



Guidance and Advice on Governors' Visits to School

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;
- Supporting the schools 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 policies;
- 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 and post Ofsted Action 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 of 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.

The visit

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

Before the Visit

- Arrange details with the member of staff you are visiting and CC the Headteacher into all emails; 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 your enhanced DBS check is up to date.

Key question – What is the purpose of my 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 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:

- Request and pay for a school lunch if required (Governors can claim this back through Governor Expenses) by 9:30am;
- 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 a teacher during a lesson and avoid taking on a teaching role, or discussing irrelevant issues with the pupils;
- Always wear a governor 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 at all times;
- Recognise that sometimes it is appropriate to leave the classroom should a situation arise which might become more problematic, e.g. 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/post Ofsted Action Plan;
- 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 about?

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;
- Pupil's 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 one of the Assistant Headteacher's;
- Never criticise or appear to criticise the school in any respect in front of staff or pupils.

Reporting on the visit

A Governors Visit Form (**Appendix A**) is to be completed for each visit and emailed to the School Business Manager so that it can be retained on file at the school for inspection. You will be required to give a brief verbal report at the next FGB of your visit.

An example of a completed Governors Visit Form is show in **Appendix B**.

**The Devonshire Hill Nursery and Primary School
Governor Visit Report**

Name	:	
Date of Visit	:	
Focus of Visit	:	
Classes / Staff visited	:	

Summary of activities e.g. observing classes, talking to staff and pupils, looking at resources, had lunch etc.

What I have learned as result of my visit

Positive comments about the focus

Aspects I would like clarified / questions I have

Ideas for future visits

Any other comments

Signed: _____
Governor

Signed: _____
Headteacher

The Devonshire Hill Nursery and Primary School Governor Visit Report

Name	: Joe Bloggs
Date of Visit	: 20 th October 2015
Focus of Visit	: Ofsted Key Issues: marking, assessment, individual pupil targets.
Classes / Staff visited	: 4W Carrie W (Teacher) and Jacky H (LSA)

Summary of activities e.g. observing classes, talking to staff and pupils, looking at resources, had lunch etc.

I spent the morning in the classroom, observing numeracy, French, literacy, and had the chance to talk to Mrs W about target setting, tracking grids, the class progress, and her role as MFL subject leader.

What I have learned as result of my visit

The **classroom environment** is bright, exciting and entirely focused on the children – displays are personal to the children (birthday photo gallery, “Our Gallery” etc.); show a range of work and achievements (The Magic Box display is wonderful – I loved the one in which the child said s/he had swallowed the key!); others clearly state class rules, targets, objectives, achievements, progress and so on.

I have gained a broader understanding of the **differing abilities and needs** of the 29 children in the class. They are a varied group, about two thirds are boys and there are a small number of children with Special Educational Needs. It was very clear how lessons were differentiated to cater for the range of abilities – e.g. the English task was varied to reflect the different levels that the children are working at. Mrs W explained that Mrs H frequently supports the lower ability group of children, and showed me a detailed plan of how Mrs Hs’ work is structured during the week.

The **use of the smartboard** was excellent and the children were able to use it to great effect (e.g. moving cheese around to be weighed). The smartboard was variously used as a whiteboard, a “TV” to show the French CD, a stop clock, to demonstrate weights and measures and a way of demonstrating work (using the visualizer).

Positive comments about the focus

Assessment and marking

Several children showed me their workbooks (for English and Mathematics) and were able to explain the marking system and how the green pen and moving on comments form their next steps. Their responses were very positive about this and they showed me that they get and appreciate personal feedback about their work.

Individual targets

The children were keen to show me their individual target folders and explained how they agree and progress with individual targets for English and Mathematics and a personal target. Mrs W showed me that she has all the targets written up as a reminder to her. The children seemed to be very clear about

their targets and were able to tell me what they were, and how they were progressing in relation to their objectives.

Pupil progress

The individual targets demonstrated that pupils are making progress, and this was backed up by the use of the tracking grids, though Mrs W noted that once there has been another input of summative assessment the actual progress will be clearer. She confirmed that she uses information on the tracking grids to explain to parents how their child is doing.

Displays

The displays show a wide range of work from all the pupils. The achievements of the children are constantly celebrated, verbally as well as visually. I was extremely impressed by the learning environment, and really enjoyed the lessons that I took part in.

Implementation of French across the school/resources etc.

As MFL Subject Leader, Mrs W explained that she is encouraging the teaching of French across the school. In recent years' modern foreign languages have been taught by specialist teachers, but the approach now is to encourage all teachers to deliver French lessons themselves. I think that with the statutory requirement to deliver a MFL in primaries by 2010 this is a wise move, as our teachers are becoming more skilled in this area and resources are being developed to enable them all to become more confident in teaching French. Mrs W showed me lesson plans that she has developed for all teachers which give ideas and resources for 15 minute lessons. In time she hopes that teachers will have the confidence and knowledge to plan their own lessons, and she also intends (in time) to observe the teachers delivering French. She explained that she is waiting to see how the teaching of French develops before spending much more on resources.

Aspects I would like clarified / questions I have

Ideas for future visits

Return to 4W late in the Summer term to see what progress the children have made during the year. Further visit to discuss MFL and how successfully French is being taught across the school; what further resources are required etc.

Any other comments

I was made to feel very welcome by Mrs W, and by all the children in 4W. They are a delightful group who were very happy to share their work and talk about their learning. They were obviously very excited about the tasks that they were set and took on the challenges with great enthusiasm. Learning highlights included the activities with the balances, singing about our lost rubbers in French, and picking out key literacy features of a science report.

I was particularly impressed by how frequently Mrs W praised the children, checked on their learning and progress and reminded them of their learning objectives. It is clear that the key issues identified by Ofsted are being included as an integral part of the learning and teaching, and the children's understanding of their own targets was impressive.

I learnt a lot, and thoroughly enjoyed my visit – thank you.

Signed: _____
Governor

Signed: _____
Headteacher