

Thornley Primary School



GOVERNOR VISITS AND PROTOCOL POLICY

Revised September 2013

Introduction

The governing body has three main roles. They are strategic direction, critical friend and accountability. Visiting the school in session helps to develop and understand the roles and is the best way to learn how the school functions so that you can increase the governing body's first hand knowledge and inform strategic decision making.

Through visits governors will have the opportunity to observe policies and plans being implemented which will help make well-informed judgements about progress being made towards the priorities and targets in the school improvement plan. The number and frequency of visits will vary.

Visits should generally relate to the priorities determined by the School Improvement Plan and cover a wide range of activities. Each visit should be agreed in advance and have a clear purpose. Governors should arrange these visits with the head teacher who has the responsibility for the day-to-day management of the school.

Potential benefits

To governors

- Recognise and celebrate success
- Develop relationships with staff
- Get to know the children
- Recognise different teaching styles
- Understand the environment in which teachers teach
- Monitor policies in action
- Find out what resources are needed and prioritise them
- Deepen understanding and increase confidence and knowledge
- Inform decision making

To teachers

- Ensure governors understand the reality of the classroom
- Get to know governors
- Understand better the governors' roles and responsibilities
- Have an opportunity to reflect on practice through discussion
- Highlight the need for particular resources

Governor visits are not

- A form of inspection to make judgements about professional expertise of the teacher
- An opportunity to check on the progress of own children
- An opportunity to pursue a personal agenda
- The chance to monopolising school/teacher time

Roles and responsibilities of governors, head teacher and other staff

It would be helpful if the governing body could, with the help of the head teacher and staff, organise an annual schedule of school visits throughout the year. The head teacher will guide the governing body on the areas of the curriculum; policies and school improvement plan priorities and targets to be covered each term. Individual governor or pairs of governors will, with the guidance of the whole governing body, identify an aspect of the school's work to focus on in order deepen their understanding.

Monitoring and review of governors' school visit policy

This policy should be monitored and reviewed annually to ensure that:

- Visits are achieving the potential benefits we identified?
- What unexpected benefits have there been?
- Practice is reviewed regularly.

Preparing for a visit

- Clarify the purpose of the visit. Is it linked to the School Improvement Plan? What are the relevant school Policies? How does this determine the activities I am interested in?
- Discuss an agenda with the head teacher, and or subject leader/co ordinator well in advance. Make sure that the date chosen is mutually agreed and convenient.
- Use the school visits pro forma – see Appendix B
- The headteacher will share the agenda with staff involved. Will governors visit a class, undertake a learning walk. Will it be helpful to see relevant documents beforehand?

During the Visit

- Remember you are making the visit on behalf of the governing body.
- Governors do not make judgements or promises - it is a visit not an inspection
- Be punctual, courteous and considerate at all times, respecting the professional roles of the head teacher and staff.
- If visiting a class, agree with the teacher how you will be introduced and what your role in the class will be and what involvement you will have with children.
- Observe discretely - don't distract the teacher during the lesson but be prepared to talk and show interest
- Interact, don't interrupt - listen to staff and pupils

Teachers and support staff will at all times be courteous and considerate, recognising the contribution made by the governing body to the school.

They may make practical suggestions on the focus for governors' visits to ensure that they are productive and enjoyable for all concerned. This could include specifying the evidence that could be shared with governors. See Appendix A for a list of things which governors could examine/explore. Whenever practical they will invite their link/curriculum governors to relevant staff meetings and training sessions.

Questions will be invited from governors, while being sensitive to issues of confidentiality. See annex B for examples of questions which could be asked. Although these focus on literacy, numeracy and SEN, many of the questions can easily be adapted to other areas of the curriculum.

After the visit

- Discuss what you have observed with the teacher. Use the opportunity to clarify any issue you are unclear about.
- Refer to the purpose of the visit. Consider together whether it has been achieved
- Thank the teacher for supporting you in your role as a governor. Be open, honest & positive.
- Make notes as soon as possible after your observation while it is still fresh in your mind and share the report with the Head Teacher for agreement that it is a true reflection of the visit.
- Reflect on the visit, for example: how did that go? Has the visit enhanced relationships? Have I learnt more about the school? Have I gained more confidence in my role as governor?

Reporting your visit

- All governor visits should be recorded and shared. This helps demonstrate the involvement governors have in the life of the school and how they support their own learning.
- Write a short summary of what you learned during the visit and the overall impression that was made. This will be easier if the visit had a focus. See Appendix B for a report format.
- You must circulate a draft to the head teacher and staff involved for them to check the accuracy and clarity. Be prepared to amend it. Aim to achieve a report that is agreed by all those involved.
- Have the report added to the next available agenda of the Governing Body and be prepared to answer questions from other governors.

Visit Focus

Although not an exhaustive list visits may focus on:-

- Particular subjects, key stages or classes.
- The use made of the building or the site.
- The condition and maintenance of the premises.
- Special educational needs.
- Literacy and numeracy.
- The use of ICT equipment.
- The impact on the school of any changes e.g. reduced classes in key stage.
- Impact of specific targets identified in the School Improvement Plan.
- Impact of Staff Development Training.

Appendix A – Monitoring & Questions

Governor Monitoring can take several forms:

- Meeting with subject leaders/head of year/house/support staff
- Snapshot of a lesson
- Discussions with pupils
- Walk around the school

Aims:

- To know and understand the level of enjoyment pupils have for a subject
- Understand what pupils like best/least in the school
- Know the standards of achievement in a subject area
- Know what steps are being taken to improve standards
- Know how well strategic policies approved by governors are working
- To report main findings back to the full governing body

Observations to make when visiting a classroom

- Relationship between all staff in the classroom and pupils
- Relationship 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 pupils are grouped
- How different abilities are catered for
- Children's work & Displays
- Ethos – the atmosphere and values that are evident (are expectations high, encouragement, praise, equality of opportunity apparent?)
- Use of space, quality and quantity of equipment and resources
- Health and safety regulations practiced ie fire exits kept clear

Questions

To ask pupils

- Tell me about what you are learning today
- Do you like (select curriculum area being monitored)
- Tell me what you most like doing in (select curriculum area being monitored)
- Is there anything you don't like in (select curriculum area being monitored)
- Do you know how you can improve/what your next target is in (select curriculum area being monitored)

To ask subject leaders/co-ordinators

- What is your vision for the subject?
- What were the Ofsted findings about the subject?
- What are the strengths of the subject and areas for development? How do you know?
- How do you keep a track of standards and progress across the school in this subject?
- What improvements have you made/planned for this year in the subject?
- What resources does the school have for the subject and how are these organised?
- How do you help develop other teachers' skills in teaching this subject?

In the classroom

Question	Possible features of answer	Notes of answer
Help me to understand how you plan your lessons: how do you get from the National Curriculum to deciding what Karen or Tom will be doing in Science today?	National Curriculum Key stage plan Scheme of Work Year/termly/weekly/daily plans Individual plans	
How do you judge how well pupils are learning and making progress?	Questioning in lessons Marking Assessments, including tests SATs Target-setting and achieving Value-added data	
What learning resources are available to your pupils and how do they learn effectively?	ICT – access to computers Use of library Classroom library Use of basics like pens and pencils. Good labelling Borrowed resources	
How do you cope with the needs of different pupils?	Boys v. girls Most able/ SEN English as an Additional Language Badly Behaved Disabled	
How do you decide to seat children and arrange the classroom? Does it ever vary and why?	Ability groups Mixed or single age groups Boy-girl patterns Different for different activities	
How do you encourage parents to be involved in their children's learning?	Regular contact Reports Parent evenings Letters Diaries	

Communication

- How are parents kept informed of progress?
- How do you gather parents' views? Has action been taken on their views?
- What steps are taken to encourage parents to support their children in reading/writing at home?

Annex B - Record for a governor's school visit.

NAME:	Date:
Governor Responsibility:	Staff seen during visit
Focus of previous visit (if applicable);	
Reason for visit (i.e. routine monitoring, specific focus):	
Links with School Improvement Plan	
Preparation/background to visit (eg reading policy, discussion with Head/teacher, LA focus)	
Information gathered during visit: (e.g. What you saw, what you learned, would you would like clarified. How long the visit lasted)	
Any key issues arising for the governing body (e.g. the way resources are allocated; the way the school communicates; progress in implementing a key policy)	
Action following governing body meeting (record any action agreed by the governing body with regard to this visit e.g. training for governors)	