



St Mary's RC Primary School Governors' School Visit Policy and Protocol

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The committee with oversight for this policy	Standards
Policy to be approved by	Full Governors
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St Mary's RC Primary School

Governors' School Visit Policy and Protocol

Introduction

The governing body has a duty to oversee the direction and policies of the school, to monitor its standards and be held to account for its conduct and performance. Visiting the school is the best way to learn how it functions, and to keep under review how it operates so that you can increase the governing body's first-hand knowledge, informing strategic decision making.

Visits should generally relate to the priorities determined by the School Improvement Plan (SIP) or evaluations in the Self Evaluation Report (SER) or Catholic Self Evaluation Document (CSED). The governing body should plan visits to cover a broad range of the school's work and each visit should be agreed and have a clear purpose. Governors should arrange their visits with the Headteacher who has the responsibility of the day-to-day management of the school.

Potential benefits for governors:

- To improve governor knowledge of the ethos of the school
- To assess the effectiveness and validity of the SIP, SER and CSED
- To improve understanding of the implementation and impact of curriculum areas
- To monitor and understand achievements and goals for specific curriculum areas
- To recognise and celebrate success
- To support and develop relationships with the staff and children
- To understand the environment in which adults and children work
- To be informed about a particular area of the school site
- To monitor policies in action and contribute effectively to the governing body's monitoring role
- To inform decision making
- To find out what resources are needed and prioritise them

Potential benefits for staff:

- To ensure governors understand the reality of the classroom
- To get to know governors
- To understand better the governors' roles and responsibilities
- To have an opportunity to reflect on practice through discussion
- To have an opportunity to share elements and features of the curriculum
- To highlight the need for particular resources

What a visit is NOT about:

- A form of inspection to make judgements about professional expertise of the teacher, to comment on their teaching or classroom management
- Checking on progress of own children or that of any other
- Pursuing a personal agenda
- Monopolising school/teacher time

Annual programme of visits

A programme of visits should be planned and spread evenly across the school year in consultation with the Headteacher and/or member of staff responsible for the area being monitored/visited

Ideally every area should be visited once a year in order to see and report back on developments

Preparing for a visit

- Check the agreed policy for governors' visits
- Clarify the purpose of the visit. Is it linked to the SIP, SER or CSED? What are the relevant school policies? How does this determine the activities you are interested in?
- Discuss the format and agenda with the Headteacher and or Subject Leader, well in advance. Make sure that the date chosen is suitable. Try to keep to the date agreed. Teachers will have planned for your visit.
- Use the Governor Visit Report Form – see Appendix 1
- Send the proposed agenda to the staff involved. Ask how they want governors to integrate? It might be possible for you to see a copy of any documents beforehand. Discuss with the SLT if any supporting information is available – Diocesan, EAS/LA report, improvement plan, evaluation report, assessment data.

- Be clear beforehand about what you are looking for. Try to prepare questions and submit to staff in advance.

During the visit

- Remember you are making the visit on behalf of the governing body.
- Be punctual and keep to the agreed timetable but be flexible
- If the visit involves a learning walk or meeting groups of learners**
- Decide with the staff how you will be introduced and what your role in the classroom will be
- Get involved with the children
- Ask to speak with children, discreetly, in a lesson or after a lesson – These questions will help you gain an understanding of pupil attitudes toward their learning:
 - Tell me about what you are learning today
 - Do you like... (curriculum area being monitored)?
 - Tell me what you most like doing in... (curriculum area being monitored)
 - What helps you with your learning in... (curriculum area being monitored)?
 - Is there anything you don't like in... (curriculum area being monitored)?
 - What would make you like this... (curriculum area being monitored)more?
- **Remember it is a visit not an inspection**
- Observe discreetly, interact when appropriate, don't interrupt
- Don't distract the staff during the lesson from their work but be prepared to talk and show interest
- Be courteous, friendly not critical
- Remember why you are there. Don't lose sight of the purpose of your visit
- Listen to staff and pupils.

Things to look for 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
- Purpose/relevance of lessons
- Coherence of the curriculum/connection between subjects
- Children's work
- Displays and use of these
- Ethos — the atmosphere and values that are evident (is the Catholic life of the school given a prominence in the classroom and communal areas? Are high expectations, encouragement, praise, equality of opportunity apparent?)
- Use of space and working conditions (are areas clean, free of clutter, in good condition?)
- Quality and quantity of equipment and resources (are there enough? Are they in good condition? Are they being used effectively/correctly?)

Curriculum Subject Visits

If your visit involves monitoring a subject area you may be asked to participate in a Learning Walk. This should take around 20 minutes. During the Learning Walk you can expect staff to speak with you about areas listed below. Please raise questions if you need clarification or more information. Ideally the Learning Walk should take place while the children are in lessons. Make use of the learning walk to understand what happens in school and lessons.

Possible questions for staff when monitoring a particular subject area

- How does the SIP, SER, CSED reference your subject/area of responsibility and do you contribute to this?
- What is your vision for your subject/area of responsibility?
- Do you have a set of minimum expectations?
- What were the last Diocesan, ESTYN or LA review findings about your subject/area of responsibility?
- What are the strengths of the subject/area of responsibility? How do you know?
- How do you keep a track of standards and progress in the subject/area of responsibility?
- What differences (if any) are obvious between specific groups of pupils?
- What professional development have you undertaken/planned this year?
- What improvements have you made/planned for this year in your subject/area of responsibility?
- What resources does the school have for the subject/area of learning and how are these organised?

- How has the budget for this area been spent?
- Are there any additional resource needs?
- How do you help develop other staff's skills in teaching/supporting the subject/area of learning?
- How do you know the subject/area of learning promotes the Catholic ethos of the school?
- How is the teaching of this subject different to that in other schools?

After your visit

- Discuss what you have observed with the teacher/member of staff. 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/member of staff 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.
- Reflect: How did that go? Has the visit enhanced relationships? Have I learned more about the school? Have I helped the governing body fulfil its duties?

Reporting your visit

- Write a short summary 'as a lay governor' of what you learned during the visit and the overall impression that was made. This will be easier if the visit had a focus. Use Appendix 1.
- Be careful not to name children
- You must send a draft to the Head and any staff involved for them to check the accuracy and clarity. Be prepared to discuss and amend it. Aim to achieve a report that is agreed by those involved.
- The clerk will circulate this at the next governing body meeting.

Visit Focus

Although not an exhaustive list visits may focus on:

- Particular area of the curriculum or school life
- Particular act of Collective Worship
- The Catholic life and Mission of the school

- Particular key stages or classes
- Behaviour management and school ethos
- The use made of the buildings or the site
- The condition and maintenance of the premises
- Additional Learning Needs
- The use of ICT computing equipment
- The impact on the school of any changes e.g. reorganisation of classes, Lockdown
- Interaction of particular groups of children during lessons

Informal Visits

Visits may also take place in an informal capacity. It is vital that everyone is clear about the capacity in which they are visiting and not to confuse the role.

- The chair making a regular visit to see the Headteacher/SLT
- To lend a helping hand with a school event
- To get information from the office relating to a committee meeting
- To help in a class
- To speak to a teacher in relation to your own child
- Attend a school function or educational visit

There is no need to record informal visits on Appendix 1.

Appendices

- Appendix 1

Appendix 1: Governors' Visit Report Form

Date: _____

Name of Governor: _____

Area of responsibility: _____

Key school priority relevant to this visit: _____

Staff seen during visit: _____

Staff/pupil groups spoken to during visit: _____

Focus of previous visits (if applicable): _____

Reason for visit: (highlight): routine monitoring specific focus* other*
(*please state)

Preparation/background to visit (highlight): read policy discussion with
Head/staff other (please state)

Information gathered during visit:

Things I liked:

Things I need clarified:

Any identified area/s for governor training:

Date for next visit (if relevant):_____

In summary, what I have learned is.....

[illegible]