

EASTINGTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

GOVERNORS' VISITS TO SCHOOL POLICY

Written – February 2014

Reviewed - Spring 2018, Spring 2020, Autumn 2022, Autumn 2024

Next review – Autumn 2026

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GOVERNORS' VISITS TO SCHOOLS

Every Governing Body has a statutory responsibility to establish and monitor its school's policies and evaluate the effectiveness of the school and its curriculum. Governors are also held to account for their own school's performance.

One of the best and most effective ways in which a Governor can get to know about their school is to visit during the school day and see it at work, talking to staff and pupils and finding out what happens in the school and the classrooms.

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

WHY VISIT?

Many Governing Bodies link Governors to subjects, classes or year groups as a way of monitoring the curriculum. This will involve individual Governors visiting the school and classrooms and taking the opportunity to discuss issues with the Headteacher and relevant subject co-ordinator.

A number of Governors have specific responsibilities eg Special Needs, Literacy, Numeracy, Health and Safety, Race Equality and Looked After Children. This reinforces the need to visit not just the school but the classroom on a reasonably regular basis.

It also allows Governors, however, to focus on particular areas such as:

- the management of the school's resources
- the condition of the building and its use
- the development of teaching and support staff
- monitoring the school's progress towards its school improvement priorities
- monitoring the Headteacher's progress towards their appraisal objectives
- attending specific committees including Finance, Health and Safety and Safeguarding
- a particular year group or class
- Child protection, SMSC, Early Years or Health and Safety

By visiting school and becoming better informed Governors will be:

- more knowledgeable about the school, its staff, needs, priorities, strengths and weaknesses

- more able to fulfil its statutory duty
- able to provide support to the Headteacher, staff and pupils
- well placed to bring to the Local Authority any matters of concern
- in a good position to support the school in its community
- more able to provide informal help and support. Not all visits are strategic and formal.
- able to share their own skills and provide support during the recruitment process, Headteacher's appraisal, or during some meetings with parents.
- An integral part of school life. By being involved in the day-to-day life of the school, governors will gain a greater insight into what school policies look like in practice.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO GOVERNORS AND STAFF?

Governors	Staff
To establish and develop effective relationships with the staff	To get to know and build positive relationships with Governors
To have a greater understanding of pupils' needs	
To recognise and celebrate success	To feel valued
To monitor the implementation of the School Development/Improvement Plan	To appreciate and value the role and responsibilities of all Governors
To increase their first hand knowledge of the school which will inform strategic decisions	
To understand the environment in which staff work and teachers teach	To ensure Governors understand the reality of the classroom and the school
To see policies and schemes of work in practice	
To find out what resources are used, what resources are needed and prioritise them	To highlight the need for further resources
To show support and encouragement to staff and pupils	
To demonstrate that the Governing Body is contributing to the school's self evaluation process	
To develop links with a class, year group or subject area	
To develop individual Governor's roles in terms of their specific responsibilities eg Special Needs, Literacy etc	To share an understanding of the specific area.

WHAT ARE GOVERNORS' VISITS NOT ABOUT?

The main point to emphasise is that Governors' visits to classrooms 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 I VISIT?

This will essentially depend on the number of Governors available to take on the responsibility and the size of the school staff.

Governors will be responsible for planning their individual programmes of *formal* visits, following consultation with the Headteacher and relevant member(s) of staff. Given the ever changing nature and challenges of the educational landscape there will always be a number of unplanned visits required. Unplanned visits requested by the Headteacher and or members of staff should be accommodated by the governors wherever possible.

WHO SCHEDULES THE VISITS?

Visits should always be agreed with the Headteacher.

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*'.

It is essential that a disproportionate amount of time should not be spent on planning and arranging visits. If you plan in advance what should always and never happen before, during and after a visit, the ground rules will be firmly established and should avoid any problems and hopefully make the visit more beneficial and enjoyable.

The Governor's Visit Form attached to this policy at Appendix 1 can be partially completed at this stage and reference should be made throughout the process to the 'Preparation Checklist' which is attached at Appendix 2.

WHAT SHOULD AND SHOULDN'T HAPPEN?

	Always	Never
Before (at least one week prior to visit)	• Review the action points in the School Improvement/ Development Plan • Agree the purpose of the visit with Headteacher • Arrange details of the visit • Try to visit at different times of the day • Headteacher draws up a schedule for visit - When? Where? With whom? Duration? Time for feedback? • Discuss with the Headteacher or Senior Management Team what is to be visited in school or the context of the lesson to be observed and possible involvement • Agree level of confidentiality	• Turn up unannounced for a focused, formal visit • Expect to go into a classroom without prior arrangement and a recommended minimum notice of one week • Visit during a SATs or examinations week without the visit being authorised by the Headteacher.
During	• Be prepared, organised and punctual • Report to the school office and sign in • Fulfil the agreed purpose of the visit • Observe school/class guidelines • Jot down discussion points	• Monopolise Staff • Interrupt the teaching or talk to the teacher while he/she is teaching • Behave like an Inspector! • Walk in with a clipboard and take copious notes
After	• Thank the member(s) of staff and pupils • Discuss observations as soon as possible after the visit • Feedback appropriately to the Headteacher • Discuss Health and Safety Issues if relevant • Complete the Visit Form and give a copy to the Headteacher • Prepare your own portfolio to include the records of your visit	• Leave without a word of thanks and giving some feedback • Discuss observations with other members of staff, parents or individual Governors (except the Chair) unless given permission

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

A week before a classroom visit there are some questions you should clarify with the Headteacher or teacher:

- 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 detail when helping eg If I'm not sure about the spelling policy, the methods used for calculations, how to help pupils read unknown words?
- What should I do if I see a pupil behaving inappropriately?
- What should I do if the teacher has problems controlling the class?

THE FOCUS OF THE VISIT

Remember a visit can be either to see the school generally in operation or a specific classroom visit.

Visits can focus on the following:

The School

- 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
- The impact of class sizes
- The deployment of support staff
- Office procedures eg budget monitoring
- To see a class or teacher led assembly

The Classroom

- Observation of particular curriculum areas ie English/Literacy, Mathematics/Numeracy, Science, Information and Communications Technology (ICT), Design Technology (DT), History, Geography, Religious Education, Art and Design, Music, Physical Education or Literacy/Numeracy.
- The implementation of the curriculum
- Gain an understanding of the process of assessment and tracking pupil cohorts and their attainment
- Assessing a group of pupils working together on a task
- The impact of learning on educational visits
- To see the impact of the religious characteristics in Church schools

The list is by no means exclusive or exhaustive.

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.

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 member(s) of staff involved
- The Headteacher
- The appropriate Committee or Governing Body

Oral feedback should be given to the member(s) of staff at the end of the visit.

Governors should agree with the Headteacher the level of detail that should be fed back to the member of staff.

Written feedback using the Governor's Visit Form (see Appendix 1) should be completed with the member of staff present and copies given to the Headteacher and member(s) of staff.

The reports will be discussed with the Chair of Governors, filed and made available to the appropriate Committee or Governing Body.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE GOVERNING BODY'S POLICY

The appropriate Committee will review this policy annually and report back to the Governing Body in the Spring term. The review will consider:

- Are we doing what we set out to do?
- Are our visits achieving the potential benefits identified in the policy?
- Have I learned more about the school?
- Are we better-informed and enabled to make sensible decisions?
- Have we developed a further method of direct communication with staff?
- Do the staff feel affirmed and valued?
- Have I helped the Governing Body fulfil its duties?
- Have there been any unexpected benefits?
- How can we make the policy and practice even better?

APPENDIX 1

GOVERNING BODY SCHOOL VISIT POLICY

Governor's Visit Form		
Name:	Governor responsibility:	Date: Duration:
Area of School/Staff/Class visited:		
Purpose of visit: (Objectives)		
Governor's comments		
Staff comments:		
Headteacher's comments:		
Signed: Governor: _____ Staff Member(s): _____ Headteacher: _____ Date: _____		

GOVERNING BODY SCHOOL VISIT POLICY

Pre and Post Visit Checklist for School and Governor

School	Governor
• Do we know why the Governor is visiting?	• Have I made a formal appointment with the Headteacher?
• Do we know what the Governor is expecting to see?	• Do I know the specific purpose of the visit?
• Is the focus of the visit also a focus in our school development/improvement plan?	• Have I arranged my time so that I can be sure to be punctual?
• Have we drawn up a timetable for the visit?	• Have I thought about how I will approach the teacher in the classroom?
• Do individual members of staff know that they are going to be visited?	• Have I thought about what I will actually do during the lesson?
• Have other key members of staff been informed?	• How will I give feedback to the staff, Headteacher and Governing Body?
• Is the appropriate documentation ready and available?	• Have I remembered that what I see or hear or might find out is confidential and not for sharing with other Governors or parents in general?
	• How can I build on this for the next visit?
	• How did I address any difficulties I met?