



St Mary's  
Catholic Primary School and Nursery

## GOVERNOR VISITS TO SCHOOL POLICY & PROTOCOL

Every Governing Body has a statutory responsibility to establish and monitor its school's policies and evaluate the effectiveness of the school and its curriculum. Governors are also held to account for their own school's performance. It is a requirement of the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) that Governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school, and will test that assumption during a school inspection.

One of the best and most effective ways in which a Governor can get to know about our school is to visit during the school day and see it at work, talking to staff and pupils and finding out what happens in the school and the classrooms. If school and classroom visits are done well by Governors they will add immeasurably to Governors' understanding of our school, its staff and its pupils.

This policy also includes a copy of our agreed Governors' Visits report pro-forma which will help provide discussion on the issues raised and also provides a formal record for OfSTED of the Governors' structured involvement in the work and life of the school. It should not, however, form part of any other evidence base e.g. a member of staff's appraisal.

Four types of Governor visits are suggested:

Type of Visit	Governors Involved	Staff Involved	Frequency	Organised by
<b>The school in operation</b>	All on a rota basis linked to their sub committee  Use Discovery Mornings	Teaching Staff Senior Leadership Team including School Business Manager	3 times per year / once per term	Committee Chair
<b>Classroom Visits</b>	Named Governors with specific responsibility	Teaching Staff Team Leaders Subject Leaders	3 times per year / once per term	Named Governors
<b>School Improvement Focus</b>	TLA Committee members	Senior Leadership Team Subject Leaders	3 times per year / once per term	Chair of TLA Committee
<b>Learning Walk</b>	All Governors	All Staff	3 times per year / once per term	All Governors

## **WHY VISIT?**

A Governing Body has a duty to oversee the direction and policies of the school, to monitor its standards and to be held accountable for its conduct and performance. Visits should be undertaken as:

### **A. PART OF THE STRATEGIC PROGRAMME TO**

- Improve Governor knowledge of the school, its staff, needs, priorities, strengths and weaknesses
- Monitor and assess the priorities as outlined in the development plan
- Help the Governing Body fulfil its statutory duties.
- Acquire knowledge to enable the Governing Body to challenge as appropriate

### **B. CRITICAL FRIEND**

- Monitoring, and evaluating plans, budgets, standards of education and achievement

### **C. ACCOUNTABILITY**

- Annual reports and meetings, publication of minutes, surveys of parental views

At St Mary's our aim is to link Governors to subjects, classes or year groups as a way of monitoring the curriculum and also to the school priorities. This will involve individual Governors visiting the school and classrooms and taking the opportunity to discuss issues with the Deputy Head Teacher and relevant subject co-ordinator.

A number of Governors have specific responsibilities e.g. Safeguarding, Special Needs, English, Maths, Health and Safety, Race Equality and Cared For Children. This reinforces the need to visit not just the school but the classroom on a reasonably regular basis. It also allows Governors, however, to focus on particular areas, e.g.

- the management of the school's resources
- the condition of the building and its use
- the development of teaching and support staff
- a specific subject area
- a particular year group or class

By visiting school and becoming better informed Governors will be:

- more aware of the needs of the school
- more able to approach staff to meet those needs
- well placed to support the school in bringing to the attention of the Local Authority or Diocese any matters of concern
- in a good position to support the school in its community

**A Governor visits school to:**

- learn so that they can increase the Governing Body's first-hand knowledge base, informing strategic decision making
- keep under review the way in which the school is operating
- experience the impact and progress of the implementation of the school improvement plan and school policies – meeting with the subject lead
- demonstrate to staff that the Governing Body takes its responsibilities very seriously
- establish and develop good professional relationships with staff, especially those that are linked with individual areas of responsibility, e.g. English, Mathematics, Special Needs or Health and Safety.
- see in context some of the monitoring systems employed by the school
- demonstrate that the Governing Body is contributing to the school's self-evaluation process
- show support and encouragement to staff and children

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO GOVERNORS AND STAFF?

Governors	Staff
To establish and develop effective relationships with the staff	To get to know and build positive relationships with Governors
To have a greater understanding of the context of the school and pupils' needs	
To recognise and celebrate success	To feel valued
To monitor the implementation of the school improvement plan	To appreciate and value the role and responsibilities of Governors.
To increase their first-hand knowledge of the school which will inform strategic decisions	
To understand the environment in which staff work and teachers teach	To ensure Governors have an understanding of the reality of the classroom and the school
To see policies and schemes of work in practice	
To find out what resources are used and needed	To showcase resources in action
To show support and encouragement to staff and pupils	
To demonstrate that the Governing Body is contributing to the schools self -valuation process	
To develop links with a class, year group or subject area	
To develop individual Governor roles in terms of specific areas of responsibility	To share an understanding

## WHAT ARE GOVERNORS' VISITS NOT ABOUT?

The main point to emphasise is that Governors' visits to classrooms are not a form of inspection in terms of making judgements about the professional expertise of members of staff, especially with regard to the quality of teaching.

### A school visit is also not about:

- Checking on the progress of your own or known children
- Monopolising staff time
- Arriving with inflexible or pre-conceived ideas
- Pursuing personal agendas or issues.

## HOW OFTEN SHOULD I VISIT?

This will essentially depend on the number of Governors available to take on the responsibility.

## **WHO SCHEDULES THE VISITS?**

Visits should always be agreed with the Head Teacher or a member of the Senior Leadership team. (i.e. Deputy Head Teacher, Team Leaders or School Business Manager.)

## **VISIT PREPARATION**

An important part of the visit preparation is to establish the protocols that are to be observed or more simply 'the ground rules'. It is essential that a disproportionate amount of time should not be spent on planning and arranging visits. If you plan in advance what should always and never happen before, during and after a visit, the ground rules will be firmly established and should avoid any problems and hopefully make the visit more beneficial and enjoyable for all involved.

## WHAT SHOULD AND SHOULD NOT HAPPEN?

	ALWAYS	NEVER
<b>Before Visit</b> (at least a week )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Review the action points relevant in the School Improvement Plan</li> <li>✓ Agree the purpose of the visit with the Head Teacher or member of the SLT.</li> <li>✓ Arrange details of the visit</li> <li>✓ Try to visit at different times of the day</li> <li>✓ Draw up general plan / schedule</li> <li>✓ Discuss with the member of the SLT what is the focus or context</li> <li>✓ Agree level of confidentiality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Turn up unannounced for a focussed, formal visit</li> <li>✓ Expect to enter classrooms without prior arrangement and a reasonable amount of notice</li> </ul>
<b>During</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Stay on schedule</li> <li>✓ Report to school Office and sign in</li> <li>✓ Fulfil the agreed purpose of the visit</li> <li>✓ Jot down discussion points</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Monopolise staff</li> <li>✓ Interrupt teaching</li> </ul>
<b>After</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Thank the staff</li> <li>✓ Discuss the observations as soon as possible after the visit</li> <li>✓ Feedback to Head Teacher</li> <li>✓ Discuss any H&amp;S issues</li> <li>✓ Complete the Governor Visit pro forma</li> <li>✓ Share pro forma with Head Teacher</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Leave without a word of thanks or some interaction with the staff</li> <li>✓ Discuss your observations with other members of staff, parents</li> </ul>

## **WHAT SHOULD I DO?**

A week before a classroom visit there are some questions you should clarify with the Head Teacher, member of the Senior Leadership Team or teacher:

- When I come into the classroom, where would you like me to sit?
- What should I do if a pupil asks for help?
- Would you like me to be involved in the lesson?
- Do you mind me asking questions if I'm not sure about detail when helping e.g. If I'm not sure about the spelling policy, the methods used for calculations, how to help pupils read unknown words?
- What should I do if I see a pupil behaving inappropriately?

## **THE FOCUS OF THE VISIT**

Remember a visit can be either to see the school generally in operation or a specific classroom visit. Visits can focus on the following:

### **The School in Operation**

- The condition and maintenance of the premises
- The use made of buildings and premises
- Security on site
- Break and lunch times
- The monitoring of Health and Safety
- The use and condition of resources e.g. furniture and subject equipment
- Office procedures e.g. budget monitoring
- To see a class or teacher led assembly
- Pupil behaviour around the school

## **The Classroom Visit**

- Observation of particular curriculum areas i.e. English, Mathematics, Science, Computing, Design Technology (D&T), History, Geography, Religious Education, Art and Design, Music, Physical Education.
- The implementation of the curriculum
- Gain an understanding of the process of assessment and tracking pupil cohorts and their attainment
- Assessing a group of pupils working together on a task –

The impact of learning on educational visits

To see the impact of the religious characteristics of our school

The impact of class sizes

The deployment of support staff

To see a class or teacher led assembly (to consider SMSC)

Pupil Voice

Behaviour for Learning

Work Scrutiny School Improvement Focus (SIF) School Improvement Focus meetings will be lengthy discussions and visits by the TLA sub committee and the senior leadership of the School. These visits will be based around the following questions:

- how well leaders, managers and pursue excellence, modelling professional standards in all of their work?
- What is the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation?
- How does the school use performance management and effectiveness of strategies for improving teaching, including the extent to which the school takes account of the 'Teachers' Standards'
- how well leaders and managers ensure that the curriculum raises outcomes for children?
- how well leaders and managers demonstrate the capacity to bring about further improvement?



- what is the impact of middle leadership and what is the extent to which schools are adequately developing their middle leadership / succession planning and the development of future leaders in the school
- what is the impact of governance?
- how effectively does school promote the confidence and engagement of parents, including by encouraging the use of Parent View and the parental survey
- what is the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements to ensure that there is safe recruitment and that all pupils are safe?

### **Learning Walks**

The Governing Body oversees the strategic operation of the school so it is important that its members have a clear understanding of how the school works and how children are learning. To do this, we suggest that governors undertake Learning Walks. These should be planned beforehand, be part of an annual schedule and be integral to the monitoring and evaluation calendar. Confidentiality should be emphasised and maintained at all times e.g. during the planning, the implementation and in any follow-up discussions.

The purposes of Learning Walks are to;

- Increase Governors' knowledge and understanding of the school through seeing at first-hand how it operates.
- Experience the impact of plans and policies
- Demonstrate to the school community that Governors are taking their roles and responsibilities seriously
- Establish and develop good working relationships
- Be able to contribute effectively to the school's self-evaluation
- Show support and encouragement and be able to celebrate successes and achievements
- See evidence of work matching the individual needs of pupils
- Be able to see that resources and the learning environment are adapted to meet the needs as appropriate.

There are different types of Learning Walks which should be tailored to the priorities of the school. General Often a first visit/ new Governor e.g.

- Introductory sessions, viewing the entrance and reception areas along with corridors and administrative areas
- To see the playground in operation
- To visit classrooms and look at displays and 'Learning Walls'
- To talk with children Specific subject focus e.g. focus on
- A specific priority or strand within the School Development / Improvement Plan
- How children learn maths; how children learn in literacy; how well a particular programme or scheme is working or how children use ICT to learn etc
- Displays, resources and equipment used in that subject area
- Staff's contribution to that subject area

Specific subject focus e.g. focus on

- A specific priority or strand within the School Development / Improvement Plan
- How children learn maths; how children learn in literacy; how well a particular programme is working or how children use ICT to learn etc.
- Displays, resources and equipment used in that subject area
- Staff's contribution to that subject area Specific aspect e.g. focus on
- How Health and Safety is carried out and how policies are adhered to
- How the school ensures that it complies with all the requirements regarding Statutory Assessments (SATs, Teacher Assessment, returning papers)
- Behaviour
- Pupil Premium and its impact
- Inclusion and Disadvantaged Pupils
- Use of support staff to support children's learning
- Lunchtimes and break times
- Breakfast Club or after school activities
- How the school develops children's thinking skills

Following Learning Walks it is vital that there is feedback to key staff and that a record of the visit is completed and shared with the Governing Body. The Head Teacher and Deputy Head Teacher will provide governors with a Learning Walk template on request which aligns to their agreed focus.

## **VISITING TIPS**

### ***Please ...***

- check in and out with the Head teacher or a senior member of staff and wear your visitor / governor ID
- remember governors have a strategic overview and are not responsible for managing the day to day operational detail of the school
- listen carefully, concentrate and show interest
- begin and end your visit in a positive way, finding some things to genuinely praise
- be punctual, polite and sensitive
- do your homework before you visit and prepare any questions you wish to ask
- invite pupils and staff to answer your questions
- avoid times when staff are particularly busy, for example, the first and last weeks of terms, SAT's etc.
- always reply to special invitations to attend events and make an effort to be there - this does much to encourage pupils and staff. Lots of information can be found on the newsletter / website to enable you to plan ahead
- earn the respect and confidence of staff by not talking about your visit except to the Head and when reporting to governors (this is very important). Always send the Head teacher a copy of your written report before sending it to the clerk to be circulated
- leave pupils and staff hoping you will come again soon!
- Smile! Please be relaxed around the staff and pupils

### ***Please don't ...***

- drop in unannounced
- destroy confidence, it is a fragile commodity
- talk too much - you have come to learn
- remain silent, this can send negative messages
- get involved in discussion of personal staffing matters
- sit at the back of the class making notes
- always expect immediate answers
- behave like an inspector

## **AFTER THE VISIT**

We all need feedback after we have been visited or observed. This can be a sensitive area but it is essential that warm thanks are given and a comment on the focus agreed. Remember as a Governor you are making the visit on behalf of the Governing Body and not in a personal

capacity. It isn't appropriate to make either judgements or promises on behalf of the Governing Body

Staff should also realise that Governors are not able to address everyday matters that would normally be sorted out as a matter of good line management. Any expression of concern should be shared with the Head Teacher as soon as possible. Comments should be limited to the focus of the visit unless health and safety is being compromised.

This should always be reported immediately. Oral and written feedback should be given to: •  
The member(s) of staff involved

- The Head Teacher
- The appropriate Committee or Governing Body Brief feedback should be given to the member(s) of staff at the end of the visit. Governors should agree with the Head Teacher the level of detail that should be fed back to the member of staff. Written feedback using the Governor's Visit Form (**see Appendix 1**) should be completed as soon as possible and copies given to the Head Teacher who would make a copy available to the member of staff. The reports will be discussed with the appropriate Committee and/or Governing Body and made available as required.

#### **MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE GOVERNING BODY'S POLICY**

The TLA Committee will review this policy in line with its agreed cycle/procedures and report back to the Governing Body.

The review will consider:

- Are we doing what we set out to do?
- Are our visits achieving the potential benefits identified in the policy?
- Have I learned more about the school?
- Are we better informed and enabled to make sensible decisions?
- Have we developed a further method of direct communication with staff?
- Do staff feel affirmed and valued?
- Have I helped the Governing Body fulfil its duties?
- Have there been any unexpected benefits?
- How can we make the policy and practice even better?

## Appendix 1: Available on Governor Hub



### GOVERNOR VISIT FEEDBACK & REPORT FORM

Governors' visits to schools during the school day give you insights that you can acquire in no other way. If you are to carry out your strategic, monitoring, executive and accountability roles as a governor, you need to have an understanding of the way our school works and a feel for the dynamics of it. There is no better way of gaining this information than by visiting us during the working day. Being a governor should be an exciting, rewarding and productive experience and visiting our school should be part of this. First hand experiences of the school help to bring our governing body meetings to life. They introduce a reality that can otherwise be missing. The experiences can prompt questions to the Head teacher and enable you as governors to be more effective in the role of critical friend. Visits allow governors to develop relationships with staff, pupils, parents and members of the local community. This provides a two-way flow of ideas that helps to inform governors' decision-making.

<b>Name of Governor</b>		<b>Date of Visit</b>	
<b>Focus of Visit</b>			

Do the pupils react positively to the presence of others?	
Are the pupils friendly and relaxed in their learning environment?	
Do the pupils have an understanding of what they are doing?	
Are the pupils interested and motivated to do their work?	
Do the pupils have a good attitude to learning?	
Are the pupils well behaved and courteous?	
Is the learning environment good?	
Are the needs of the pupils being met equally?	
Are there opportunities for the pupils to work together and also independently?	
Is there a balance between questions asked and answered by boys and girls?	
Was there a variety of activities?	
Were the children well behaved and courteous?	
Are the children listened to?	
Is learning evident?	
Did you see evidence of British Values? E.g mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs and for those without faith	

Area / Staff Visited		
Purpose of the visit		
What did you see?		
What did you hear?		
What did you enjoy?		
What did you learn?		
How were different groups being supported? EAL PP SEND LAC G/B		
How was IT being used?		
Activities you were involved in		
Next steps		
Items to report back in committee		
How has the visit contributed towards developing your role as governor?		
Governor Signature		
Date		
Report shared with		
Signed		
Date		

Governor visits could also include opportunities to observe a wide range of other activities including: staff training sessions; sports competitions; assemblies; music and drama performances etc.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Governor monitoring can take several forms:**

- Pupil interviews
- Meeting with subject/leader
- Snapshot of a lesson
- Walk around the school

### **Aims:**

- To know and understand the level of enjoyment pupils have for the subject
- To understand what pupils like best/least in the subject
- To know the standards achieved in the subject
- To know what steps are being taken to improve the subject area
- To report main findings back to the full Governing Body.

### **Pupil Interviews: (suggested questions to ask a small group of children when walking around the classrooms)**

These questions will help you gain an understanding of pupil attitudes toward the subject.

- 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)

### **Key questions for subject/learning link governor discussion with Subject Leaders**

- What is your vision for the subject?
- Do you have a set of minimum expectations?
- What were the OFSTED findings about the subject? (This question is mainly for Literacy, maths, science and ICT. Other subjects may have been the focus of a curriculum inspection.)
- What are the strengths of the subject? How do you know?
- How do you keep a track of standards and progress in the 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?
- Are there any additional resource needs?
- How do you help develop other teachers' skills in teaching the subject?

## **Appendix 3**

### **Things to observe when visiting a classroom**

- Relationship between staff and pupils
- Relationships 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 the pupils are grouped
- How different abilities are catered for
- Children's work
- Displays
- Ethos – the atmosphere and values that are evident (are expectations high, praise, encouragement, equality of opportunity apparent?)
- Use of space and working conditions
- Quality and quantity of equipment and resources