**GOVERNOR VISITS TO SCHOOL**

**Status:**  Good practice guidelines.

**Purpose:**  To provide a framework for governors to make focused visits to the school so that they can increase their knowledge of the work of the school, including ensuring governor awareness of the school’s strengths and weaknesses and of the impact of development plans.

**Consultation:** All staff and governors contributed to these guidelines.

**Links:** Curriculum policies.

School Development Plan.

School Self-Evaluation.

**Progress and evaluation:** Governors’ visits will be an agenda item at committee and governing body meetings to discuss any actions noted. At the final meeting of each academic year there will be a report on the number of visits conducted, the areas of focus and the evidence collected.

### **Date established by governing body:**

### **Date for full implementation:**

### **Date for review:**

**School visit guidance**

### Governing bodies have a statutory responsibility to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the school and its curriculum, governors need to know what progress is being made towards targets set out in the School Development Plan. Visiting the classroom can help to support this process.

Ofsted inspection assumes that governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school. This depends on governors assessing performance data presented to them by the Senior Leadership Team and having an understanding of what happens in the classroom.

It is also important to Ofsted that the Governing Body makes an impact on school improvement and visiting school to see it in operation, and to be aware of standards and progress are important aspects of this crucial role.

Governors are not qualified to assess standards but they need to visit school in order to:

* Appreciate and understand the work of the staff (teachers and support staff) and how the pupils are learning;
* Be aware of the response of pupils to their work and check that the pupils are aware of what they are learning;
* Be aware of resource issues;
* Be able to ask appropriate questions and hold sensible discussions with the professionals;
* Understand as fully as possible the meaning of the results of monitoring reported to them.

Governors are not inspectors and are not present in a lesson to make judgements about the professional expertise of the teachers. That remains a task for the head and/or other education professionals. It would be **inappropriate**, for governors to:

* Make judgements about the quality of teaching;
* Report on the progress of individual children;
* Pursue personal agendas;
* Monopolize teachers’ time;
* Arrive with inflexible pre-conceived ideas.

**Arrangements**

At the first full governing body meeting of the academic year, the governing body will, with the help of the headteacher and staff, determine a schedule of monitoring visits to be made during the year, these will be in addition to the link governor role which is with a specific class and that teacher’s curriculum responsibilities. Every governor is expected to carry out at least one monitoring visit per academic year on School Development Plan priorities.

The aim will be for them to explore an aspect of the school in some detail, increasing their confidence and knowledge and generating evidence to help the governing body evaluate the school’s performance and fulfil its role to support and hold senior leaders to account.

Governors will be able to observe policies and plans being implemented, their findings should help the whole governing body and its committees make well-informed, independent judgments about their relevance and impact.

Minutes of meetings when reports of visits are discussed, will enable the governing body to judge the extent to which the information gathered informed the governing body’s understanding of the school’s performance.

The visits may take a range of forms, including (but not limited to) the following:

* Learning walks, in or outside teaching hours as appropriate.
* Joining school tours.
* Presentations from school staff at governors’ meetings.
* Observation during school day, including events.
* Lesson observations with a member of staff.
* Link visits.

The form of each visit will be agreed in advance with those involved.

**Ofsted**

Governance is no longer a separate category, it forms part of the Leadership and Management judgement.

An outstanding governing body is one that stringently challenges and supports the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory duties are met. Inspectors will evaluate how effectively governors challenge and hold senior leaders to account for all aspects of the school's performance and ensure financial stability.

Inspectors will consider whether governors:

* + carry out their statutory duties
  + understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school, including the quality of teaching
  + ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
  + understand and take sufficient account of pupil data, particularly their understanding and use of the school data dashboard
  + are aware of the impact of teaching on learning and progress in different subjects and year groups
  + are challenging and supporting leadership in equal measure
  + are providing support for an effective headteacher, or whether they are hindering school improvement by failing to tackle key concerns
  + are transparent and accountable, including in terms of governance structures, attendance at meetings, and contact with parents and carers
  + understand how the school makes decisions about teachers’ salary progression
  + are failing to perform well and contributing to weaknesses in leadership and management

Inspectors should also satisfy themselves that the governing body is ensuring that the school’s finances are properly managed, and investigate governors’ role in deciding how the school is using the pupil premium, the Year 7 catch-up premium, or the new primary school sport funding.

The grade descriptors for outstanding quality of leadership and management include these points of relevance to visits:

* The pursuit of excellence in all of the school’s activities is demonstrated by an uncompromising and highly successful drive to strongly improve, or maintain, the highest levels of achievement and personal development for all pupils over a sustained period of time.
* All leaders and managers, including those responsible for governance, are highly ambitious for the pupils and lead by example. They base their actions on a deep and accurate understanding of the school’s performance, and of staff and pupils’ skills and attributes.
* Governors, or those with a similar responsibility, stringently hold senior leaders to account for all aspects of the school’s performance.
* The school’s actions have secured improvement in achievement for those supported by the pupil premium, which is rising rapidly, including in English and mathematics.
* Senior leaders in the school work to promote improvement across the wider system.

**School Visits Aide-Memoire**

**What is the purpose of the visit?**

What has prompted my decision to visit?

Who has prompted my decision to visit?

Is the reason specific or general?

What are my/other people’s expectations?

How can my visit benefit the teacher?

**How shall I carry it out?**

What particular areas of the school am I interested in?

What particular activities am I interested in?

What particular age-group(s) am I interested in?

Are there any questions that can be answered by observation?

What questions should I ask?

Who should I ask?

**Did I achieve my aim?**

To what extent did I address the reason for my visit?

Which of my questions did I answer?

To what extent did I fulfil my own/other people’s expectations?

What difficulties did I meet and why?

**Is there any follow-up?**

Have I recorded my experiences?

Did I ‘report back’ to the head and staff?

Have I prepared a short report for the next governors’ meeting?

How can I build on this for the next visit?

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|  | **Always** | **Never** |
| **Before** | Arrange details of visit.  Agree purpose of visit  Discuss the context of the lesson to be observed.  Agree role within the lesson | Turn up unannounced |
| **During** | Keep to the role agreed  Keep questions for the class teacher until after the visit is over  Please remember confidentiality  Stick to the times and purpose agreed  Be sensitive to the mood in the classroom and the expectations of the children. | Assume a different role  Walk in with a clipboard  Distract the pupils from their task |
| **After** | Thank the teacher and the pupils  -Discuss the visit with the teacher at their convenience  -Feedback to the governing body | Leave without  acknowledgement  Break rules of confidentiality |

**Record of school visit**

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| Name of governor(s): |
| Date of visit: |
| Focus of visit (How does the visit relate to a priority in the School Development Plan and/ or an aspect of the SEF?) |
| Governor observations and comments  (Eg. what did you see? What did you learn? What would you like clarified? How long did the visit last?) |
| Key issues arising for the governing body |
| Date shared with the headteacher: |
| Date shared with committee/governing body: |

**Link governor guidance**

Each member of staff who is a subject leader will be linked to a non-staff member of the governing body. Links will be decided at the first full governing body meeting of each academic year. This is guidance for governors how best to fulfil their “link” role.

In addition to being linked to a subject leader, non-staff governors will also be assigned to one of the SLP teams each year; much of the following guidance will apply to this role too.

Aims of link governors:

* to be a source of support and encouragement to the subject leader
* to be a critical friend – ask “open” questions
* take an interest in the subject(s)
* always remember you are NOT an inspector nor are you trying to be a teacher
* keep the WGB informed of your link subject and any important developments.

How to inform yourself:

* arrange to meet one-to-one with your subject leader link once a term, or at least twice in the school year
* ask for a copy of the school policy for your subject area(s) – compare with others (use the internet); does ours reflect the ethos of the school; does it comply with any national strategies in that subject?
* ask for a copy of the subject leader’s report that your link will write once a term, each with a different focus (teaching & learning; assessment & standards; pupil views)
* attend a planning session for that subject
* observe a lesson – perhaps delivered by a teacher other than the subject leader
* find out about lunchtime and extended school activities that relate to your subject(s)

Things you might ask one-to-one:

* what are the school’s strengths in this subject – how do we know this (e.g. data on pupils’ progress/target setting) and what makes us different from other schools? [This will allow you to comment effectively on SEF3, Achievements & Standards and SEF5, The Quality of Provision]
* are there any perceived weaknesses – how are these being addressed i.e. is there an action plan? [Also for the SEF5 and the SDP]
* do all teachers and/or TAs deliver the curriculum in this subject or only specialist(s)?
* are there sufficient resources (e,g, equipment, media etc) and CPD opportunities to develop staff skills and confidence? [This information is relevant to budget setting]
* how is ICT used to support this subject?
* how is the effectiveness of subject planning, target setting, staff development etc monitored for this subject?
* how often is the curriculum and any associated policies reviewed?
* are there particular issues in this subject for supporting children with learning difficulties or stretching the G&T children?
* how does our curriculum in this subject support individual aspirations?
* as your link governor, how can I best help you?

Communication:

* Use the information from your interactions and questions to put in a short report on your subjects(s) to the Curriculum and Achievement committee – this need only cover what you think are the key issues that all governors should know – ideally a mix of the “excellent” and the “work in progress”.
* Champion anything you see as particularly vital – e.g. the need for certain resources to be budgeted for or extra skills to be asked for during future recruitment
* **DO show any written report of your visit to the teacher concerned and agree it with them before you share it with anyone else**

**Link governor report**

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| Subject leader | Date |
| Link governor | Class |
| Main strengths of subject at Deer Park School:   * Include pupil performance * Impact of recent SDP initiatives in your subject | | |
| Areas currently in development/update on previously reported areas: | | |
| Governor input required:   * Budget, CPD, staffing issues? * Recommendations for modification of the curriculum policy for this subject? | | |
| Key issues arising for the governing body | | |
| Date shared with the teacher: | | |
| Date shared with headteacher: | | |
| Date shared with committee/governing body: | | |

**Lesson observations guidance**

Governors are responsible for the overall conduct of the school, this means that they need to monitor what is happening and find ways of keeping in touch with the teaching and learning that is taking place. In some cases it may be appropriate for a governor to observe a lesson but **it must be understood that visits are not about making judgments on the quality of individual teachers’ work**; that is the headteacher’s responsibility. Nor are they about checking on the progress of individual children or pursuing personal agendas.

Governors should observe lessons to gather information in order to monitor policy decisions made by the governing body, to build positive relationships with staff and teachers and to gain a better understanding of each other’s roles and to focus on particular aspects of the school and its curriculum.

When organising and conducting a visit, governors must respect the professional roles of the headteacher and staff. They should confirm with the member of staff involved the date, timing and focus of the visit at least one week in advance. In advance of their visit they should seek suggestions from that member of staff about what it would be appropriate to look for eg on a visit focused on fostering children’s independence as learners, it would be wise to ask the teacher what children should be seen to be doing if they are becoming more independent in their learning.

Before arriving in the classroom, agree with the teacher how you will be introduced so the children know who you are and why you are there. Confirm where you will sit and how the teacher would like you to get involved. Agree how long you will be staying. Do not take notes or distract the children by talking to them during carpet sessions but do engage with them when they are in small groups, if appropriate.

At the end of each visit you should thank the teacher and children, make a comment about what has impressed you during your visit. As soon as possible after the lesson you must discuss what you have observed with the staff involved and clarify any points you are uncertain about. You must jointly agree key points to report to the governing body. You should also discuss your observations with the headteacher and agree how and when you will report to the governing body.

Governors must be sensitive to issues relating to confidentiality. You should not expect to study data about specific named children. While staff should take every care to anonymise any information or examples of work it may be possible for governors to identify individuals in discussions of progress and attainment of children, particularly in targeted groups. Governors must be fully mindful of and committed to absolute confidentiality in such circumstances.

**Suggestions for questions**

There are numerous questions which can help you gradually build up a picture of the school’s strengths and areas for development but think about what evidence can be provided in relation to each question. For example you don’t need to ask if children are proud of their work if you have observed them in class, sharing their work with their peers, pointing out where their work is displayed and taking it home to show their parents.

How are the children organised in class?

* Do they work individually, sit in groups and work together or remain as a whole class?
* Does the layout or organisation of the classroom help or hinder the learning?
* How does the organisation of children reflect their ability?
* Do they move quickly and efficiently from the carpet to their correct table?
* Is the noise level appropriate for their activity?

Quality of learning

* Are the lesson objectives clear to the children?
* Are the children clear about their targets if questioned?
* Are pupils making links between previous/new learning?
* Are pupils working independently?
* How well do pupils collaborate with each other? Do they show respect to each other?
* How well do pupils follow instructions?
* How well is the lesson concluded? Was there a plenary session?
* How are pupils with special educational needs integrated into lessons?
* Has the teacher been able to adequately differentiate for ability?
* Are pupils engaged, working hard, making a good effort, applying themselves, concentrating and productive?
* Are pupils happy with their work? Are they proud of it?
* Are pupils interested in their work and in what they are learning? Or are they easily distracted?
* Are resources sufficient?

Process of teaching

* Does the teacher use open and closed questioning?
* Are the children praised for their work?
* Are the instructions clear?
* Does the teacher demonstrate what is expected?
* Does the teacher use many different methods (VAK – visual, audio, kinaesthetic)?
* Are the children fully engaged? Are there changes in pace?

**Record of lesson observation**

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| Governor | Date |
| Teacher | Class |
| Type of lesson (Subject, activities) | | |
| Focus of observation (What did you see? What did you learn?) | | |
| Questions for teacher | | |
| Key issues arising for the governing body | | |
| Date shared with the headteacher: | | |
| Date shared with committee/governing body: | | |