

Classroom Visits: Guidelines

Preamble

The governing body is the 'accountable body' in a school – accountable to parents, pupils, the local authority and Central Government through Ofsted. It is responsible for everything from Health and Safety and Child Protection to the school budget, Teaching and Learning and pupil progress. Because governing bodies have a statutory responsibility to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the school and its curriculum, governors need to know what progress is being made towards targets set out in the School Development Plan (SDP). Visiting the classroom can help to support this process.

Ofsted inspection assumes that governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school. This depends on governors assessing performance data presented to them by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), and through the Teaching and Learning Committee in the context of an understanding of what happens in the classroom.

It is also important to Ofsted that the Governing Body makes an impact on school improvement and visiting school to see it in operation, and to be aware of standards and progress are important aspects of this crucial role.

Governors are not qualified to assess standards but they need to visit lessons in order to:

- Appreciate and understand the work of the staff (teachers and support staff) and how the pupils are learning;
- Be aware of the response of pupils to their work and check that the pupils are aware of what they are learning;
- Be aware of resource issues;
- Be able to ask appropriate questions and hold sensible discussions with the professionals;
- Understand as fully as possible the meaning of the results of monitoring reported to them.

N.B. Governors are not inspectors and are not present in a lesson to make judgements about the professional expertise of the teachers. That remains a task for the head and/or other education professionals. It would be inappropriate, therefore, for governors to:

- Make judgements about the quality of teaching;
- Report on the progress of individual children;
- Pursue personal agendas;
- Monopolize teachers' time;
- Arrive with inflexible pre-conceived ideas.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality should be adhered to regarding classroom visits. Observations and comments should be shared with the teacher concerned, and with the headteacher, but not with other staff or with parents. And the approach of a governor should be to ask for explanations of anything not understood, not to make assumptions.

Reports to the Governing Body should not identify individuals in a critical manner: this is not the role of a governor.

Minimum commitment

Individual governors have differing amounts of time to commit to an exercise such as classroom visits. It is important, however, that all governors should try to make visits at some time, beyond that initial general visit to the school when one is newly appointed to the governing body. A governor should aim to make a class visit *at least* once a year.

Ground rules

It is useful to follow some basic rules in planning visits.

School Visits – an Aide-Memoire

What is the purpose of the visit?

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

How shall I carry it out?

- What particular areas of the school am I interested in?
- 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?
- Who 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?

Is there any follow-up?

- Have I recorded my experiences?
- Did I 'report back' to the head and staff?
- Have I prepared a short report for the next governors' meeting?
- How can I build on this for the next visit?

	Always	Never
Before	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange details of visit. • Agree purpose of visit • Discuss the context of the lesson to be observed. • Agree role within the lesson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn up unannounced
During	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep to the role agreed • Keep questions for the class teacher until after the visit is over • Please remember confidentiality • Stick to the times and purpose agreed • Be sensitive to the mood in the classroom and the expectations of the children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assume a different role • Walk in with a clipboard • Distract the pupils from their task
After	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank the teacher and the pupils • -Discuss the visit with the teacher at their convenience • -Feedback to the governing body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leave without acknowledgement • Break rules of confidentiality

Review

The guidelines should be reviewed by the Governing Body each academic year. We would need to ask:

- Are our visits proving useful?
- Have there been benefits, particularly unexpected benefits, from our visits?

Governor Visit Report

Name:	Date:
Focus of visit	Classes/staff visited
Summary of activities e.g. talking to staff and pupils, looking at resources, had lunch etc.	
What have I learned as a result of my visit?	Positive comments about the visit
Aspects I would like clarified/questions that I have:	
Ideas for future visits:	
Any other comments:	
Signed _____ (Governor)	Signed _____