

1. Introduction

ASHMEAD PRIMARY SCHOOL GOVERNOR VISITS POLICY AND GUIDELINES

This policy is to aid governors and school staff to ensure that governor school visits are structured, productive and enjoyable for all concerned.

2. Aims

School visits by members of the governing body are a key component to being an effective school governor and have potential benefits to both governors and staff.

Benefits to governors

- To recognise and celebrate success
- To put information reported to governors regarding the monitoring of teaching and learning in context
 - To develop relationships with the staff
 - To get to know the children
 - To recognise different teaching styles
 - To understand the environment in which teachers and other staff work
 - To see policies and schemes of work in action
 - To inform decision making
 - To find out what resources are needed and prioritise them

Benefits to staff

- To help governors understand the reality of the classroom
- To get to know the governors
- To understand better the governors' roles and responsibilities
- To have an opportunity to reflect on practice through discussion - To have the opportunity to share expertise
- To highlight the need for particular resources

3. Guidelines

It is important to remember that visits are a snapshot in time, and that governors need to be very careful about coming to firm conclusions based on the evidence from a single visit.

Visits should be undertaken as part of a 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 development plan
- assist the governing body in fulfilling its statutory duties

The visit is not about:-

- Making judgments about the professional expertise of the teacher
- Inspection
- Checking on your own children
- Pursuing a personal agenda
- Pursuing any issues that relate to the day-to-day management of the school other than as agreed with the headteacher or SLT.

In order to undertake their role with objectivity, ideally, governors will not monitor classes containing their own children nor will they begin monitoring until they have received suitable training as part of their induction course. Governors are an important part of the school team and are welcomed into the school by staff. It is important that governors remember to respect the professionals and the children, support the headteacher and the staff, and acknowledge that they represent the full Governing Body. As such, all governors must adhere to the highest standards of confidentiality.

4. How is a visit organised?

• Initial visit to the school by a new governor

After the appointment of a new governor, the Welcome Letter from the Governing Body Chair and headteacher invites the new governor to make arrangements to visit the school. This general visit would include a tour around the school, an opportunity to be introduced to the staff and provides the governor with an opportunity to collect some of the school documents listed in their information checklist within the Welcome Pack. Parents with children at the school should also undertake this visit as they are undertaking a new role within the school and this visit would provide them with a broader perspective of the school.

It will not be necessary to write a report after this visit, but the governor should inform the governor responsible for training that the visit has taken place.

• Subsequent visits to the school

In advance of the visit:

Plan the visit to ensure that you are clear about its purpose e.g.:

- to gain background information and get to know the school or class or year group
- to develop relationships with the staff
- to monitor a specific age group, subject area or activity
- to look at school premises to find out what resources are needed.
- to inform decision making
- to monitor how a particular policy or procedure is carried out
- to carry out Health and Safety reviews and monitor school practices.

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Agree the plan with the headteacher, member of staff and the governing body or governing body committee and arrange a convenient time to visit.

5. What to look for in the classroom?

Possible areas for focus could include:

How do the pupils react to the presence of the teacher, headteacher or yourself? How friendly and relaxed are the pupils?
How interested are the pupils in their work?
Do the pupils have an understanding of what they are doing?
How well behaved and courteous are the pupils?
In what ways does the school provide a varied and interesting environment?
How are the needs of all the pupils being met equally?
Do pupils work in a group or individually on a particular task?
Are the same relative number of questions asked by girls and boys?
Or any other focus deemed useful by either the governing body or the headteacher.

6. Written feedback report

This report helps to focus on what was actually learnt about the school and to pass this information on to the governing body. This report will form part of the governors' monitoring role, therefore it should contain statements of fact on what was observed or what was not observed. It should contain information to assist decision-making and evaluation by the whole governing body e.g. when reviewing the impact of a particular policy. It may be appropriate to give some recommendations. Please remember that the headteacher is responsible for ensuring the quality of teaching, so you do not make professional judgments when observing lessons.

Reports should be no longer than a page; they should be informative, to the point and should not include any pupil names.

The report should set out the objectives for the visit and indicate how well or otherwise they were met. Draft reports need to be sent to the Headteacher and Chair of the relevant committee for approval before circulation to the Governing Body.

7. Level of commitment

In order to ensure a work-life balance for both staff and governors, a maximum commitment should be a half-day equivalent per term to make a staff visit, meet up with staff and produce a report.

8. Monitoring and review

The full Governing Body will monitor this policy to ensure a reasonable distribution of visits across the year and across subjects, classes, year groups

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and teachers. The Governing Body will also plan a programme of visits and review this policy at the first meeting of the academic year.

8. Informal ways of getting to know the school

Governors are actively encouraged to participate in the life of the school and are always welcome to attend school events (e.g. special assemblies, sports day, etc.) the dates of which are published regularly in the school newsletter and sent out to all governors. These visits are not included as part of this policy.

Appendix 1 - School Visits – an Aide Memoire

Before the visit

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?

Have I arranged my visit in advance and ensured it is at a convenient time for the member/s of staff concerned?

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? Do I want to talk to the children and, if so, have I asked the member/s of staff concerned if this is OK?

Please remember to use the community room rather than the staffroom for refreshments unless the staffroom is empty.

After the visit

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?

Please remember to be sensitive to the circumstances and flexible in your expectations. No two days are ever the same.

Keep an open mind about what you see.

Education and classrooms have changed a great deal since you were at school and practice is very different. Don't expect to see the formal type of lesson you might remember from your own childhood.

By all means ask questions (preferably at the end of the lesson) but be sensitive to the extra demands of differentiation and inclusion that teachers now face.

Appendix 2. Governor Visits- Report

Name	
Area of Responsibility	
Date of Visit	
Focus of Visit	
Classes/staff visited	
Summary of activities e.g. observing classes, talking to staff and pupils, looking at resources, etc	
What I have learned as a result of my visit	
Positive comments about the focus	
Aspects I would like clarified/ questions I have	
Ideas for future visits/ other comments	

Signed:..... (Governor)

Signed:..... (Head teacher)

Signed:..... (Teacher/ Subject Leader)

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