STRUCTURED GOVERNOR VISITS TO SCHOOL

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<th>REVISION DATE</th>
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<th>DATE OF APPROVAL</th>
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<tr>
<td>May 2014</td>
<td>Governing Body</td>
<td>17 June 2014</td>
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THIS POLICY IS BASED ON THE LOCAL AUTHORITY MODEL POLICY

All most recent policies are stored on the VLE and are available on the school website.
STRUCTURED GOVERNOR VISITS TO SCHOOL

INTRODUCTION
Individual governors do not have an automatic right to enter the school. However governors do need to be able to visit school regularly in order to develop their understanding of how the school works and to enable the governing body to fulfil its statutory responsibilities.

Being a school governor is a big commitment and it is recognised that not all governors will have time to undertake structured school visits on a regular basis. As a minimum, it would be helpful if all governors could aim to undertake a structured visit to the school at least once per academic year. Some governors will be able to visit more often than that and where this is possible, such visits should be encouraged within a structured protocol to ensure that such visits are manageable and do not impact negatively on the smooth running of the school.

Governor visits to school can be a thorny and sometimes controversial subject if not managed properly. Some governors will worry about making visits to school, especially to a classroom because they can be unsure why they are there. Conversely, some school staff may not understand why it is important for governors to visit the school, and their classrooms in particular. This guidance document aims to dispel some of these concerns so that governor visits can be conducted in a way that is productive for all involved.

WHY SHOULD GOVERNORS VISIT SCHOOL?
The governing body has statutory responsibilities to agree the strategic aims and direction of the school, and to ensure that those aims are implemented by the school staff, led by the head teacher.

To enable the governing body to fulfil these roles effectively governors need to know the school well. This knowledge can be acquired in a number of ways:
- Regular written reports from the head teacher
- Presentations by staff at governing body and committee meetings
- School performance data, such as RAISEonline
- Structured visits to school by governors
- School inspection reports carried out on behalf of Ofsted

Structured visits to schools should not be confused with the more informal visits a governor might undertake, e.g. as a helper in school, attending a school production, etc. Structured visits should have a clear purpose that is either linked to a particular role a governor has been nominated to undertake e.g. SEN governor, or to see how a specific priority within the School Improvement Plan is being implemented.

The key things to remember when planning or making a structured visit are:
- You are undertaking a visit to observe and to learn about what goes on in school; you are NOT an inspector
- You are not there to pass judgement on the quality of the teaching you see; that’s the head teacher’s job!
- There is nothing wrong with asking questions, that’s how you learn, but remember the teacher’s prime focus is to teach the children
- Be supportive, not negative
- Don’t sit at the back taking notes, this smacks of an inspection.
PROTOCOLS FOR GOVERNORS’ STRUCTURED VISITS TO SCHOOL
If structured visits are to enhance the governing body’s effectiveness and their understanding of the school, they need to be planned carefully; without careful planning they achieve little. Ideally the governing body will establish a policy/protocol for governors structured visits, which is agreed and shared with the staff within school. A model policy/protocol is attached to this guidance at Appendix 1.

The following list provides examples of good practice that might be incorporated into your model policy:

Before a Visit
- Ensure all visits are arranged in advance with the head teacher/class teacher(s) as appropriate. The head teacher is responsible for the day-to-day management of the school and should maintain an overview of visitors onto the school site.
- Clarify the purpose of the visit. Is it linked to the School improvement Plan or another specified purpose? Make sure the date chosen is suitable for the purpose identified.
- Time permitting; discuss the proposed agenda with any staff involved. Clarify how you might be integrated into lessons.
- Try to prepare some questions in advance. Find out if there is an agreed prompt sheet/checklist that has previously been agreed.
- If you would like to make some notes during your visit, discuss this with the class teacher(s) before the visit. PLEASE NOTE: it is not the role of governors to monitor teachers or teaching practice so it is important that there is complete clarity in this matter.

During a Visit
- Ensure you arrive promptly at the agreed time. Keep to the agreed timetable but be prepared to be flexible.
- Agree with the teacher(s) how you will be introduced and what your role in the classroom will be. You do not want to be a distraction to the children. Get involved if the teacher(s) has agreed that this would be appropriate.
- Remember you are a visitor to the school and behave accordingly. Governors should respect confidentiality of anything seen and heard.
- Observe discreetly. Remember don’t sit at the back making notes unless this has been agreed beforehand.
- Don’t distract the teacher(s) from his/her work, but be prepared to talk and show interest. Interact but don’t interrupt. If you have questions, ask them when the lesson is over.
- Remember why you are there. Don’t lose sight of the purpose of your visit.
- At the end of the lesson/visit, remember to thank the teacher and the children for allowing you to spend time in the classroom.

After a Visit
- Whenever possible, discuss what you have observed with the teacher(s). Use the opportunity to clarify any issue you are unclear about, e.g. did your presence have any impact on the atmosphere in the classroom? If so, how?
- Refer to the agreed purpose of your visit. Consider together whether this has been achieved. Be open, honest, and positive.
- Whenever possible, discuss your observations with the head teacher. Be prepared to take the comments of others on board.
• If you didn’t make notes during your visit, make them as soon as possible after your visit, while it is still fresh in your mind.
• You should complete a short written report to the governing body about your visit. Circulate a draft to the head teacher and any staff involved. Be prepared to amend it. Aim to achieve a report that is agreed by those involved. A template for reporting on structured visits is attached at Appendix 2, with an example of a completed template attached at Appendix 3.
• Forward the final version to the clerk to the governing body for distribution with the agenda papers for the next governing body or relevant committee meeting as appropriate.
• Reflect: how did that go? What changes, if any, would you want to incorporate into future visits?

Some simple guidelines
• If you have a child/children at the school do not use these visits to raise issues that should properly be resolved by other means. Remember which “hat” you are wearing! Governor visits to school are undertaken in the interests of all the children, not just your own.
• If this is your first structured visit to school, don’t feel intimidated. The staff will appreciate your taking the trouble to find out more about their work in school.
• Remember that you are not assessing the professional competence of individual teachers and it is important that you are not perceived by staff in that light.
• The outcomes of structured visits should overwhelmingly be positive. If during your visit an issue causes you specific concerns, you should discuss them in the first instance with the class teacher.
• If you continue to be concerned, you should inform the teacher that you intend to take your concerns to the head teacher. Your involvement in that issue will then cease. It is the role of the head teacher to investigate any issues further and to take any action that might be appropriate.
• Remember that you are in school as a guest and that you are there to learn, not to inspect.
Model Policy for Governors’ Structured Visits To School

Introduction
The governing body has an important statutory responsibility to help the school provide the best possible education for all its pupils by:

- Setting the school’s values, vision and strategic aims, agreeing plans and policies, and making creative use of resources
- Monitoring and evaluating performance, acting as a critical friend to the head teacher to support and challenge him/her in managing the school.

To fulfil these roles effectively, the governing body needs to know the school well. This knowledge is acquired in a number of ways:

- Regular written reports from the head teacher and School Improvement Partner
- Presentations by staff at governing body and committee meetings
- School performance data, such as RAISEonline
- Structured visits to school by governors
- School inspection reports carried out on behalf of Ofsted

The aim of this policy is to provide governors with clarity of expectations whilst undertaking structured visits to the school.

All governors are welcome to attend a range of school events throughout the year, and details of these events will be issued to governors during the course of the year. This policy does not relate to these and other informal visits that a governor might undertake.

Purpose of Governors’ Structured Visits to School
Undertaking structured visits to school enables governors to develop greater knowledge and understanding of our school, its strengths and weaknesses, and how its priorities for development are progressing and impacting on the quality of provision.

Visits will be undertaken as part of a strategic programme to monitor and assess progress of the school’s priorities for development and to assist the governing body in fulfilling its statutory duties.

Governors are not inspectors and governors’ structured visits are not for monitoring the performance of teachers. Governors are not qualified to make judgements on the quality of teaching that takes place in the school; that is the role of the head teacher and the senior leadership team. Governors’ visits will be used to learn about how the school functions on a day-to-day basis to support the governing body to more effectively fulfil its strategic and critical friend roles. Governors structured visits can also enable governors to foster effective working relationships with staff.
Protocols for Governors’ Structured Visits to School
It is important that structured visits allow governors to fulfill their roles without disrupting the work of the school; therefore all such visits must follow the following protocols:

Before a Visit
- All visits to be organised in advance with the head teacher/class teacher(s).
- Agree the purpose of the visit and proposed agenda.
- Clarify how you might be integrated into lessons.
- Try to prepare some questions in advance.

During a Visit
- Arrive promptly at the agreed time. Keep to the agreed timetable but be prepared to be flexible.
- Agree with the teacher(s) how you will be introduced and what your role in the classroom will be.
- Remember you are a visitor to the school and behave accordingly. Governors should respect confidentiality of anything seen and heard.
- Observe discreetly. Don’t sit at the back making notes unless this has been agreed beforehand.
- Don’t distract the teacher(s) from his/her work, but be prepared to talk and show interest.
- Don’t lose sight of the purpose of your visit.
- At the end of the lesson/visit, remember to thank the teacher and the children for allowing you to spend time in the classroom.

After a Visit
- Whenever possible, discuss what you have observed with the teacher(s).
- Consider together whether the purpose of your visit has been achieved. Be open, honest, and positive.
- Whenever possible, discuss your observations with the head teacher.
- Make notes as soon as possible after your visit, while it is still fresh in your mind.
- Complete a short written report to the governing body about your visit using the Record of Governors’ Structured Visits to Schools pro-forma. Circulate a draft to the head teacher and any staff involved. Be prepared to amend it. Aim to achieve a report that is agreed by those involved.
- Forward the final version to the clerk to the governing body for distribution with the agenda papers for the next governing body or relevant committee meeting as appropriate.
- Reflect: how did that go? What changes, if any, would you want to incorporate into future visits?

Policy Review
This policy will be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that the purpose of governors structured visits is being realized and that all governors are fulfilling their commitment to the school.

The policy will be reviewed on or before (date)
# Record of Governors’ Structured Visits to School

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<th>Informal Visit</th>
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<th>Formal Visit : Purpose of Visit</th>
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<th>Links with your area of responsibility</th>
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<th>Governor observations / comments including any agreed key issues</th>
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<th>Actions (if any) to be taken</th>
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A visit to High Hopes Primary School.

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<th>Name: Jane Smith</th>
<th>Date of visit: 13 January 2010</th>
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**Purpose of visit**
- To tour the school to make informal contact with staff and to observe behaviour in class, assembly and at break time
- To monitor the quality of the learning environment

**Links with the School Improvement Plan**
- Behaviour and its impact on the quality of teaching and learning are key elements of the action plan.
- The school is due to move to new premises and we are trying to maintain standards in the old building.

**Observations and comments by governor**
Two year five pupils accompanied me and were very positive about their experiences in the school. Throughout the school, the atmosphere was calm and I observed staff intervening with pupils when they weren’t concentrating – both in class and in assembly. In one class the children were coming to the end of a 40-minute session on writing and they were totally focused, quiet.

One supply teacher was delivering D&T and the children were competing to build the strongest, tallest tower that could have a ping pong ball balanced on the top. This was proving very popular. They were all totally engaged.

The courtyard area was very overgrown and the children told me that it used to be looked after but not much was happening now. The one bench was damaged. The children said they thought it would be good to tidy it up and have more seats out there.

Displays throughout the school were well-presented and colourful. There was lots of children’s work and it was all recent. My ‘guides’ proudly showed me examples of their work that was displayed. Assembly included presentation of golden apples for good behaviour. Children were well behaved and attentive. Not clear if that was the daily act of worship?

At playtime all the staff seemed to be out on the playground. I wondered what breaks they have during the day.

**Key issues arising for the governing body**
- Positive news re: behaviour and displays.
- Follow up idea of turning the courtyard area into an attractive space for children to have lunches, relax etc.
- How are we managing the daily act of worship? Is there a programme of themes? Are children involved in delivering? Are our values being promoted through this medium?
- How are playground rotas managed? Do our teachers have a break?

**Action following governing body meeting**
(Record any action agreed by the governing body with regard to this visit)

GB also considered latest data re: exclusions – none so far this school year which is considerably down on last year.

Agreed chair would send a letter to staff congratulating them on the impact of their work to improve behaviour. In addition agreed I would write a letter to be read in assembly to say how much I had enjoyed my visit and how impressed I was by the behaviour of children in classes and in the playground.

Link governor to discuss with school council what they would like to see happen with the courtyard and whether they could help. Following that head to write to parents via the newsletter to see if they’d help. Furniture that will be purchased for the new school to be purchased early for use in the courtyard.

Deputy Head to report to the next GB meeting on how we manage the daily act of collective worship – themes etc.

GB reassured by headteacher and staff governors that the playground rota is equitable and effective.