

Tower View Primary School Governors' Visits to Schools Policy 2018-21

Rationale

The Governing Body at Tower View Primary School has a responsibility to keep in touch with what is happening in the classroom. Although their role is strategic, it is important that they have some understanding of the practicalities of the job. Meeting children, talking to staff and seeing lessons underway will help members of the Governing Body to understand some of the issues they are required to discuss and make decisions about with greater clarity.

A. Why do Tower View Primary School governors need to visit the school during the working day or after school?

Governors' visits to the school during the school day or afterwards give insights that we can acquire in no other way. If we are to carry out our strategic, monitoring, executive and accountability roles as a governor, we need to have an understanding of the way school works and have a feel for the dynamics of the school. There is no better way of gaining this information than by visiting during the working day. Being a governor is an exciting, rewarding and productive experience and visiting our school should be part of this.

First hand experiences of the school help to bring the governing body meetings to life. They introduce a reality that can otherwise be missing. The experiences can prompt questions to the headteacher and enable governors to be more effective in the role of critical friend. Visits allow all governors to develop relationships with staff, pupils, parents and members of the local community. This will provide a two-way flow of ideas that helps to inform governors' decision-making.

Visits can be designed to monitor the implementation of school improvement plans and as part of the school's self-evaluation processes. Governors may need to have first-hand experience of the impact of the strategic plans they have worked on with school leaders.

Some governors need to visit the school to make regular checks on critical aspects of the school's work, such as financial procedures; special educational needs provision; health and safety; and child protection.

Ideally every member of the governing body should make a visit to the school at least once a year. As a school community we always appreciate having governors present at key events such as end of term concerts, but these are in addition to the need for visits during the normal school day or for specific purposes after school.

Governors can visit the schools in different roles. Some may be a regular presence, such as parent governors at a primary school who would bring and collect their children daily. Others may only be able to visit occasionally, for example those with full time jobs far from the school. Visits therefore may range from the very informal to the formal, mandated visit on behalf of the governing body, but governors should always be conscious of how their presence may be seen by other people, staff, pupils and parents and thus act accordingly.

B. Formal visits

It is good practice for the governing body to have a protocol for school visits. We allocate specific areas of the school to named governors, such as year groups or curriculum areas. These would be reviewed at least annually as the priorities of the school alter. We may use a 'governor of the month' process to make a general visit and observe all aspects. The annual planner for meetings could include a routine of visits. We will ensure the agreed system has clear priorities, procedures and outcomes associated with it that both Governors and staff understand. This would include:

- What is being observed, scrutinized.
- The purpose of the visit.
- The method that this will be reported back to staff and Governors.

(A standard checklist or a reporting form with specific headings is at the end of this document.)

C. Informal visits

Informal visits take place when governors may 'pop in' or be on site because of their child or their job. These visits will give governors a picture of the general to and fro of school life and a good idea about how the school works. However, governors should be careful how they use this information. It is difficult to switch roles completely: others will always see us as a governor, even if we think we are just being a parent.

D. What sort of things might governors do during school visits?

Classroom visits

All governors should have opportunities to observe the core business of schools, which is teaching and learning. Governors will be interested in the roles of teachers and teaching assistants. Spending 10-20 minutes in any one classroom is usually sufficient. Classroom visits can take different forms, for example:

- Visiting a sequence of classrooms to get a feel of classroom life. The protocol agreed allows governors to chat with children once they are working independently or in pairs/groups.
- Visiting classrooms to observe the impact of a recent school improvement project e.g. literacy lessons to observe improvements in the teaching of writing. This sort of visit will be carried out if a school leader, who can point out the new or improved features, accompanies the governor.

Meetings with groups of pupils, staff or parents

A meeting with a representative group can provide governors with an invaluable opportunity to gather information and opinions as well as develop relationships with members of the school community. The focus for the meeting and the questions need to be planned and agreed in advance. This can be a particularly good way to gather information about the impact of initiatives. For example, a meeting with a group of middle leaders could be a good way to gather information about the role of middle

leaders and the impact of any training. Discussions with pupils will be accompanied by a member of staff for safeguarding issues.

Breaks and lunchtimes

Planning opportunities for governors to spend time informally with staff and children during breaks and lunchtimes adds to any visit. These times can be crucial to the development of good personal relationships which underpin all effective governing bodies. This can include time to:

- Visit the playground and/or canteen and chat with children and supervisors.
- Sit in the staffroom and have a coffee with the staff.
- Spend time in the school office getting to know the office staff.

Touring the learning environment

A tour of the school and grounds is an opportunity to observe the displays, resources, events, and specialist teaching equipment. This would be accompanied by a member of staff who would support the observation, inform the governor of specific items / issues and answer any questions that may be raised.

Governor visits can also include opportunities to observe a **wide range of other activities** including: staff meetings and training sessions; leadership team meetings; sports competitions; assemblies; music and drama performances.

E. The framework for Governor visits

Governor visits work best when there is a planned programme and when governors come into the school in pairs and are accompanied by a member of staff. This allows governors to discuss what they have seen and have questions answered readily. The programme should ensure that there are opportunities for governors to monitor specific aspects of the school, to follow up lines of enquiry and to develop a general idea of what the school is like.

Visits need to be planned in advance: this will be an agenda item during the full governing body meeting.

The Governing Body should aim to organise one or two visit per term. It is a part of the commitment by governors prior to becoming a Governor and dates should be agreed at an appropriate meeting.

It is important that the **Headteacher** can support governors' visits and ensure that governors' time in school is used well. This thus requires:

- Prior agreement to the visit.
- Prior agreement of the specific focus and possible outcomes.
- Prior agreement of time and location of the visit.

It is an expectation that governors carry out their commitments. This will ensure that there is no disappointment or loss of confidence when a visit from a governor fails to occur.

1. Preparation

- a) Agree a convenient time and date with the headteacher and/or the member of staff we are linked with. Avoid stressful times such as test or exam weeks.
- b) Decide on what the visit is for and, if we will need any paperwork, make sure that the relevant person is aware of this.
- c) Inform self about the aspect we will be observing by reading relevant documents such as the school policy, school self-evaluation or the last Ofsted report.
- d) Dress suitably – nurseries or practical lessons can be messy and infant chairs are tiny!

2. Start and Briefing

- a) Governors should arrive punctually and observe school protocols for signing in and wearing a visitor badge.
- b) Effective visits start with a meeting with the headteacher, deputy head or member of staff to clarify the nature of the visit, what governors are to see and do and any further protocols to be followed by governors.
- c) Any specific alterations to the expected visit due to unforeseen circumstances e.g. accident, building work, staffing issue, pupil issue.

3. During the Visit

- a) Remember that we are **not an inspector**: don't give the impression that we are looking for faults. Governors should **not make** judgements about what they observe, especially when they are watching lessons.

- b) Bear in mind that governor visits are about gathering information and developing relationships. They are not about the day-to-day management of the school, which is the headteacher's responsibility.
- c) Link staff member may have planned an itinerary for us and will probably want to introduce us to the class or other colleagues.
- d) We may want to offer praise and this is entirely acceptable. However, governors **should not offer advice or criticism directly to the staff** – any such comments should be made to the headteacher separately.
- e) Keep note-taking to a minimum and pay attention to what is going on around us. If appropriate, join in with the pupils' activities.
- f) Don't make any promises on behalf of the governing body – unless we have been given specific delegated power to do so.
- g) Do not intervene with behavioural or parental issues unless requested to do so, or there are clear health and safety issues.
- h) Thank everybody for their hospitality, including the pupils where appropriate.

4. Follow-up

- a) It would be helpful to include a de-briefing at the end of your visit so that you can clarify any issues and share your experience with the headteacher and/or relevant members of staff. Remember, do not criticise any member of staff in their presence.
- b) A little note or card to say thank we is always welcome
- c) If there are any urgent actions needed following the visit, such as a health and safety issue, these should be raised with the headteacher in the first instance and could be referred to a Committee or the Chair. If we have any concern about Child Protection, report it to the headteacher immediately or in the case of a concern about the headteacher referred to the Chair.
- d) A brief report back to governors is an important part of the visit, especially if you were looking at a specific area of school life. It is a good idea to have standing item for feedback on every agenda. Complete the agreed feedback form for circulation to the governing body. Ensure this is sent to the clerk in good time for the next meeting. There is a template for reporting back at the end of this document.

F. Nominated Governors

Whilst it is very important that every governor knows and understands their school's individual characteristics and needs, it is also important that the governing body fulfils its monitoring role. It is not realistic to assume that every governor can monitor every aspect from literacy standards to toilet maintenance. Our Governing body makes use of individual governors' interests and expertise by nominating them for particular areas such as special needs, healthy living or literacy.

We ensure that the Governors represent a varied range of areas of the school and review these annually. We utilize the DFE and local authority documents in devising a set of appropriate nominated governors to meet the needs of the school and balance this with the time available from each governor.

These will always include the following nominated roles:

- Child protection
- Health and safety
- Special educational needs.
- Prevent
- Safeguarding
- Literacy
- Numeracy

A General Term of Reference for each nominated Governor is as follows:

The nominated governor forwill:

- ✚ report back to the governing body.
- ✚ keep a record of visits and meetings undertaken.
- ✚ meet with the relevant member of staff to discuss school self-evaluation and progress against the school's improvement plan.
- ✚ receive and deal with relevant correspondence and guidance.
- ✚ keep up to date with relevant legislation and school documents.
- ✚ seek to attend relevant school training sessions or staff meetings.
- ✚ try to attend parent evenings and other relevant school events.
- ✚ Try to make themselves available for interview by Ofsted Inspectors if needed.
- ✚ monitor targets and results.
- ✚ be a member of any relevant committees (e.g. the health and safety governor will be on the premises committee)

It is important not to undermine the corporate responsibility of the governing body by placing too much emphasis on assigning responsibility to individual governors. The governing body maintains overall responsibility for every aspect. This makes reporting back an essential part of the job description.

Appendix One

Specific Governor Outlines

SEN Governor

Liases with the school's special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO)

Documents to consult:

- ✚ the school's SEN Policy
- ✚ the SEN Code of Practice
- ✚ the school's Accessibility Plan
- ✚ the school's equality information and objectives

The SEN governor reports to the governing body at least once a year.

Focus of Visits:

- ✚ To view SEN teaching taking place
- ✚ To see how statemented and school action pupils are provided for in a mainstream class
- ✚ To meet the SENCO
- ✚ To look at the SEN Register and to sample Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

Suggested questions

Policy

How does the SEN Policy relate to the school's other policies such as those covering equal opportunities or behaviour? Is it up to date?

Pupils

How many pupils have statements and how many are undergoing assessments?
How many pupils have 'non-statemented' special needs?
How are these pupils distributed between year groups?
How are pupils initially identified as having special needs?
How does the school monitor individual pupils' progress?
How are pupils responding to SEN provision?

Staff

How much time does the SENCo have for this role?
How many staff are involved wholly or partly with SEN pupils?
Are extra points being awarded to teaching staff for SEN work?
What teaching arrangements are used?
What SEN staff training is available or arranged?
How are staff informed about identified pupils?

Curriculum

Do pupils with SEN have access to the whole curriculum, including outings?
How does the curriculum encourage tolerance of difference?
Are there any exemptions or disapplications of the National Curriculum for individual pupils?

Funding

How are the specific funds for SEN spent?
Are there any gaps in provision?
Is there a regular inventory of resources available for SEN pupils?
Are there any access problems for some classes or pupils to the available resources?
Does the school use any borough facility for accessing classroom resources or specific support e.g. speech therapy?

Child Protection Governor

Liases with the headteacher and/or the designated child protection teacher.

Documents to consult:

- ✚ the school's child protection policy.
- ✚ guidance issued by the Area Child Protection Committee.

The governor should attend **designated training**.

The child protection governor reports to the governing body once a year.

Focus of Visits

- ✚ To check that the school's procedures are up to date and in line with those established by the Area Child Protection Committee.

Suggested questions

Policy

Do all staff know the procedures to be followed when a possible case arises?

Are there suitable arrangements to keep confidential records separately from general pupil records?

Are there suitable arrangements for obtaining DBS checks for all staff and volunteers?

Pupils

How many pupils are on the child protection register?

How many cases have been referred to the Child Protection team in the last term?

Staff

When was the last training session for all staff ?

Do all staff know who the designated Child Protection teacher is?

Curriculum

What lessons or advice are given to the pupils to encourage them to talk to a trusted adult about any problems?

Funding

Are there sufficient funds to finance cover arrangements when the designated teacher is out of class either at training courses or attending case conferences?

Health and Safety Governor

Liases with the headteacher, staff health and safety representative and possibly the site supervisor.

Documents to consult:

- ✚ the school's health and safety policy
- ✚ the health and safety policy of the LA
- ✚ the schools' latest health and safety inspection report

The health and safety governor reports to the governing body at least once a year.

Focus of Visits

- ✚ To ensure that arrangements are in place to enable compliance with health and safety requirements, and to identify any areas requiring attention.

Suggested questions

Policy

- How often is the school inspected by the LA's health and safety inspector?
- Have all of the recommendations from the last health and safety inspection report been implemented?
- When was the last review of the policy?
- Does the staff handbook provide guidance to staff on what to do in an emergency?
- Does the staff handbook include guidance for staff on school trips?
- Has the school conducted risk assessments, including fire risk assessments?

Pupils

- When was the last fire drill? How many fire drills do you have each term?
- What does the school teach you about health and safety?
- Do you feel safe at school?

Staff

- Do the staff have a health and safety representative?
- How many staff have been trained as first aiders? Where is the list of first aiders displayed?
- Does the number of SMSAs (School Meals Supervisory Assistants) meet minimum guidelines?
- Do staff know how to report health and safety issues?

Curriculum

- How does the school teach pupils about health and safety?

Funding

- Is there sufficient funding to implement the recommendations from the last health and safety inspection?
- Does the school's development plan identify future improvements to school security?

Year Link Governor

Liases with the headteacher and year leader

Documents to consult:

- ✚ the school's discipline or behaviour policy
- ✚ the home/school agreement policy
- ✚ any pastoral support guidelines
- ✚ the school's development plan and school self-evaluation.

Each year link governor makes a brief annual report to the governing body.

Focus of Visits:

- ✚ To learn about a specific year group and view activities such as assemblies.
- ✚ To discuss pastoral care and academic progress within the year group.
- ✚ To learn about any procedures which are relevant to a particular year group, such as option choices.
- ✚ To visit more than one class in the year group.
- ✚ To meet the year leader.

Suggested questions

Policy

When was the school discipline or behaviour policy last reviewed? What consultation took place?

How is the year group affected by the school's organisation and other school policies?

Pupils

Is there a sense of year identity among the pupils?

Do pupils feel represented and listened to?

Do they know and understand the pastoral system as it applies to their year group?

Are any activities associated with the year group well planned and executed?

What are the procedures for supporting pupils at risk of exclusion or whose behaviour is giving rise to concern?

Staff

What is the year leader's role in promoting pupils' attainment and progress?

Is there clear communication about pastoral matters and policy?

What support does the year leader offer to class teachers?

Curriculum

How does the school ensure equity between different teaching groups within the year?

How are pupils prepared for specific activities which occur during the particular year?

What extra-curricular activities are available to the year group?

Funding

Is there sufficient funding for training in pastoral matters?

Tower View Primary School Governor School Visit Record:



Name of Governor

Date of visit

Time of visit: From To

Aim of visit:

Governor's activities during visit:

Governor's overall comments:

Signed Date

Items to report back to Governing Body

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Signed:

Dated:

Visit Aide Memoire

- It is important for all parties to note that governors' visits are not a form of inspection and do not involve governors making a judgement about teaching in any official capacity. That remains the responsibility of the Headteacher and other education professionals.
- It might be wise for governors to avoid visiting classrooms where their own children are present. It can cause discomfort for everyone!
- They should also be aware of 'pursuing personal agendas' and make sure they fulfil the reason for the visit.
- Please remember that members of staff are very busy people whose first priority must be the children.
- There may be times when arrangements have to be changed or alterations made.
- 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. By all means ask questions (preferably at the end of the lesson) but be sensitive to the extra demands of differentiation and inclusion that teachers now face.

Ground Rules

Always

Arrange details of visit. Agree purpose of visit. Discuss the context of the lesson. Agree role within the lesson. Be sensitive to the mood in the classroom and the expectations of the children. Thank the teacher and the pupils. Discuss the visit with the teacher at their convenience. Feedback to the governing body.

Never

Turn up unannounced. Change the role agreed. Ask questions of the class teacher during a lesson. Forget confidentiality Vary from the times and purpose agreed. Walk in with a clipboard. Interrupt the teacher. Distract the pupils from their task. Leave without acknowledgement