

A Guide to Governor Visits to the School.

Governors need to be a part of a whole school self-evaluation strategy as critical friends, being both supportive and challenging. To achieve this, Governors should be able not only to recognise and celebrate success but to also ask relevant questions in order to further understand how the school (its' departments, subject areas etc) function (including what processes are undertaken to provide effective measurements of performance and pupil learning). Visits into School are an important part of the process already referred to but Governors **must** remember that their role on such visits is to observe and inform themselves.

There are basically four types of a visit to the School:

1. *A Social Visit:* Sports Day, School Plays and Concerts, Prize Giving and Religious festivals etc.
2. *An Informal Visit:* By personal arrangement with the Headteacher. To see the layout of the School (who works there) and gain an understanding of how the School is organised. *This is often useful for new Governors.*
3. *A Formal Visit:* Approved by the Governing Body for a specific purpose, i.e. to gather information to inform decision making by the whole Governing Body. *This is part of the monitoring and evaluation function of the Governing Body.*
4. *An Expected Visit:* Designated and planned Governor visits, especially by Governors with specific Link Governor responsibilities, e.g. Numeracy, Literacy, SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabled) etc.

All by arrangement with the Headteacher.

A Protocol For Visits:

The following sections list examples of good practice:

Before:

(a) Always make an Appointment when planning a visit into School but remember that members of Staff do not have to agree to an appointment if the timing of the visit is inconvenient (e.g. during periods of both Internal and External Examinations as well as during Ofsted Inspections etc).

(b) Governors should make sure that there is a clear purpose for the visit that has been agreed by the Headteacher and the Staff concerned. Is it linked to the School Improvement Plan and how does this determine the itinerary? Link Governors should arrange an Appointment with the designated Departmental/Area Learning Head to discuss how to proceed with the Link arrangement.

(c) Ensure that there is a clear agenda for the visit – times, meetings and items for discussion but be prepared to be flexible. Discuss with Staff, if there is time permitting, how they would like Governors to integrate into any lessons that they are to observe. Ascertain beforehand exactly what it is that you are observing.

(d) Governors should appraise themselves of any supporting information that is available within the School, e.g. Ofsted Reports, School Improvement/Development Plan, Performance data etc.

(e) Know beforehand (and advise those who don't know) what the outcome of your visit will be: a verbal report to either the Governing Body or a Committee, a written report available to all, an item in a newsletter etc.

During:

(f) Dress appropriately.

(g) Be punctual. Report to the School Office, upon arrival to and departure from, the School. Always sign in/sign out and wear the appropriate identification badge.

(h) Governors should be considerate in all parts of the School being aware that people are carrying out their roles within all areas of the building(s).

(i) If a classroom observation is part of the programme for the visit, decide with the Teacher concerned how you will be introduced and what your role will be (if this hasn't already been done during the pre-visit contact with the School).

(j) Remember that your visit isn't an Inspection (especially as you are not qualified to make such judgements) and avoid taking notes whilst you are discreetly observing lessons. *You are there to learn!*

(k) Get involved with the pupils if the Teacher has agreed beforehand that this would be appropriate.

(l) Although the Governor should be prepared to talk and show any interest, Teacher distraction, from his/her work, should be avoided at all costs. *So be courteous, friendly but not critical and interact but don't interrupt.*

(m) Remember why you are there and do not lose sight of the purpose of your visit.

(n) Listen to Staff – show that you are interested and enthusiastic.

NB: Governors may only enter a classroom/speak to pupils if invited to do so by a member of the Teaching Staff. Similarly, Governor access to the Staff Room is by invitation only from a member of the Teaching Staff.

After:

(o) Discuss what you have observed with the Teacher concerned. Use the opportunity to clarify any issue you are unclear about. For example, did your presence have any impact on the atmosphere in the classroom? If so, how?

(p) Refer to the purpose of the visit. Consider together whether it has been achieved.

(q) Thank the Teacher for supporting you in your role as a Governor. Be open, honest, and positive.

(r) Make notes as soon as possible after your observation while it is still fresh in your mind.

(s) Discuss your observations with the Headteacher, Departmental/Subject Area Head etc. Be prepared to take the comments of others on board.

(t) Agree with the Headteacher how and when you will report on your visit to the Governing Body.

(u) Write up your report, circulating a draft to the Headteacher and any Staff involved. Be prepared to amend it and aim to achieve a report that is agreed by those involved.

(v) Reflect on how the visit went.

(w) *Hope to be invited back.*

The “Do Nots”:

1. Do not just drop in at the School uninvited.
2. Do not act or carry items that suggest that your visit is an Inspection (this includes making notes and carrying a clipboard during the visit).
3. Do not quiz people too rigorously unless invited to do so and be careful about raising concerns about what may be School policy. If in doubt **don't** but talk about the relevant policy with the Headteacher at the end of the visit.
4. Do not be drawn in conversation into making criticisms of:
 - The Governing Body
 - The Headteacher
 - Any member of Staff
 - School policy.
5. Do not make promises on behalf of the Governing Body.
6. Do not make judgements about the professional expertise of the Teacher(s) (*as you are not qualified to do so*).
7. Do not arrive for the visit with any inflexible pre-conceived ideas.

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Source: This Guide is garnered from documentation provided by Dave Eccles (Onside Education Consultants) during the BGTG sponsored training course – “Role of Link Governors and Effective School Visits”.