



BARNSELEY
Metropolitan Borough Council



Advice and Guidance on Governors' Visits to School

**Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Working in Partnership with the Barnsley
Governors Association**

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INTRODUCTION

The governing body of the school has a statutory responsibility to establish and monitor its school's policies and evaluate the effectiveness of the school and its curriculum. The governing body is also held to account for the school's performance.

Whilst there is no requirement for governors to visit the school during the school day it is recognised that such visits constitute good practice.

In order to avoid misunderstandings that could arise from governors' visits into schools, it is recommended that the governing body have an approved policy/protocol for governors' visits. It is important that any policy/protocol is shared with staff so that they understand the purpose of the visits in the context of school governance. Trust between staff and governors is very important to ensure the visits achieve a satisfactory outcome to both parties. Governors' visits must always be non-threatening and be undertaken in the context of gaining knowledge of how the school operates during the working day.

If school visits are done in the spirit of partnership they will add immeasurably to governors' understanding of the school, its staff and its pupils.

PURPOSE OF VISITS

The main purposes for visiting the school are to:

- fulfil the governing body's duty "to conduct the school with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement";
- develop governors' understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses;
- support the school's work;
- contribute to the governing body's monitoring role (visits are one of a number of ways in which governors fulfil this role);
- enable individual governors to ask informed and challenging questions at governing body meetings;
- help governors understand the teaching and learning process;
- see policies in action;
- give governors an enhanced sense of identity with the school and the people who work in it;
- monitor the implementation of curriculum policy;
- understand how the curriculum is differentiated for pupils of different ability;
- offer visible support to staff;
- assist in reviewing key aspects of the School Improvement Plan.

The benefits to the staff should be to:

- get to know and build positive relationships with governors;
- feel valued;
- appreciate and value the role and responsibilities of the governing body;
- ensure governors understand the reality of the classroom;
- observing the use of resources;
- share an understanding of teaching and learning.

What are governors' visits not about?

Governors' visits to classrooms are not a form of inspection in terms of making judgements about the professional expertise of the members of staff or the quality of teaching.

Furthermore, visits must never be concerned with checking on the progress of individual children or pursuing personal agendas or issues.

Where governors go into school to support teaching and learning these are not governors' visits and should be covered by a separate policy/protocol.

THE VISIT

The following is a suggested format for managing governors' visits.

Before the Visit

- Arrange details of the visit with the Headteacher, never turn up unannounced.
- Agree the level of confidentiality.
- Agree the purpose of the visit, and read the considerations for commenting on the learning environment which follow.
- Ensure the enhanced CRB check is up to date.

Key Question – What is the purpose of my visit?

- What has prompted my decision to visit?
- Who has promoted my decision to visit?
- Is the reason specific or general?
- What are my/other people's expectations?
- How can my visit benefit the pupils / teacher / governing body?

During the Visit

Fulfil the agreed purpose, this can be by developing links with a class, year group or subject area, but remember:

- Arrive on time.
- Meet the Headteacher at the start of the visit.
- Don't go in like an inspector with a clipboard or notebook.
- Do not conduct a lesson observation and make judgements on teaching.
- Use the agreed recording format for the type of visit undertaken.
- Never interrupt the teacher during a lesson and avoid taking on a teaching role, or discussing irrelevant issues with the pupils.
- Always wear a visitor badge.
- Don't make visits during a school OfSTED inspection or SATs week.
- Avoid making promises to staff on behalf of the governing body.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Recognise that sometimes it might be appropriate to leave the classroom should a situation arise which might become more problematic, eg a behaviour outburst.
- Meet the Headteacher at the end of the visit and discuss what you have seen and any issues or concerns you may have.

Key Questions - What areas to visit?

- What particular areas of the school am I interested in?
- What particular areas are highlighted in the School Improvement Plan/SEF.
- What particular activities am I interested in?
- What particular age group(s) am I interested in?
- Are there any questions that can be answered by observation?
- What questions should I ask?
- Whom should I ask?

- Did I achieve my aim?

- To what extent did I address the reason for my visit?
- Which of my questions did I answer?
- To what extent did I fulfil my own/other people's expectations?
- What difficulties did I meet and why?

After the Visit

- Thank the teacher and pupils.
- Never leave without a word.
- Always let the Headteacher or administration team know you are leaving the building.
- Feedback to the Headteacher on the findings of the visit.

Considerations for the learning environment

Below are a few considerations to bear in mind when commenting on classrooms and the learning that takes place in them.

- The range of activities that pupils engage in/experience.
- The pupils' engagement with the task – they are active, not passive, asking and responding to questions and listening to each other.
- Displays use pupils work and are creative, celebrate achievement and mainly relate to current work.
- Utilisation of the space in the classroom.
- How is the classroom organised?
- Quantity, quality and appropriateness of resources in the classroom.
- Motivation and self esteem.
- Behaviour.
- Are all staff actively participating within the sessions and know what they are doing?

The following are examples of things a governor might observe when visiting a classroom:

- Relationship between staff and pupils.
- Relationships between pupils.
- Variety of teaching styles.
- Availability and role of support staff.
- Behaviour and attitude of pupils – are they attentive, motivated, listening, questioning, responding?
- Enjoyment and enthusiasm of both staff and pupils.
- How the pupils are grouped.
- How different abilities are catered for.
- Pupils' work.
- Displays.

- Ethos – the atmosphere and values that are evident (are high expectations, encouragement, praise equality of opportunity apparent?)
- Use of space and working conditions.
- Quality and use of equipment and resources.

Always remember . . .

- Governors are visiting the school as representatives of the Governing Body and have no individual power or status.
- If you see anything you feel is not appropriate, discuss this first with the Headteacher, or in their absence, the Deputy Head.
- Never criticise or appear to criticise the school in any respect in front of staff or pupils.

REPORTING ON THE VISIT

The governing body may wish to prepare a schedule of governors' visits for the year in which agreement has been reached regarding what areas/classes are to be visited and by whom.

Visiting the school as a representative of the governing body would usually involve some type of report back to the governing body.

It is for the governing body to determine its own arrangements for reporting back. The usual methods are:

- oral report at a governing body meeting;
- presenting a report at the governing body meeting;
- circulating a report to governors outside of the meeting.

An example of a report proforma is provided at Appendix 1.

The governing body should consider what arrangements will need to be in place to report back to staff on the visit.

MODEL POLICY / PROTOCOL

Parts A, B and C to be completed by the school to meet their individual needs.

SCHOOL POLICY/PROTOCOL FOR GOVERNORS' VISITS

The Governing Body acknowledge that Governors do not have an automatic right to enter the School whenever they wish. However, from time to time, Governors need to be able to visit the School in order to develop their understanding of the School. Such visits will enable Governors to fulfil their statutory responsibility for the conduct of the School.

A Purpose of Governors' Visits

B Arrangements for the Visit

C Reporting arrangements

Policy / Protocol agreed by the Governing Body on _____.

Chairperson's signature _____.

GOVERNING BODY SCHOOL VISIT POLICY

Governor's Visit Form

Name:	Governor responsibility:	Date: Duration:
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Area of School / Staff / Class visited:

Purpose of visit:
(Objectives)

Governor's comments:

Signed _____

Date _____