

St Anne's RC Primary and Nursery School Policy for Governing Body Visits

Rationale

Formal visits should have a clear focus, ideally linked to priorities in the School Improvement Plan. Governors have limited time, therefore, time spent on governors' visits should 'add value' both to the school and to the effectiveness of the whole governing body.

Governors visit 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 what goes on in St Anne's. 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 checked and, if necessary, revised in consultation with the Headteacher or appropriate member of staff.

Governors' school 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 playground, the school environment, health and safety, parents'/carers' consultation evenings, meetings with senior staff; shadowing staff and/or pupils; looking at a sample of pupils' work (more able, average, less able) in a particular subject area; attending a school assembly; reporting on the school's extracurricular activities, joining departmental scrutiny of pupils' workbooks, meeting senior staff to discuss homework setting and marking.

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

Teaching and learning

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

This is a specialist skill which nonspecialists are not equipped to undertake. The headteacher is responsible for ensuring the quality of teaching. Headteachers have a duty under the School Teacher Appraisal Regulations to ensure governors receive appropriate information on this key issue.

They should 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.
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Governors are entitled to have a clear view about the quality of teaching in their 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 needs to be made about how best to employ such people on visits, especially to the classroom. It may be felt appropriate for them to accompany the headteacher on classroom observations – this is 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 school development plan. Planned and focused governors' visits contribute significantly to more informed decisionmaking by the governing body.

Written reports

Governors' visit reports should be quite simple, giving 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. (See *Template for Governor School Visit*.)

Draft reports by governors should be read first by the Headteacher 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 pupils reading aloud or simply running a stall at the school fair.

On the whole informal visits are generally 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.

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 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 pupils 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 school, not just drop in.
- 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 teacher and Headteacher.

Planning and undertaking school visits

Before

- Check to see if there is a policy for governors' visits
- Clarify the purpose of the visit. Is it linked to the School Improvement Plan? How does this determine the itinerary?
- Discuss an agenda with the headteacher 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 headteacher if any supporting information is available – Ofsted report, improvement 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 children if the teacher has agreed that this would be appropriate.
- Remember it is a visit not an inspection. Observe discreetly. Remember that notetaking
- 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,
- 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 head and any staff involved. Be
- prepared to amend it. Aim to achieve a report that is agreed by those involved.
- Reflect: how did that go?

Reviewed: September 2016