



Amotherby Community Primary School

Governor school visits model policy

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Date of policy creation/review	Reasons for review	Date of adoption	Date of next review
November 2021	New Document	December 2021	December 2024

Amendments	Date	Details
1		
2		
3		

Purpose of visits carried out by governors

Visiting school on a planned, regular basis allows governors to:

- better understand their school's strengths and areas for development
- determine if agreed policies and procedures are working in practice
- identify how resources are being used
- show staff and pupils that they are interested in the life, work and achievements of a school
- experience the culture and ethos of the school

Monitoring visits should focus on:

- strategic priorities and key policies agreed by the governing board
- the evaluation of progress: are the things people say are happening actually happening?
- seeking assurance that the needs of pupils are being met (such as safeguarding and SEND)

Frequency of visits

The frequency of governance visits should be in accordance with the schedule established by the governing board and agreed with school leaders and relevant staff. Visits should be scheduled to allow governors to see relevant activities and strategic milestones.

Arranging and preparing for visits

Visits should be arranged through the headteacher, with adequate notice, and agreed with the relevant members of staff.

Due regard should be given to:

- how the visit fits with the schedule of board and committee meetings, to allow for timely feedback and discussion
- how to avoid visits clashing with important events and/or busy periods in school life
- the workload implications for staff who are likely to be involved in the visits

Governors are encouraged to prepare for their visit. This may include:

- reading and familiarising yourself with the governing board's protocol for visits and the expected conduct
- reading and familiarising yourself with the school's policy for visitors (this is different from the governor visits policy) that includes relevant health, safety and safeguarding instructions
- reading the background information relating to the focus of the visit, such as relevant section(s) of the strategic plan, performance data, policies, stakeholder information
- clarifying the purpose of the visit with the head teacher and or relevant member of staff
- confirming the visit schedule and activities

Conduct on visits

When visiting the school in a governing capacity, you should:

- arrive in good time and follow the school's procedures (such as signing in and producing identification)
- adopt a friendly approach that puts everyone at ease
- be respectful of the school at work and if you wish to take notes, check that those you are with are comfortable with this
- if you are taking notes, be clear with everyone that this is for feedback purposes and that you are not recording judgements (for example on the quality of their teaching)
- ask relevant questions that are closely linked to the purpose of your visit
- acknowledge the staff and pupils you meet

Governors are also expected to behave in line with the governing board's code of conduct, being aware of the need to maintain confidentiality.

Expectations following a visit

A report should be completed as soon as possible after each visit. A draft will be shared with the headteacher and any other members of staff involved in the visit and, when agreed, a final version will be included in the papers for discussion in the next governing board meeting (this may be the full governing board).

Appendices

Appendix 1 – School visit report

Appendix 2 – A guide to school visits

Appendix 1

School visits report

Governor:	Date of visit:
Agreed Focus of visit and name of lead staff member:	
<i>Visits should focus on:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ <i>strategic priorities and key policies agreed by the governing board</i>■ <i>the evaluation of progress: are the things people say are happening actually happening?</i>■ <i>seeking assurance that the needs of pupils are being met (such as safeguarding and SEND)</i>	
Summary of activities:	
<i>For example:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ <i>meeting staff with leadership responsibility for specific areas, such as safeguarding or SEND</i>■ <i>talking to staff and pupils</i>■ <i>experiencing a lesson being taught (as part of getting to know the school, rather than making judgements about quality of teaching)</i>■ <i>seeing examples of pupil work</i>	
What is the school doing within this area of focus and how do you know the school's actions are having an impact	
<i>Remember:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ <i>Ask open questions beginning with 'what', 'how', 'when', 'how often', 'why', 'who' and 'where'</i>■ <i>Don't be afraid to clarify any terms or acronyms you're not familiar with</i>■ <i>Remember you're not there to pass judgement on staff or inspect them – you remain an observer</i>■ <i>Remember you're not there to pass judgement on staff or inspect them – you remain an observer</i>■ <i>Include specific evidence that demonstrates the positive impact the school is having in this area</i>■ <i>Where a positive impact hasn't been made yet, note down why that is and what steps are being taken to make progress</i>■ <i>Add any further evidence you'd like to see to help you make a better assessment of the impact</i>	

What have I learned as a result of my visit and how will I feed this back to my board?

Relate this back to focus of your visit.

Discussion points for the governing board:

Any other comments:

An opportunity for the relevant staff member to provide comments on your report.

Appendix 2

1. The focus for school visits

Monitoring visits should have a strategic rather than operational focus. In practice, this means visits should focus on:

- Strategic priorities and key policies agreed by the governing board.
- The evaluation of progress: are the things people say are happening actually happening?
- Seeking assurance that the needs of pupils are being met (such as safeguarding and SEND).

There may be opportunities to visit your school on an informal basis, such as attending performances or events. Whilst these visits are valuable, they are not a substitute for scheduled visits with a clear focus linked to strategic priorities.

2. Planning and preparation

2.1 Scheduling visits

Governing boards should plan a schedule of visits for each academic year – When making these plans, boards should consider:

- Strategic milestones (things that the board expects to have happened) – these should be outlined in the school improvement plan or trust strategy document.
- How the visits schedule fits with the schedule of board and committee meetings, to allow for timely feedback and discussion.
- How to avoid visits clashing with important events and/or busy periods in school life.
- The workload implications for staff who are likely to be involved in the visits.
- The board's own capacity to fulfil the schedule: is it manageable?

The schedule of visits should be agreed between the governing board, school leaders and relevant staff. This will help ensure that the timing of visits allows governors to see relevant activities.

2.2 School visits policy

The governing board should adopt a policy which sets out how visits are to be conducted and explains what you should do prior to, during, and after a visit.

2.3 Pre-visit planning

Visits are more effective when governors prepare in advance. This preparation might include:

- Reading and familiarising yourself with your governing board's policy for visits and the expected conduct.
- Reading and familiarising yourself with your school's policy for visitors (this is different from the governor visits policy) that includes relevant health, safety and safeguarding instructions.

- Reading background information relating to the focus of the visit, such as relevant section(s) of the strategic plan, performance data, policies, stakeholder information.
- Clarifying the purpose of the visit with the head teacher and or relevant member of staff.
- Confirming the visit schedule and activities.

2.4 Virtual visits

School visits are an opportunity for you to meet with staff, pupils and other stakeholders, helping you get to know your school and build relationships. However, there are circumstances where it may be appropriate and more convenient to carry out a virtual visit. This has been a necessary approach for all boards during the COVID-19 pandemic and usually involves meeting with a member of staff and or pupils by video conference.

When planning a schedule of visits, governing boards should be aware that, whilst some areas of focus lend themselves to virtual visits, this does not allow governors and trustees to readily experience school life, culture and ethos first-hand – it is not possible to carry out effective monitoring without regular in-person visits to the school site.

Virtual visits should be planned in much the same way as in-person visits and might consist of:

- virtual meetings or phone calls with staff
- experiencing school life virtually (perhaps attending events like virtual assemblies)

Chairs should talk to school leaders about what a practical and appropriate approach to virtual visits might be.

2.5 Frequency of visits

Governing boards are best placed to determine how often and when their visits should take place, with the aim of balancing board visibility and minimising disruption for the school.

In most cases, governors and trustees can expect to carry out monitoring visits at least twice a year.

3. During and after visits

3.1 During a visit

Governors are usually accompanied on their visits by a relevant member of staff to help guide their monitoring, answer questions and clarify learning points or lines of enquiry.

When visiting the school in a governing capacity you should:

- Arrive in good time and follow the school's procedures (such as signing in and producing identification).
- Adopt a friendly approach that puts everyone at ease.
- Be respectful of the school at work and if you wish to take notes, check that those you are with are comfortable with this.
- If you are taking notes, be clear with everyone that this is for feedback purposes and that you are not recording judgements (for example on the quality of their teaching).

- Ask relevant questions that are closely linked to the purpose of your visit.
- Acknowledge the staff and pupils you meet.

3.2 After a visit

Following a visit to school, you may wish to:

- Send a follow up message thanking everyone involved in supporting your visit for their time and assistance.

- Emphasise the positive aspects (such as the behaviour of the pupils, welcoming atmosphere) with the headteacher and or relevant member of staff who acted as your guide.

The impact of visits is increased when the learning is shared through structured feedback to the governing board.

As soon as possible following a visit, use any notes you have taken to complete a report on your visit.

Your report should detail the key learning points, discussion points for the governing board, the follow-up required, and next steps. When writing your report, we suggest that you:

- Use neutral, collaborative language to describe what you observed (for example, *'reading attainment in key stage 1 is poor, the school needs to improve this'* could be written as *'we have discussed the school's strategy to improve reading in key stage 1'*).
- Detail the agreed reasons for the visit and focus your report around this.
- Consider asking an experienced governor for feedback on your report.
- Send a draft of your report to the relevant staff member as a courtesy and to invite feedback before circulating more widely.
- Submit your report in line with your visits policy – ask your clerk for help if you're unsure.

You may also need to give oral feedback on your visit at a future board or committee meeting.

4. Reviewing your visits policy

We recommend that governing boards review the impact of their school visits when reviewing their policy, building lessons learned into future plans and considering:

- Are our visits proving useful?
- What benefits, particularly unexpected benefits, have come from our visits?
- Are we better informed and enabled to make sensible decisions?
- Is there anything we need to change about how visits are conducted, taking into account feedback from school staff?