

KATHARINE LADY BERKELEY'S SCHOOL GOVERNOR VISITS POLICY & GUIDELINES

Last Review: February 2012

Governing bodies have a statutory responsibility to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the school and its curriculum. Ofsted inspection assumes that governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school. This depends on governors assessing performance data in the context of an understanding of what happens in the classroom, as well as the school as a whole. This policy will ensure that governor visits into our school and classrooms are constructive and effective and welcomed by staff and pupils.

Governor visits include:

- Annual departmental visits by linked governors. These may or may not include time in a classroom.
- Group or Committee visits to learn about particular aspects of the school and/or the curriculum. Again, these may include time in classrooms.
- Ad hoc meetings with staff to discuss particular issues

Other ways of getting to know school can include:

- Attending school assemblies.
- Attending parents' meetings and open evenings
- Talking to students informally whenever opportunities arise
- Attending staff meetings and INSET days.
- Helping with careers activities
- Helping with learning support
- Attending extra-curricular concerts, drama productions, exhibitions and sporting events

Purpose of visits

To be effective, it is helpful if each visit is focused on a particular aspect of school life. For example to:

- learn about the general daily working and organisation of the school
- learn more about specific departments in terms of curriculum, staffing and other resources, performance and current issues and establish specific governor links
- learn about specific aspects of the curriculum
- look at provision and outcomes for particular groups eg SEN pupils or Gifted & Talented
- learn about an aspect of student wellbeing and pastoral care
- gain knowledge about particular activities such as assembly, lunchtime, behaviour management or after school sports or other extra-curricular activities
- meet pupils and staff in their working environment in order to see school life through their eyes
- engage with parents
- informally survey school buildings and grounds and understand how they are used and any health & safety issues
- see how ICT is used and the benefits
- demonstrate interest and support to staff and become known within the school
- be available to hear questions and concerns and respond appropriately

Benefits

Both Governors and staff should benefit from well-organised visits in the following ways:

Governors will have opportunities:

- To see the school in operation
- To get to know the issues concerning the staff and the pupils
- To gain a better understanding of departments
- To show support and recognise and celebrate success in all its forms
- To develop better relationships with staff

- To get to meet pupils in their working environment
- To start to recognise different teaching styles and methods
- To understand better the environment in which teachers teach and pupils learn
- To see policies and schemes of work in action
- To find out how resources are used and spot any potential gaps
- To learn how governors can best provide support where it is needed and as a result
 - o be able to make more informed policy decisions
 - o be more sympathetic and understanding about problems and concerns
 - o be better ambassadors for the school in the community

Teachers and middle and senior leaders will have opportunities:

- to inform governors about the realities of the classroom, their departments and school life
- get to know the governor attached to their area
- develop a better understanding of the governors' roles and responsibilities
- to reflect on practice and performance through discussion with their link governor
- be able to highlight the need for particular resources

What visits are not

Governors' visits are not a form of formal inspection of the school or classroom in any way. Governors are not to make judgments about the professional expertise of teachers or any other school staff as this is covered by the performance management process and statutory inspections. Nor are visits an opportunity for staff to bypass the normal channels of internal communication.

Therefore governors should not:

- make judgments about the quality of teaching
- check on the progress of their own children or others known to them
- pursue personal agendas
- monopolise teachers' or leaders' time
- arrive in the school or a classroom with inflexible, pre conceived ideas
- become involved in matters that should be referred by the individual to their line manager

Planning visits

Departmental governor links will be agreed by the full governing body at the start of the school year and each governor will then be responsible for making at least one visit to their Department(s) during the year by mutual agreement with the staff involved.. Further visits can be agreed by Committees linked to specific issues or items in the School Improvement Plan at any point. These can be either on an individual or group basis and should be recorded in the minutes of the Committee. It is hoped that over time, all Governors will take part in formal school visits. Classroom visits will only take place with the agreement of all staff involved.

Opportunities for informal visits are publicised and shared with governors as they arise. It is hoped that all governors will take these opportunities to share in the life of the school and meet staff, parents and pupils.

Monitoring of Visits

In order to be able to share information with other governors and ensure an evidence trail for inspection purposes, governors are expected to write a report on any formal visits. Essentially, a report should simply cover the purpose, key findings and any outstanding questions or issues and would normally not be more than one side of A4. This should be agreed this with those involved, the curriculum deputy or headteacher before wider circulation. Care should be taken not to include value judgements, or comments about other departments that cannot be substantiated.

In the case of more informal visits, governors may use their discretion as to whether a report is appropriate. However, the respect and courtesy outlined in the attached guidelines should apply to all visits.

At the end of the academic year, the clerk to governors will check that all departmental visits have been completed and recorded in order to ensure that no one has been missed. Any gaps will be picked up when governor link roles are agreed for the following year.

Evaluation of visits

This will be done in a number of ways.

- 1 Individual governors or committees involved in specific visits should evaluate if the visit achieved its objectives and was time well spent and adjust future visits accordingly
- 2 As a governing body, the overall value of visits should be reviewed at the start of the academic year and changes made to the plans for the new year The full governing body should ask these key questions:
 - Are our visits helping us achieve our priorities?
 - Have there been any unexpected benefits?
 - Are there any repeated concerns/issues that need to be addressed?
 - How can we make the policy and practice even better?
- 3 Governor visits should be reflected in the school self-evaluation process as evidence of governor involvement and a contributor to their informed evaluation of the school.

Policy review

This policy will be reviewed at least every two years or sooner if circumstances change.

This policy was agreed by the full governing body on: 7 March 2012

GUIDELINES ON MAKING SUCCESSFUL GOVERNOR VISITS.

The following guidelines may be helpful to governors making visits particularly for the first time or when the visit involves time in classroom(s).

Before visits, you may find it helpful to:

- Make contact with the head of department and others involved to agree a date and time and arrange details of your visit, including context, purpose, agenda and timing.
- Identify any specific questions, issues you wish to explore or resources you wish to see.
- Do any background reading such as inspection reports, self-evaluation documents, performance data or relevant policies

If going into classrooms:

- Ask if there are specific class rules or other relevant background information such as H&S requirements
- Agree how you will behave, what you will do and whether it is acceptable to take notes
- Agree how you will be introduced and how your role will be explained to any pupils you meet
- Agree if, when and where to feedback any informal comments on your classroom visit

During your visit you should:

- Observe any class rules or guidelines
- Be punctual and leave when agreed
- Avoid clipboards!
- Endeavour to look relaxed, blend in and avoid being conspicuous
- Fulfil agreed purpose, but be flexible if circumstances require it
- Never interrupt the teacher or disrupt the classroom activities
- Join in (if that has been agreed as appropriate)
- Be courteous, friendly, positive not critical; listen to staff and pupils.
- Recognise achievement and effort witnessed during your visit
- Thank those involved for their help and share any observations or comments you have in a constructive and supportive way

After the visit you should:

- For all formal visits, write up a short visit note and share it by email with those involved so they have the opportunity to comment. This should also be copied to the Curriculum Deputy and Headteacher.
- Ensure that the agreed visit note goes to the Clerk to Governors
- Ensure that any agreed actions are followed through.
- Maintain confidentiality as appropriate and agreed, particularly in relation to any pupil or staff issues.

Some other things to look out for while in school:

- Are there clear signs of welcome?
- Is pupils' work on show?
- Are you encouraged to see all parts of the school?
- Is behaviour orderly at break times and when moving between classes?
- Are you encouraged to see examples of pupils' work and told about the progress of the class?
- Do all games and sports sessions include all the pupils in the class?
- Are all pupils encouraged to take part in music, drama and dance sessions?
- Are all pupils equally involved in all the activities, including those with special needs?
- How well do pupils get on together in class and around the school?
- What other impressions have you formed?

You might like to evaluate your visit by asking:

- Were you clear about the objectives of the visit and were they met – if not why not?
- Were you and everyone concerned properly prepared?
- Did you see what you wanted to see?
- What would you do differently next time?
- What were the areas you would like to know more about?
- Has the visit helped you, the school and the Governing Body?
- Has it given you ideas for future visits?

Addressing Concerns

If there is any aspect of the visit that is worrying, you should raise it with the Head of Department, Curriculum Deputy or Head Teacher first. If not satisfied with the response, it should be shared with the Chair of Governors.