply '*the ground rules*'.

In fairness to everyone involved it is important that governors take time before a visit to be clear about what they are observing and how it fits into the governors' schedule of work. It may be necessary to read documentation beforehand and draft a set of preliminary questions that may need addressing within the areas for focus.

## **THE FOCUS OF THE VISIT**

Remember a visit can be either to see the school generally in operation or for a specific purpose such as checking on safeguarding arrangements, Health and Safety audits or to gain a greater understanding about teaching methods or behaviour management methods

Visits could focus on any of the following:

### **The School in Operation**

- The condition and maintenance of the premises
- The use made of buildings and premises
- Security on site
- Break and lunch times
- The monitoring of Health and Safety
- The use and condition of resources eg furniture and subject equipment
- Office procedures eg budget monitoring
- To see a class or teacher led assembly (to see how well information is provided)
- Pupil behaviour around the school

### **The Classroom Visit**

- Observation of particular curriculum areas ie English/Literacy,
  - The implementation of the curriculum
  - Gaining an understanding of the process of assessment and tracking pupil cohorts and their attainment
- 
- Observing the impact of learning on educational visits
  - The impact of class sizes

- The deployment of support staff
- To see a class or teacher led assembly (to consider SMSC)
- To hear the Pupil Voice
- To observe Behaviour for Learning
- To observe a Work Scrutiny

## **WHAT SHOULD GOVERNORS DO BEFORE UNDERTAKING A CLASSROOM VISIT?**

A week before a classroom visit there are some questions that should be clarified with the Headteacher or teacher. These might include the following:

- When I come into the classroom, where would you like me to sit?
- What should I do if a pupil asks for help?
- Would you like me to be involved in the lesson?
- Do you mind me asking pertinent questions if I'm not sure about details of what I am seeing  
E.g. If I'm not sure about the spelling policy, the methods used for calculations, how the school helps pupils read unknown words?

## **School Improvement Focus**

School Improvement Focus meetings will be more lengthy discussions and visits by the relevant governors to relevant leaders of the School. These visits will be based around the following areas:

- How well leaders and managers and pursue excellence, modelling professional standards in all of their work
- How effective and accurate the outcomes of monitoring and evaluation activities are in highlighting strengths and areas for development
- How the school uses performance management and the effectiveness of strategies for improving teaching, including the extent to which the school takes account of the 'Teachers' Standards'
- How well leaders and managers ensure that the curriculum raises outcomes for children
- How well leaders and managers demonstrate the capacity to bring about further improvement
- The role and impact of middle leadership and the extent to which the school is adequately developing middle leadership / succession planning and the development of future leaders in the school
- The impact of governance
- How effectively the school promotes the confidence and engagement of parents, including by encouraging the use of Parent View
- The effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements to ensure that there is safe recruitment and that all pupils are safe?

## **Learning Walks**

The Governing Body oversees the strategic operation of the school so it is important that its members have a clear understanding of how the school works and how children are learning. To do this, it is suggested that governors take part in Learning Walks at least once each year. These will be organised by the headteacher. They will be planned beforehand, be part of an annual schedule and be integral to the monitoring and evaluation calendar. Confidentiality should be emphasised and maintained at all times e.g. during the planning, the implementation and in any follow-up discussions.

The purposes of Learning Walks are to:

- Increase Governors' knowledge and understanding of the school through seeing at first-hand how it operates.
- Experience the impact of plans and policies
- Demonstrate to the school community that Governors are taking their roles and responsibilities seriously
- Establish and develop good working relationships
- Be able to contribute effectively to the school's self-evaluation
- Show support and encouragement and be able to celebrate successes and achievements
- See evidence of work matching the individual needs of pupils
- Be able to see that resources and the learning environment are adapted to meet the needs as appropriate.

## **General Introduction to School**

Often a first visit for new Governor e.g.

- Introductory sessions, viewing the entrance and reception areas along with corridors and administrative areas
- To see the playground in operation
- To visit classrooms and look at displays and 'Learning Walls'
- To talk with children

## **Specific subject focus**

e.g. focus on

- A specific priority or strand within the School Development / Improvement Plan
- How children learn maths; how children learn in literacy; how well a particular programme is working or how children use ICT to learn etc
- Displays, resources and equipment used in that subject area
- Staff's contribution to that subject area

### **Specific aspect**

e.g. focus on

- How Health and Safety is carried out and how policies are adhered to
- How the school ensures that it complies with all the requirements regarding
- Statutory Assessments (SATs, Teacher Assessment, returning papers)
- Behaviour
- Pupil Premium and its impact
- Inclusion and Disadvantaged Pupils
- Use of support staff to support children's learning
- Lunchtimes and break times
- Breakfast Club or after school activities
- How the school develops children's thinking skills and learning approaches

### **AFTER THE VISIT**

We all need feedback after we have been visited or observed. This can be a sensitive area but it is essential that warm thanks are given and a comment on the focus agreed.

Remember as a Governor you are making the visit on behalf of the Governing Body and not in a personal capacity. It isn't appropriate to make either judgements or promises on behalf of the Governing Body.

Staff should also realise that Governors are not able to address everyday matters that would normally be sorted out as a matter of good line management. These sort of conversations should be discouraged.

Any expression of concern should be shared with the Headteacher as soon as possible. Comments should be limited to the focus of the visit unless health and safety is being compromised. This should always be reported immediately.

Oral and written feedback should be given to:

- The Headteacher
- The Chair of the Governing Body

Written feedback using the Governor's Monitoring Form should be completed as soon as possible and copies sent to the Headteacher who will make a copy available to any member of staff where this is appropriate.

The reports will be discussed with the appropriate Committee and/or Governing Body meeting and made available along with the agenda.

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### **MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE GOVERNING BODY'S POLICY**

The Chair of Governors will review this policy annually in line with its agreed cycle/procedures and report recommendations back to the Governing Body for approval and adoption.

### **Governor signing in/out procedures –**

When Governors arrive at the Main Reception, they are asked to sign themselves into using the electronic system. When signing in they will be issued with a visitor sticker.

All visitor stickers must be visibly worn whilst on school site. The sticker indicates to children and staff that the person who has entered the school through the Main Reception, has signed in and been allowed through the security system.

Governors must also ensure that they sign out on the same electronic system before leaving the premises

**Date:** September 2018

**Review:** September 2019

Signed: \_\_Donna Ellison\_\_\_\_ (Headteacher)

Signed: \_\_Lorrie Cooper\_\_\_\_ (Chair of Governors)