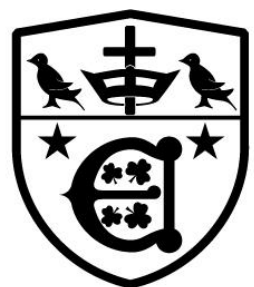


# Governing Body Visits Policy

December 2022

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**ST EDWARD'S  
COLLEGE**  
LIVERPOOL

## Introduction

It is often difficult for busy governors to find time to be in school while it is in session, but it is essential that they are able to do so. Surveys show that head teachers and staff are encouraged by governors visiting the school, provided they come to learn and help rather than to inspect.

Knowing the school is fundamental to the three core functions of a governing board as set out in the Department for Education's (DfE) *Governance Handbook*:

- Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
- Holding the head teacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils, and the performance management of staff
- Overseeing financial performance and making sure money is well spent

While the last two functions might partially be undertaken in meetings and through reports and data, it is less easy to understand the school's vision, ethos and values without visiting during a working day. This is particularly important in a Church school which aims to ensure that all pupils and adults flourish through its distinctively Christian character and provision.

## General Principles

A number of general governance principles underpin the rationale for, and organisation of, governor visits:

- The governing board is a corporate body, and governors visit the school not as individuals, but on behalf of the board, with a remit for the visit and arrangements for feedback to the board. It is helpful therefore to plan an annual programme of visits in advance, identifying themes and allocating governors either singly or in groups to undertake them and to report back.
- The board is responsible for the school's strategic direction and success; operational, day-to-day management is the responsibility of the head teacher. Visits should generally link to key governance responsibilities and school specific priorities. Where a school improvement priority is the focus, the governor visit could be included in the school improvement plan.
- An effective partnership between governors and staff, based on mutual understanding, benefits the whole school community.

Benefits to governors include:

- improving governors' decision making through knowledge of the school context, ethos and culture - its staff and students, priorities, strengths and challenges
- developing relationships and a culture of openness and transparency
- observing how plans and policies work in practice
- monitoring the priorities outlined in the development plan

Benefits to staff include:

- helping governors understand the reality of the classroom and curriculum and celebrate effort and success
- getting to know the governors and understand better the board's roles and responsibilities
- having an opportunity to reflect on practice through discussion

- The purpose of governor visits is *not*
  - to make judgements about the professional expertise of individual staff
  - to pursue issues that are day-to-day management responsibilities
  - to check on progress of individual children
  - to pursue personal interests and concerns
  - for staff to make a case for priority or resources

### **Agreeing the focus and programme**

Every visit should have a clear, prearranged purpose and focus. It is helpful to develop an advance schedule of visits, agreed with the head teacher, with identified themes and governors to undertake them and report back. This helps ensure that governors and staff use their time productively, that visits are an embedded part of the board's work, and complement but do not duplicate other activities such as presentations from staff. Governor visits could be included in the school improvement plan and the board's annual work plan.

Examples of what a visit might focus on include:

- Monitoring the implementation of a particular policy, for example safeguarding, behaviour, attendance
- Monitoring progress towards specific targets from the school improvement plan - for example, meeting with the subject lead and learning about the strategy adopted and how this influences classroom practice and children's learning
- Understanding of a particular curriculum area or year group
- Understanding of the process of assessment and tracking pupil cohorts
- Understanding of a particular issue, for example, pupil engagement, provision of ICT, boys' achievement, literacy
- Understanding of how RE and Worship are planned, delivered and integrated into the daily life of the school
- Update on a particular area with an assigned link governor. Common links include SEND, Safeguarding, Pupil Premium, RE, Literacy, Numeracy. It is important that schools keep links under review, to ensure they are still relevant and working effectively
- The use of resources, such as a new teaching resource, or a demonstration of the use of ICT in the classroom.

The itinerary will follow from the focus. Visits normally involve meeting with the responsible member of staff to provide background information and context, demonstration of the initiative in action and, if possible, providing the opportunity to speak to children and/or staff members. During any visit it is important to remember that governors' role is strategic and the purpose is to learn and understand. Governor visits should not be confused with inspections or professional observations of staff. It is important to avoid giving the impression of judging teachers' performance. If governors have concerns about anything observed during a visit these should be raised with the head teacher or with the Chair if the issue involves the head teacher.

A visits protocol, shared with staff can help to avoid any misunderstandings. See Appendix A

### **Frequency of visits**

A visits protocol should include an expectation for the number of visits that individuals should make each school year. NGA (the National Governance Association) recommends that in normal circumstances, individual governors should formally visit the school at least once a year but no more than once a term. A realistic expectation of governors' time commitment

ensures a sharing of responsibilities and that visits can be spread out over the academic year. Of course, individuals may also spend time in school in a non-governance capacity, for example, as parents in relation to their own child or as volunteers (for example accompanying school trips). It is important to keep these roles separate from governing and to be clear about when you are visiting in a governor and when in a personal capacity.

A visit does not require governors to be in school for a full day, nor necessarily to observe lessons. Depending on the issue, a well planned meeting with a member of staff at the beginning or end of the school day can achieve the purpose and be manageable for those with work and family commitments.

### **Protocol / Code of Practice for visits**

Governors do not have the right to visit the school unannounced. Visits should be part of a planned programme agreed by the whole governing board and linked to the school strategy or key governance responsibilities. Any member of staff who will be involved in the visit should know its purpose and what to expect. Having a clear protocol in place that is understood by all parties ensures a disproportionate amount of time is not spent planning each visit.

## SCHOOL GOVERNOR VISITS POLICY AND PROTOCOL

### Purpose of Policy and Protocol

This policy is designed to assist governors and school staff in ensuring that governor school visits are structured, productive and enjoyable for all concerned.

While the day to day management of the school is delegated to the head teacher and staff, the governing board has strategic responsibility for the school's conduct and direction and a wide range of responsibilities which can be summarised as:

- Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction – the vision, values, plans, policies and priorities of the school
- Supporting and challenging the head teacher and holding to account for the performance of the school and the performance management of staff
- Overseeing financial performance and making sure money is well spent

School visits are a key component of being an effective governing board. They complement the work of committees and reports from the head teacher and staff and have potential benefits for both governors and staff:

**Benefits to governors:** As part of a strategic programme, governor visits inform decision making and assist the governing board in fulfilling its statutory duties by:

- improving governors' knowledge of the school ethos, culture and context - its staff and students, needs, priorities, strengths and challenges
- developing relationships and a culture of openness and transparency
- observing how plans and policies work in practice
- monitoring the priorities outlined in the development plan

#### **Benefits to staff**

- to help governors understand the reality of the classroom and celebrate effort and success
- to get to know the governors
- to understand better the governors' roles and responsibilities
- to have an opportunity to reflect on practice through discussion

#### **The purpose of governor visits is *not***

- to make judgements about the professional expertise or quality of teaching of individual staff;
- to pursue issues that are day-to-day management responsibilities;
- to check on progress of individual children
- to pursue personal interests and concerns
- for staff to make a case for priority or resources

The governing board will agree a programme of governor links and visits at the first meeting of the school year (see Annex C). Their focus will be agreed with the head teacher and will cover a key aspect of governing board responsibility, school policy or priority in the school improvement plan. Every governor is expected to make at least one / two / three governor visits in the academic year. This is in addition to attendance at meetings, training and informal events.

**New governors** will make a general introductory visit of the school as part of their induction programme. The purpose will be to familiarise them with the school's layout, organisation and priorities, to meet key staff and governors and to answer any questions.

## **Link governor roles**

We have agreed the following link governor roles:

- Safeguarding
- SEN and disability
- Pupil Premium
- Religious Education and Collective Worship
- Health and Safety

The role of the link governor is to liaise with the relevant member of staff; to understand current issues in the particular area and to report to the governing board

## **Governor visits protocol**

### **Focus**

All school visits will:

- Have a clear focus, linked to strategic priorities, which is agreed by the full governing board
- Be arranged with adequate notice through the head teacher and agreed with the relevant members of staff
- Be of value to the governing board which is demonstrable to outside agencies, for example, Ofsted or the LA

### **Conduct**

It is not the role of governors to form judgements about the performance of school staff during visits and individuals will make every effort to avoid this impression. Governors will comply with the school and governing board's codes of conduct and the standards of presentation expected of staff. They will be mindful that they are representing the board through their words and actions.

### **Follow-up**

Governors will have the opportunity to discuss the visit, including any concerns, with the head teacher immediately or soon after the visit. The attached Governor Visit Report sheet (Annex B) will be completed after each visit. A draft will be shared with the head teacher and any other members of staff involved in the visit and, when agreed, a final version will be included in the papers for discussion in the next governing board or relevant committee meeting as appropriate.

### **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality should be adhered to in relation to visits. Comments should be limited to the head teacher or member of staff with whom the visit was arranged. Individual children or staff (other than the member of staff involved with the visit) should not be identified in school visit reports.

***This Policy was adopted by the Governing Body in December 2022. The next review will be in December 2025.***

## Governor Visits 'Do's and Don'ts'

	<b>Do</b>	<b>Don't</b>
<b>Before</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Agree the visit focus in advance as part of a schedule at a governing board meeting, including identifying a clear purpose. (It can be useful to think of the governing board as 'commissioning' the visit and delegating responsibility for carrying it out to individual governor(s).)</li> <li>✓ Arrange a mutually convenient time, avoiding sensitive times such as exam or assessment periods.</li> <li>✓ Discuss the visit with the head teacher and ensure that any member of staff who will be involved in the visit understands the arrangements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☒ Turn up unannounced.</li> <li>☒ Approach staff directly without the approval of the head teacher</li> </ul>
<b>During</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Present yourself in a way which matches the professionalism expected of school staff.</li> <li>✓ Report to reception and follow procedures for visitors – even those familiar with the school should do this.</li> <li>✓ Only enter classrooms and other areas of the school – including the staffroom – following invitation by a member of staff.</li> <li>✓ Keep to the role agreed; only talk to students if invited to do so by the teacher</li> <li>✓ Be flexible if something urgent crops up which means the arranged tasks cannot take place – always keep in mind that the education of the students is of overriding importance.</li> <li>✓ Be courteous and professional, including thanking staff before leaving.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☒ Give the impression that you are inspecting, for example by using a clipboard or making notes while visiting a classroom.</li> <li>☒ Assume a different role to that agreed; parents and education professionals, in particular, should be mindful not to stray into these roles.</li> <li>☒ Express personal opinions if pressed on a controversial issue – individuals should keep in mind that they are representing the governing board as a whole.</li> <li>☒ Make assumptions – always ask for explanations of anything not understood at an appropriate time when it will not interrupt pupils' learning (this may be in conversation with the class teacher after the lesson or with the head teacher at the end of the visit).</li> <li>☒ Check on the progress of individual children, including your own.</li> <li>☒ Walk around the school unaccompanied or put yourself in</li> </ul>

		situations where you are likely to be unaccompanied with pupils.
<b>After</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Share any concerns, however trivial, with the chair and the head teacher.</li> <li>✓ Complete a short visit report on an agreed form; a draft should be shared with any relevant members of staff and the head teacher, then taking their comments into account a final written report should be prepared and given to the governing board / committee before the next meeting.</li> <li>✓ Ensure that school visits is an agenda item at the governing board meeting and that any findings are discussed</li> <li>✓ Send a thank you email to those that contributed to the success of the visit.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Make comments regarding a teacher's conduct of the lesson or individual students.</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Identify individual students in your report, even in a positive light.</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Gossip about your visit – what you have seen should be treated with the same level of confidentiality as any other governing body business.</li> </ul>



**Record Sheet – Governor visits into School**

Name of Governor:	Date of Visit:
Focus of Visit (link to strategy/school development plan):	
Summary of activities (talking to Principal, Staff, Pupils, looking at specific resources, having lunch, etc):	
What have I learnt as a result of my visit? (relate this back to the focus of the visit) :	
Aspects I would like clarified/questions I have:	
Actions/issues for the Governing Body to consider:	
Any other comments/ideas for future visits:	

**Governor Visits Focus 2019/20**

The following areas for visits were agreed at the governing board meeting of .....

Focus and details	Governor(s)	Term