

GOVERNING BODY PROTOCOL

School Visits

Formal visits should have a clear focus, ideally linked to priorities in the Federation's Development Plan. Governors have limited time, therefore, time spent on governors' visits should 'add value' both to the schools and to the effectiveness of the whole Governing Body.

Lay People

Governors visit the schools as lay people, not as inspectors, even where they have personal professional expertise in the particular subject area. A visit will only ever provide a snapshot of school life. It may not always give a full and balanced picture of the real state of affairs. That is why it is always important that the information and impressions gained by individual governors during a visit are cross referenced and, if necessary, revised in consultation with the Headteacher, appropriate member of staff or relevant Subject Leader.

Governors' visits should not be confined to the classroom.

Ideally governors should consider a series of different types of visits, some of which are focused on the classroom but others might include, for example:

- the school environment
- health and safety
- parents'/carers' consultation evenings
- meetings with senior staff
- shadowing staff and/or students
- looking at a sample of students' work in a particular subject area
- attending an assembly
- reporting on the school's extracurricular activities
- joining departmental scrutiny of students' workbooks
- Learning Walks with staff
- attend Student Council meetings.

Whatever focus is agreed, it is important that governors' visits link with issues in the Development Plan.

Teaching and learning

Governors do not undertake formal visits to judge the quality of teaching and learning in the schools.

This is a specialist skill which non-specialists are not equipped to undertake. The Headteacher is responsible for ensuring the quality of teaching and has a duty under the School Teacher Appraisal Regulations to ensure governors receive appropriate information on this key issue.

At TLF the Headteacher will provide governors with:

- details of systems used to monitor the quality of teaching;
- the professional support available to teachers to help them teach more effectively;
- the timescale and likely outcome/s of this support;
- the Headteacher's overall assessment of the quality of teaching in the school;

Governors will be entitled to have a clear view about the quality of teaching in the school, including the measures and timescales to address weaknesses.

If the Governing Body includes people from educational backgrounds i.e. retired Headteachers/advisers/inspectors a decision will be made about how best to employ such expertise on visits, especially to the classroom.

Observations

Observations will be for the Headteacher to decide. However, despite the expertise that such governors bring, they should not engage with staff about professional matters.

Governors should use their visits as occasions on which to collect information to report back to the Governing Body/ relevant committee on the progress of key priorities or initiatives in the federation's development plan. Planned and focused governors' visits contribute significantly to more informed decision making by the Governing Body.

Written reports

Governors' visit reports should, quite simply, give a layperson's account of what was seen and learnt by the governor conducting the visit and whether there are issues for the Governing Body to consider. It is helpful if governors record what they see and do on a standard form, which has been discussed and agreed with all the staff. Draft reports by governors should be read first by the Headteacher and Subject Leader before they are circulated to other members of the Governing Body.

Written reports, like all other documents for the Governing Body, should be available for public scrutiny after the Governing Body has seen them. They should not name individuals but they will identify post holders by title. Reports should not contain any criticisms but they may raise important strategic issues, which the Governing Body needs to consider.

Informal visits

Governors on informal visits attend in a more personal capacity, much as a parent might do, but always with the knowledge and approval of the Headteacher. Such visits add to individual governors' knowledge and understanding of the school and can strengthen relationships and foster trust and respect between governors and staff.

Informal visits can take many forms, for example, attending a play, concert or sports day; helping on school trips; listening to students reading or simply running a stall at a Parents' Evening. On the whole informal visits are generally easier and less daunting than formal visits. They should be seen as a valuable **complement to formal visits** – not an alternative

A Protocol for Governors' Visits

Governors are there to observe and inform themselves. They will intrude as little as possible on the teachers' time.

Governors attached to a department or class should arrange an appointment, with the Subject Leader (where they exist), to discuss how to proceed with the link arrangement.

Governors can go into classes when invited to do so by the teacher.

Governors can talk to students in class only when invited to do so by the teacher.

Governors can attend departmental or staff meetings when invited to do so.

Members of staff invite governors into the staff room if they wish.

Governors will not go into the staff room unless they are invited.

Governors will always make an appointment when they want to come into the school, not just drop in; the Headteacher will always be fully informed

Members of staff are always free to say that it is not convenient for a governor to come in at any particular time.

These informal contacts should not be used to raise individual problems that should properly be resolved by the Senior Leadership Team.

If governors see something that worries them, they will discuss this first with the Headteacher.

Planning and undertaking visits to one of the schools

Before

- Clarify the purpose of the visit. Is it linked to the Federation Development Plan? How does this determine the itinerary?
- Discuss an agenda with the Subject Leader, or relevant member of SLT, well in advance. Make sure that the date chosen is suitable for the purpose identified.
- Find out if there is a prompt sheet/checklist, agreed by staff and governors, to guide governors' visits.
- Time permitting, discuss the proposed agenda with any staff involved. How do they want governors to integrate into the lesson?
- Be clear beforehand exactly what you are observing. Try to prepare questions for staff in advance. The teacher may be able to guide you on this.
- Discuss with the Subject Leader or Line Manager if any supporting information is available – Ofsted report, Action Plan, performance data.

During

- Be punctual.
- Keep to the agreed timetable but be flexible
- Decide with the teacher how you will be introduced and what your role in the classroom will be.
- Get involved with the students if the teacher has agreed that this would be appropriate
- Remember it is a visit not an inspection.
- Observe discreetly. Remember that note taking can be disconcerting.
- Don't distract the teacher from his/her work but be prepared to talk and show interest.
- Be courteous, friendly not critical.
- Interact, don't interrupt.
- Remember why you are there. Don't lose sight of the purpose of your visit.
- Listen to staff
- Be interested and enthusiastic

After

- Discuss what you have observed with the teacher. 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?
- 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 and positive.
- Make notes as soon as possible after your observation while it is still fresh in your mind.
- Discuss your observations with the Headteacher. Be prepared to take the comments of others on board.
- Agree with the Headteacher how and when you will report on your visit to the Governing Body.
- Write up your report and circulate a draft to the Headteacher and Senior Leaders. Be prepared to amend it. Aim to achieve a report that is agreed by those involved.
- Reflect: how did that go?

What to do and not to do when reporting back on visits

Do / Don't

- Prepare the report in draft as soon after the visit as possible. (Governors visiting as a pair will need to get together to discuss observations and conclusions.)
- *Be lengthy. A single A4 sheet is often sufficient.*
- Have the report typed if possible. (For those governors without access to a computer, the school will be able to help.)
- *Write like an inspector (even if you are one), and don't make written observations about the quality of teaching and learning. If there are concerns, raise them with the Headteacher verbally.*
- Discuss the draft with the Headteacher, in case there are mistakes or misunderstandings that need to be clarified. (A visit can only be a snapshot of the school or a class at a particular time.)
- *Name staff or students except in exceptional circumstances (e.g. when in a teacher's class for a lengthy period of time). Check with the Headteacher if you are unsure.*
- Give a copy to the Clerk to the Governors to circulate with the papers for the next meeting, following which (like other Governing Body papers) it will be available for public inspection.
- *Hand round the report at the meeting; Governors will have had no opportunity to read it and give it proper attention.*
- Come to the meeting prepared to make a short verbal introduction to the report and answer any questions other governors may have.
- *Go through your report in full detail, or read it out verbatim. This lengthens meetings unnecessarily.*
- Think to yourself: what can I do to make my next visit even more effective?

Governor's visit record

Name

Date

Purpose of visit

Links with the Strategic Development Plan

Governor observations and comments

Any key issues arising for the Governing Body

Action following Governing Body meeting

What should be monitored and evaluated?

Outcomes

Achievement and standards

Assessments and test results, attainment and progress of specific groups of children
e.g. boys/girls, children from ethnic minority groups, SEND, Pupil Premium, G&T

Personal development and wellbeing

Student attendance

Students' behaviour, attitudes, independence and self esteem

Student exclusions

Student involvement in extracurricular Activities

Provision

Quality of teaching and learning

The school's curriculum

Impact of leadership and management

Staffing and budget

Number of applications for admission

School ethos/culture

Staff morale, attendance and commitment

Partnership with parents, agencies, and the wider community

Views of parents, students, staff and the community

The learning environment.

Monitoring the federation's culture / ethos

You could use the following success criteria and look for evidence. It is not an all-embracing list, and you will be able to add to it every time you do the exercise.

Success criteria - What I saw or heard (evidence)

There are high expectations of all

- School vision and aims displayed
- School targets displayed
- Staff follow up students who are not adhering to the school's standards – uniform, behaviour
- Staff handbook describes standards for performance, behaviour
- School rules are in evidence
- 'We can do ...'

Mutual respect is evident in the way that staff and students relate to each other

- Students work without disturbing others
- Students are encouraged to work cooperatively on group tasks
- Students do not interrupt each other or staff
- Staff do not interrupt each other or students
- Students do not intimidate or belittle each other
- Teachers maintain control without the use of threats, humiliation
- The behaviour policy emphasises 'catch them being good'
- Teachers are courteous when they speak to students and the reverse is true
- All staff have access to appropriate accommodation and facilities, staff rooms, work rooms, offices
- 'What do you think?'

The federation promotes positive attitudes to ethnic and cultural diversity

- Staff and students are aware of the federation's Equality policy
- The schools use the expertise, skills and knowledge of people from diverse backgrounds
- Students are encouraged to recognise and respect social, ethnic and cultural differences and similarities
- Positive images of people from various ethnic groups and their cultural backgrounds are displayed in the schools
- Celebrations of festivals of different cultures and religious beliefs
- Federation diary/calendar shows full range of ethnic religious festivals
- Special dietary needs are catered for
- Curriculum content and resources reflect ethnic and cultural diversity

Students have rights as well as Responsibilities

- Students are exercising leadership skills
- Student council information is displayed
- Students are acting as mentors / buddies / counsellors for their peers
- The Headteacher and staff refer to students by name
- Routine management does not interrupt teaching and learning
- Students are aware of and articulate about their rights and responsibilities
- High quality teaching and resources support learning
- Students help to determine the rules and sanctions
- Suggestion box
- Exit surveys
- Staff interactions with students model the values of the school

Students' achievements are celebrated

- A wide range of work is displayed, not just excellent work
- Displays are up to date and in good condition
- Press cuttings books in reception area
- Displays, photos cover a range of achievements academic, social, cultural, sporting, both inside and outside the schools
- Display in entrance area shows destinations of most recent cohort of leavers
- Positive and public appreciation of effort as well as success awards assemblies, badges, stickers, certificates
- Teachers show pride in students' work
- Students show pride in each other's work
- Prefects chosen for their personal qualities regardless of their academic achievements
- Regular home school communication about students' efforts and successes
- Behaviour credit cards

The school's environment is looked after by all

- Students and staff show respect for people, living things, property and the environment
- Litter free, clean, tidy corridors, reception area, classrooms and toilets
- Interactive wall displays are used, not damaged
- Displays are up to date
- Equipment all in good working order

Federation schools performance monitoring questions for Governors

Standards Quality of Teaching Leadership and Management

- How are the schools currently performing?
- Are our children making better than expected rates of progress?
- How do standards in year groups, classes, and / or subjects compare with national standards?
- How does the schools' performance compare with LA averages?
- How does the schools' performance compare with that of similar schools?
- How does the schools' current performance compare with its previous performance? What is the trend in results over the last three years?
- Have some subjects / year groups shown a marked improvement this year? If so, why?
- Are some groups of students doing better than others? If so, why? (E.g. looked after children, gender, ethnicity, SEN)
- What are the attitudes of students towards their learning?
- How do teachers plan for their lessons?
- How do teachers ensure that all students are appropriately challenged?
- How do teachers explain to students what they are going to teach?
- How do teachers keep track of progress?
- What do teachers do when they see students underachieving?
- To what extent do teachers seek the views of their students about learning?
- Do the schools know what teaching styles work and why?
- Can these styles be applied in those parts of each school where results need to improve?
- What professional support do teachers get to help them teach more effectively?
- How do support staff contribute to teaching and learning?
- How do support staff support students to ensure they have equal access to opportunities to learn and develop?
- How do support staff support students to help them make their own decisions and take responsibility for their own actions?
- What professional support do support staff get to help to maintain and improve their contribution to raising student achievement?

- Does the Governing Body and the leadership teams provide a clear vision and sense of common purpose among key stakeholders?
- foster high aspirations?
- maintain an explicit focus on student achievement?
- plan strategically?
- adopt a proactive stance to change
- demonstrate a commitment to equality and inclusion?
- promote the personal development and wellbeing of learners
- ensure that rigorous self-evaluation keeps the Self Evaluation Form current and informs plans?
- make effective use of performance data
- ensure sound financial and resource management?
- practise distributed leadership?
- ensure that all judgements about performance are based on sound evidence.