

HALSTOW PRIMARY SCHOOL

GOVERNOR VISITS POLICY AND GUIDELINES



Status

Agreed

Headteacher _____

Chair of Governors _____

Review date

September 2018

HALSTOW PRIMARY SCHOOL

GOVERNOR VISITS POLICY AND GUIDELINES

1. Introduction

This policy is to aide governors and school staff to ensure that governor school visits are structured, productive and enjoyable for all concerned. It must be read alongside the Local Authority document 'Improving Governance in Greenwich' titled 'Visiting the School'.

2. Aims

School visits by members of the governing body are a key component to being an effective school governor and have potential benefits to both governors and staff.

Benefits to governors

- To recognise and celebrate success
- To develop relationships with the staff
- To get to know the children
- To recognise different teaching styles
- To understand the environment in which teachers and other staff work
- To see policies and schemes of work in action
- To inform decision making
- To find out what resources are needed and prioritise them

Benefits to staff

- To help governors understand the reality of the classroom
- To get to know the governors
- To understand better the governors' roles and responsibilities
- To have an opportunity to reflect on practice through discussion
- To have the opportunity to share expertise

3. Guidelines

It is important to remember that visits are a snapshot in time, and judgments should not be made arbitrarily. **The visit is not about:-**

- Inspection
- Making judgments about the professional expertise of the teacher.
- Checking on your own children
- Pursuing a personal agenda
- Arriving with inflexible pre-conceived ideas

In order to undertake their role with objectivity, ideally, governors will not monitor classes containing their own children nor will they begin monitoring until they have received suitable training as part of their induction course.

Governors are an important part of the school team and are welcomed into the school by staff. It is important that governors remember to respect the professionals and the children, support the headteacher and the staff, and acknowledge that they represent the full Governing Body. As such, all governors must adhere to the highest standards of confidentiality.

Agree the plan with the headteacher, member of staff and the governing body or governing body committee and arrange a convenient time to visit.

4. At the end of the visit

At the end of the visit there will be an opportunity to meet with the Executive Head/ Head of School to have a discussion about your visit. Governor views are very important to the school.

Governors will be asked to complete an evaluation form which helps to focus on what was actually learnt about the school and to pass this information on to the governing body. This will form part of the governors monitoring role, therefore it should only contain statements of fact on what was observed or what was not observed. It should contain information to assist decision-making and evaluation by the whole governing body e.g. when reviewing the impact of a particular policy. It may be appropriate to give some recommendations. Please remember that the headteacher is responsible for ensuring the quality of teaching, so you do not make professional judgments when observing lessons.

Evaluations should be no longer than a page; they should be informative, to the point and should not include any pupil or staff names.

Evaluation forms need to be sent to the Headteacher and Chair for approval before circulation to the Governing Body.

5. Monitoring and review

The community committee will monitor this policy every three years.

6. Informal ways of getting to know the school

Governors are actively encouraged to participate in the life of the school and are always welcome to attend school events which are published in the school newsletter.

Please remember...

- To be sensitive to the circumstances and flexible in your expectations.
- No two days are ever the same.
- Keep an open mind about what you see.
- Education and classrooms have changed a great deal since you were at school and practice is very different.
- Don't expect to see the formal type of lesson you might remember from your own childhood.

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GOVERNOR VISIT EVALUATION FORM

Name	
Date of Visit	Start time:
	Finish time:
Focus of Visit 1) Creativity at Halstow – developing children’s learning through higher order thinking skills, pupil talk, exploratory learning and giving children the opportunity to justify and explain their reasoning/ thinking. 2) Meeting with school council to find out what projects are currently being developed 3) To understand further the training being offered by Halstow as part of the teaching schools project and the impact on Halstow children and staff 4) To review the new premises following on from the recent building work	
Classes/staff visited	
Summary of activities eg observing classes, talking to staff and pupils, looking at resources, etc	
What I have learned as a result of my visit	
Positive comments about the focus	
Aspects I would like clarified/ questions I have	
Ideas for future visits/ other comments	

Signed:.....
(Governor)

Signed:.....
(Headteacher)



VISITING THE SCHOOL

1. Governors can and should monitor and evaluate the school's progress on the action plan in other ways than at meetings. In a number of schools in special measures some governors made a point of visiting the school to see for themselves what improvements were being made. These visits need to be well planned if they are to be worthwhile. Without careful planning they achieve little.

One governor visited his primary school, wishing to be supportive and to see how the school was progressing. In reality the governor had tea with the headteacher, preventing her from engaging in more purposeful tasks, circulated round the different classrooms, introducing himself to staff, talked in an unfocused way to the pupils, and finally left, saying he was pleased with what he had seen. His visit was of no practical benefit to the school whatsoever.

2. Some governors are anxious about observing teaching and learning, feeling that they are neither qualified to judge the quality of what they see, nor that it is their role to do so. It is helpful for this issue to be debated within the school, because staff need to be protected from misplaced and ill-informed criticisms from governors about the quality of the educational provision. There have been examples of governors who have wanted to 'inspect' lessons in a formal way. This has nearly always led to serious tensions within the school, and been unhelpful to the teachers. The headteacher needs to agree with governors what it is appropriate for them to do, and what should be properly left to the senior staff.
3. Nonetheless, if governors are to monitor and evaluate the school's work they need to visit the school. When handled well these visits build up trust and respect between staff and the governing body, and they allow governors to monitor the school's work in a way that is far more supportive than if they just attend meetings. The visits to school by governors work well when the focus of the visit is carefully agreed in advance, and understood by all involved.

In one secondary school the governor linked to special educational needs visited the school to talk to the special educational needs co-ordinator. The provision for pupils with special educational needs had been severely criticised in the school's inspection report, and the governor wanted to see how the tasks identified in the action plan were translating into practice. It had been previously agreed that the governor would:

- a) observe a new development, whereby a small group of pupils received extra support for reading;
- b) talk to a classroom assistant about the new ways in which she helped pupils in lessons, and
- c) talk with the co-ordinator about the improvements being made within the department.

It was also agreed that the governor would write a short record of the visit for other governors to read. At the end of the visit the governor felt she had a greater understanding of special needs issues, and a clearer picture of how the school was tackling the criticisms made in the inspection report.

4. Some visits are less formal, but still give governors the opportunity to observe and monitor the daily working of the school.

One governor in a special school for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties enjoyed his visits on Wednesday afternoons to help with aspects of design and technology. Through these visits he built up a positive relationship with both staff and pupils, and was able to appreciate the different strategies used by staff to control the excesses of behaviour of some of the older boys.

5. In a number of schools, governors attend training sessions with staff, in order to develop a shared understanding of new initiatives. Some teachers and governors, for example, have jointly attended training on the National Numeracy Framework, usually where the teacher is the numeracy co-ordinator and the governor is linked to numeracy in the school. Such joint training can have a marked impact on the relationship between staff and governors, reinforcing the idea that the two groups are working together to develop the school. In some schools, members of the governing body have attended staff meetings to support the introduction of an important new development, such as a draft policy on behaviour. This can give governors an insight into the views of the staff, and an appreciation of the practical difficulties they may be facing.
6. Governors should always make sure that their visits to the school are recorded in some way, so they can monitor the pattern of visits that have taken place. Some schools have designed a special form for governors that records who visited and when, what the focus of the visit was, and contains a brief reflection on what took place. This works well, and can be shared with other governors. Other schools just require the governor to speak briefly about their visit at a governors' meeting, and this is recorded in the minutes.

One governor visited her junior school with a specific focus to see the new information technology suite in action. In her report to the governors she was very positive about the new equipment, the interest and enthusiasm of the pupils, the speed at which they managed the task, and the views of the teacher about the layout of the new suite. She brought samples of the pupils' data-handling work to a later governors' meeting. Her report also expressed her concern that the chairs the pupils were using were not the right height for good posture, and ventilation in the room was inadequate. The headteacher was subsequently able to make improvements to address the two issues she had raised.

Monitoring visits by governors should:

- Follow discussions about the protocols involved
- Have an agreed focus
- Be carefully planned
- Be recorded for or reported to other governors