



# **Governor Visits Protocol and Practice**

## Background

It is essential that governors see classes at work and be familiar with the life of the school during the working day. This enables governors to be good ambassadors of the school and increases their knowledge base, so that they can provide effective support and challenge at Local Governor Committee (LGC) meetings.

In addition to visiting the school and attending meetings, governors should ensure that they undertake appropriate training to support them in their role.

Governors have no automatic right as individuals to visit the school and it is crucial that governors and the staff understand the governors' role – in particular that governors do not have an inspectorial role and have no right to go into school without notice.

Everyone concerned should understand that governors go into school primarily to learn and not to judge. Most visits occur because the LGC has decided it can be an important way for governors to measure success and understand the progress of activities and priorities identified in the School Improvement Plan (SIP).

## Link roles

The Trust asks that each local committee appoint a named link member in each of the following areas:

- Safeguarding
- Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- Pupil Premium (including other Premium grants)

Individual role descriptions are made available by The MILL Academy (The Trust). More than one link role can be held by the same person, but it is better to share the workload and to encourage other members to get more involved in the committee's work. Chairs in particular are advised to pass on any link responsibilities that they hold.

In addition to these, the committee may agree that individual members will take on link responsibilities in relation to a specific priority for the school. Examples of these could be:

- Fundraising
- Parental and community engagement
- A subject area such as literacy or numeracy
- A phase of the school, such as Early Years
- Behaviour and attendance

Where these link roles are created at Local Governor Committee level, it is important to agree a clear set of expectations.

The Trust advises that, where responsibilities are largely held centrally, the committee does not appoint a link member. For example, finances are closely monitored by the central team and the Board's Finance, Risk and Audit committee, so a link role in this area is unlikely to be a local committee member's best use of time and expertise.

Link roles are a good way of structuring your induction into governance, so you need not wait until you have been on the committee for a period of time before volunteering. You should discuss link role opportunities with your chair.

## Visits

Knowing your school and being visible to the school community are essential to being able to support, challenge and champion it as part of your role. Meetings and reports from the school's leadership are an important part of this, but must be complemented by visits so that the committee shares a deep understanding of school life. Committee members are expected to visit the school at least once every full term, but ideally every half term.

You will get to meet the children and be shown the work that they are doing; you will have conversations with passionate and hard-working members of staff and will feel part of the school environment and community.

The main principle of effective school visits is that they should be purposeful. As part of your introduction to the school, you should be invited to undertake a Governor Visit so that you know the layout and condition of the school and so that you can start to get to grips with the terminology.

After this, your visits should have a specific focus – for **link members**, this focus will be informed by the relevant role description; for others, you should ask the Headteacher or the committee what area of school life it would be useful for you to report back on. A visit might also include a meeting with someone other than the Headteacher; for example, the Pupil Premium link will want to meet the school's Pupil Premium Co-ordinator and, if there is a literacy link, that member should meet the literacy lead for the school.

Committees – and **chairs** in particular – are strongly encouraged to support newer members by joining them on their first few visits. A newer member could, for example, shadow another member's existing visit. Having more than one member come in at the same time can also reduce the work of the school in arranging and supporting visits.

**Parent members** should make time to visit the school *as members of the committee*. This means visiting other than by being at the school to drop off and pick up your children or at parents' evenings.

It can be difficult for **staff members** on the committee to find time during the working week to 'visit' their own school. This is not always possible, but can be a useful way to broaden their understanding of different aspects of the school and to maintain the visibility of the committee. Headteachers are encouraged, where possible, to allow time for such 'visits'.

## Formal Visits

Governors with link responsibilities agreed with the LGC, in addition to the three expected by the Trust Board (Safe guarding, SEN, PP & Grants), should arrange an appointment to discuss how to proceed with the link arrangement. The Headteacher should always be made aware of this appointment.

It is inappropriate for a governor to come into school or visit pupils engaged in Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) activities without an appointment and approval of the Headteacher.

1. The reason for the visit should be outlined e.g. curriculum area; SIP area of focus etc.
2. The visit should promote both educational awareness and goodwill.
3. The visiting governor should be both sensitive and positive towards staff, pupils and the school environment.
4. Governors are not inspectors and will not make professional judgements about teaching and learning.
5. Governors should be aware of the need for confidentiality and be familiar with the Safeguarding Policy.

## Frequency

Each governor should aim to make at least one visit per school year. Visits should be arranged so that at least one visit takes place each term from a member of the LGC, i.e. three times per year for a Link Governor.

In order for governors and staff to use their time effectively, whenever possible, governors are encouraged to use the Committee meeting days to carry out their named governor responsibilities.

## Reporting

A Governor Visit Report should be completed for each visit. (Appendix 2). Before the visit, the sections relating to the purpose of the visit, the staff to visit and potential activities should be agreed between the governor and Headteacher. After the visit, governors should update the activities section along with other sections as to what has been learned, comments and ideas for future visits. The report should be sent to the Headteacher, for them to include their comments, before circulation.

In the unlikely event that there is any aspect of the visit that concerns you, please take it to the Headteacher. The report will then be shared with the Local Governor Committee.

## Visit Guidelines

1. All visits will be conducted in accordance with the protocol for Governor Visits – Appendix 2.
2. With the Headteacher, agree in advance your role in the classroom (observer, participation, involvement with pupils, etc).
3. Remember you are there in a supportive role.
4. Remember to complete the visit form before and after your visit.

5. If you see something you don't understand or need clarification on, this should be discussed afterwards with the class teacher if at all possible.

## **Protocol for Governor Visits**

### **Preparing for a visit**

- Check the agreed policy for governors' visits
- Clarify the purpose of the visit. What are the relevant parts of the School Improvement Plan that relate to my visit? What are the relevant school Policies? What am I looking to understand as part of my delegated named governor role? How does this determine the activities I am interested in?
- Discuss the purpose of the visit and an agenda with the Headteacher well in advance. Make sure that the date chosen is suitable.
- Be clear beforehand exactly what you are observing.

### **During the Visit**

- Remember you are making the visit on behalf of the Local Governor Committee, it is not appropriate to make judgements or promises on behalf of the LGC.
- Be punctual.
- Keep to the agreed timetable but be flexible.
- 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 excessive note taking can be disconcerting and may make your visit look like an inspection.
- Don't distract the teacher during the lesson 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 and pupils.

### **After**

- Discuss what you have observed with the teacher or staff lead. 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 staff for supporting you in your role as a governor. Be open, honest, positive.
- Complete the Governor Visits Form 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 and amend your report if appropriate.
- Agree with the Headteacher how and when you will report on your visit to the LGC.
- Reflect: how did that go? Has the visit enhanced relationships? Have I learned more about the school? Have I helped the LGC fulfil its duties? Has it given me any ideas for future visits?

### **Reporting your visit**

- After completing your Governor Visit Form ensure it is sent to Headteacher in order for them to check for accuracy and include their comments.
- Ensure the clerk has a copy of your visit for the files.
- Circulate this at the next appropriate LGC meeting.

## Governor Visit Report

<b>Name:</b> (name of governor)	<b>Date of Visit:</b> (date of visits)
<b>Area of responsibility:</b> (named governor role)	
<b>Areas visited:</b>	<b>Purpose of visit:</b>  (description of purpose of visit) (reference to SIP, delegated responsibilities, etc)
<b>Summary of activities e.g. talking to staff and pupils, looking at resources, had lunch etc.</b>  (summary of activities that you would like to do / have done as part of your visit)	
<b>What have I learned as a result of my visit?</b>  (summary of the key facts you have learned, impressions formed as a result of your visit)	<b>Positive comments about the visit</b>  (summary of the positive comments about your visit)
<b>Aspects I would like clarified/questions that I have:</b>  (anything you were unsure about or did not understand)  (anything you forgot to ask or questions that your visit has raised)	
<b>Ideas for future visits:</b>  (How you would like to follow up your visit (if appropriate))	
<b>Other comments (Governor):</b>  (other comments you may have related to your visit)	
<b>Staff and Headteacher comments:</b>  (any comments the staff member or Headteacher have in relation to your visit, your findings, your questions, etc)	
Signed (Governor) _____ Date _____	
Signed (Designated Lead/Headteacher) _____ Date _____	

<b>Key:</b>	Completed prior to visit	Completed prior to and post visit	Completed post visit
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