

## GOVERNOR VISITS POLICY CIRCLE BASED GOVERNANCE MODEL

<b>Review Body:</b>	<b>Trust Board</b>
<b>Leadership Group Responsibility:</b>	<b>Quality of Leadership &amp; Management</b>
<b>Type of Policy:</b>	<b>Non-statutory</b>
<b>Reviewed:</b>	<b>October 2019</b>

### Context

The governing board has a statutory duty to oversee the policies and direction of the school, to monitor its standards and be held to account for its conduct and performance.

The governance handbook states on the role of governor school visits:

*Boards need to know their school if accountability is going to be robust and their vision for the school is to be achieved. Many boards find that visiting, particularly during the day, is a helpful way to find out more about the school. Through pre-arranged visits that have a clear focus, the board can see for themselves whether the school is implementing their policies and improvement plans and how they are working in practice. Visits also provide an opportunity to talk with pupils, staff and parents to gather their views; though are unlikely to be sufficient for these purposes.*

*Boards are not inspectors and it is not their role to assess the quality or method of teaching or extent of learning. They are also not school managers and should make sure they do not interfere in the day-to-day running of the school. Both are the role of executive leaders. If boards wish to spend time within a classroom, they need to be very clear why they are doing so.*

For the circle model, the governor monitoring visits, performed by the skillset appointed delegated governor roles (including monitoring pairs), are replacing the agenda items, challenge and support which would have taken place within a committee meeting. Therefore, for the board, collectively, to be able to fulfil its core functions it will need to ensure that a robust policy, procedure and practice for governor delegated monitoring is in place. These visits will hold the school to account for its functions and areas of strengths and weaknesses thereby increasing the governing board's collective first-hand challenge and knowledge, informing self-evaluation, holding to account and strategic decision making. It is recognised that the amount of time that a governor can commit to a visit will vary but in general governors, in their delegated monitoring roles, should undertake **3** visits a year unless the school circumstances necessitate i.e. school category of RI or inadequate. If governors cannot make this commitment they should question whether they can make a realistic and valuable contribution to be a governor. Whole governing board days in school alongside delegated monitoring can also be an additional valuable tool in knowing your school with a planned focus and feedback.

This policy sets out the protocol and procedures which have been shared with staff. It sets out how governor visits should be conducted to allow both governors and staff to gain the most from the visit

Governor delegated monitoring roles should align to the priorities determined on the School Development Plan, with an agreed monitoring visit schedule that is timely to the school and board meetings and reported back, with minute evidenced documented questions and

discussion, to enable collective understanding in replacement of a committee at the board meeting. The monitoring schedule should also offer provision for the statutory delegated governor monitoring roles of safeguarding and SEND and other delegated monitoring roles of health and safety; career guidance (secondary); EYFS (primary); whistleblowing and training & development. Each monitoring visit should have an agreed clear purpose. Role descriptors are available to aid governors in their understanding and expectations in carrying out their monitoring visits.

Governors should arrange their planned visits in advance with the Headteacher who has the responsibility of the day-to-day management of the school. The Governing board should review their school visits policy, protocols and procedure annually to ensure its effectiveness with the approved policy circulated to all staff.

## **Governing Board Circle Monitoring Visits Policy**

### **Introduction**

This policy applies to school visits made for the purpose of governance, where committees have been replaced by board meetings, and not to visits to the school site that any individual may make in another capacity e.g. as parents, priests, professional advisers, volunteers or members of staff.

### **Purpose**

All school visits will:

- Have a clear focus, linked to strategic priorities and designated governor roles, be timely planned and on the approved monitoring schedule which is agreed by the full governing board.
- Be arranged with adequate notice through the Headteacher who will agree it with the relevant members of staff.
- Be of value to the governing board in collectively holding the school to account in replacement of committees and demonstrably evidenced to outside agencies e.g. Ofsted or the LA.

*It is not the role of those governing to form judgements about the performance of school staff during visits and individuals should make every effort to avoid this impression.*

### **Governor Conduct**

Governors undertaking visits will comply with the school and RMET codes of conduct and the standards of presentation expected of staff. They will be mindful that they are representing the whole governing board through their words and actions. The RMET governor code of conduct will contain reference to the governor monitoring visits policy.

### **Training**

Governors should ensure they understand their monitoring remit, undertaking relevant training to keep up to date with best practice and latest statutory and legislative requirements. Role descriptors are available to aid governors in their understanding and expectations in carrying out their monitoring visits.

### **Governor reports following visit**

Governors undertaking their visits will have the opportunity to discuss the visit, including any concerns, with the Headteacher immediately or soon after the visit.

The attached Governor Monitoring Visit Record will be completed after each visit, containing the questions and answers as would be expected of a committee agenda item. A draft will be

shared with the Headteacher and any other members of staff involved in the visit for any comments; a final version will be uploaded to GovernorHub and the clerk will include it in the agenda and as a supporting paper for collective discussion and further questioning in the next governing board meeting.

### **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality should be adhered to regarding visits. Comments should be limited to the Headteacher with whom the visit was arranged but not with other staff or with parents. Individual children or staff members (other than the member of staff involved with the visit) should not be identified in school visit reports.

### **Frequency of Visits**

Governors, trustees, local governing board/ advisory members will undertake visits as agreed in their approved monitoring schedule with no more than three visits per academic year unless the school circumstance necessitates.

### **Review**

This policy, protocol and procedure should be reviewed by the governing board every academic year alongside the code of conduct.

### **Purposes of a circle model governor visit**

The benefits to governors within their individual delegated monitoring roles:

- To assist the governing body, including the statutory delegated governor roles of safeguarding and SEND and other delegated monitoring roles of health and safety; career guidance (secondary); EYFS (primary); whistleblowing and training & development to hold leaders to account within their delegated area of responsibility, collectively fulfilling its statutory duties and demonstrating their accountable delegated role in replacement of committee agenda items.
- To see the strategies in action as outlined in the school development plan e.g. meeting with the subject lead of an area for improvement, seeing first hand, questioning and learning about the impact of the adopted strategy and how this translates through to classroom practice and children's learning.
- To challenge, support and improve knowledge of the school, its staff, needs, priorities, strengths and weaknesses within the governor delegated area of responsibility.
- To hold the school leaders to account for the impact of specialist funding i.e. pupil premium, sports premium (primary), year 7 catch up literacy and numeracy (secondary) within the relevant delegated governor role.
- To develop an understanding of issues facing the school and how they are dealt with on a day-to-day basis to inform collective strategic decision making.
- To observe the impact of policies in action including monitoring the implementation of a particular policy e.g. safeguarding, behaviour, health and safety, SEND, careers guidance.

The benefits to governors within general monitoring e.g. focussed or whole GB days:

- Gaining an understanding of the wider curriculum or particular curriculum area as relevant.
- To see the use of resources and how the premises are utilised, understanding the environment for teachers and pupils
- To recognise and celebrate success
- To evidence the boards approved ethos, vision and values in action

- To show themselves as part of the school and to gain stakeholder engagement with pupil, parents, staff or the wider community e.g. Pupil voice, school council, parent forum

The potential benefits to staff:

- To ensure governors understand how school priority strategies are embedded in practice, understanding the reality of the classroom and environment
- To enhance the continuous professional development of middle and subject leads.
- To get to know and build positive relationships with governors
- To understand better the governors' roles and responsibilities
- To feel valued
- To have an opportunity to reflect on the impact of policies and procedures through discussion
- To highlight the need for/impact of particular resources

The potential benefits to students:

- To ensure governors understand the reality of the classroom environment, broad curriculum and school life
- To get to know governors
- To understand better governor roles and responsibilities
- To give feedback about the school and their views of the impact of policies to the governors

The potential benefits to parents:

- To ensure governors understand the issues that parents may face
- To get to know governors
- To understand better governor roles and responsibilities
- To give feedback about the school to the governors

#### **What a visit is not about**

- Visiting classrooms to observe a lesson, unless as part of an accompanied learning walk against a specific school improvement priority. This prevents any confusion on a class visit being confused as a form of inspection to make judgements about professional expertise of a teacher.
- Undertaking a staff operational role e.g. touring the school undertaking health and safety checks as the health and safety governor, even if professionally qualified in this area.
- Checking on progress of individual children
- Pursuing a personal agenda
- An opportunity to tackle staff about specific issues not related to the designated role

#### **Protocols or ground rules for visits**

- Ensure the visit has a clear focus linked to the school development plan and area of governor responsibility.
- Governors individually understand the boards and their delegated area of responsibility, enabling preparation to ensure they provide the challenge and support required.
- Governors to remember that during any visit their role is strategic not operational.

- Governors to ensure in preparation for their visit they have undertaken relevant training and read any relevant policy or supporting documentation.
- The Headteacher will liaise with the member of staff responsible for the school/priority/policy objective to arrange the date and the focus of the meeting.
- Staff should have the opportunity to explain the context of any lesson on the rare occasion that a governor visits a classroom
- Governors will not interrupt lessons by asking teachers questions on the rare occasion that they may visit the classroom.
- Governors may talk to students during learning walk visits to lessons, about their understanding and learning journeys, but must not ask questions about the teacher's conduct of the lesson.
- Governors will ensure that they are familiar with the school's and RMET code of conduct, with the expectation that they follow the same behaviours; understand how they will be addressed and how to address others as well as appropriate dress code as outlined within the codes of conducts.
- A breach of the governor monitoring visit policy will be dealt with following the process of a breach of the board's code of conduct.
- Governors will formally write reports on their delegated monitoring using the approved templates ensuring that draft reports are sent to the Headteacher for proof reading and comments prior to the final report being produced.
- Delegated governor monitoring reports will be uploaded to GovernorHub, prior to the governing board meeting to enable discussion, evaluation, triangulation and key questions to be raised; with minute evidence documented to show the impact of the monitoring in replacement of the challenge at a committee.

### **Annual programme of visits**

A programme of visits (monitoring schedule) should be planned, using the school development plan and subsequent skillset approved priority and statutory delegated monitoring governor roles, spread evenly across the school year in consultation with the Headteacher and trust. Regular analysis of this schedule enables governors to ensure they are monitoring, evaluating and triangulating against the current school priorities, reporting back to the board in replacement of a committee whilst knowing the school in terms of being able to describe to Ofsted or other outside agencies. The number of visits required to be undertaken by each delegated governor role is three in one academic a year, unless the school situation necessitates otherwise.

**Examples of delegated governor monitoring visits** in which key questions are asked to the relevant staff lead can also for example include:

- Learning walks with members of staff
- Pupil voice in the class or interviews in groups
- Looking at pupils' work against the marking policy
- Monitoring implementation of a policy e.g. behaviour, equality, safeguarding, finance
- Gaining an understanding of the broad curriculum, or particular area
- Gaining an understanding of the impact of spend of funding, including specialist funding, with spending leads
- Ensuring finance monitoring and processes are in place
- Seeing in action deployment of staff and impact of any change e.g. reduced class sizes/ split classes
- Reviewing the environment, the condition and maintenance, use made of the buildings or the site and resources of the school

**Whole governing body days or general monitoring** in school can for example include

- Visiting break and lunchtimes
- School council
- Parent forum
- Monitoring the culture, ethos and values and for Church schools, ensuring the distinctive Christian character is maintained against agreed expectations.
- Parental engagement at the start or end of school
- Monitoring British values
- Monitoring preparation for the next stage of education

### **Monitoring and review of school visit policy**

The policy should be monitored and reviewed annually alongside the code of conduct.

Areas we should consider when reviewing are:

- Are our visits achieving the potential benefits we identified? Are we fulfilling our core functions?
- Are our individual reports containing the challenge and answers appropriate to a committee item minutes?
- Do our discussions at meetings from the reports enable the collectiveness in holding to account achieved by committees?
- Are our visits timely against the school improvement plan?
- Do we have the right governor monitoring roles against the current school priorities?
- Are our delegated governors aware of their responsibilities in replacement of committees? Do we have role descriptors?
- Do governors understand their individual/ monitoring pair delegated role, are appointed due to skillset and are keeping up to date with best practice and latest statutory/ legislative requirements
- Are we better informed and can evidence the accuracy of Headteacher and SLT reports
- Have there been any unexpected benefits?
- How can we make our practice even better? Is there anything we need to change in how visits are conducted from feedback from stakeholders?

### **Governor Visits - Good Practice**

#### **Preparing for a visit**

- Check the agreed policy and schedule for governors' monitoring visits
- Arrange a mutually convenient time to visit, within the monitoring schedule and governing board meeting window, with the Headteacher.
- Discuss the visit and agreed timetable with the Headteacher to ensure that any member of staff who will be involved in the visit, understands the arrangements.
- Clarify the purpose of the visit as outlined within the monitoring schedule and undertake any background preparation reading required. Understand your strategic delegated monitoring role and responsibility, attending relevant training. Do you have a role descriptor explaining your responsibilities?
- Review the milestones and action points in the School development Plan? What are the relevant school policies associated to this area? What questions do I want to ask?
- Discuss with the Headteacher/staff lead if any new supporting information is available, e.g. Ofsted report, updated improvement plan, note of visit, staff lead report, performance data.
- Ensure that you are familiar with safeguarding and health and safety procedures
- Read the RMET code of conduct and staff code of conduct to ensure understanding of the professional behaviours required.

## **During the Visit**

- Remember you are making the visit on behalf of the governing body; it is not appropriate to make judgements or promises on behalf of the governing body.
- Be punctual, reporting to reception and signing in as a governor. Wear a badge to identify you. Keep to the agreed timetable but be flexible to the school needs.
- Decide with the Headteacher how you will be introduced and how you will address staff and pupils
- Be courteous and professional throughout the visit, friendly not critical, including thanking members of staff before leaving.
- Remember you are there to learn, fact find and ask the questions in replacement of a committee, it is a monitoring visit not an inspection.
- Keep to the role agreed; only talk to students if invited/agreed to do so.
- Observe discretely. Remember that excessive note taking can be disconcerting and may make your visit look like an inspection, though recording needs to be balanced with being able to capture the questions and answers.
- Interact, do not interrupt.
- Remember why you are there. Do not lose sight of the purpose of your visit.
- Respect confidentiality
- Meet the Headteacher at the end of the visit and discuss what you have seen, including any issues or concerns you may have. Refer to the purpose of the visit. Consider together whether it has been achieved.
- Ensure that you have signed out

## **After**

- Share any concerns with the Headteacher and chair, however trivial. Use the opportunity to clarify any issue you are unclear about.
- Thank the staff by email via the Headteacher for contributing to the success of the visit and for supporting you in your role as a governor. Be open, honest, and positive.
- Make more notes as soon as possible after your meeting and any observations while it is still fresh in your mind. Complete the agreed visit template proforma ensuring that all the questions and answers are captured, with key points to be raised at the next board meeting.
- Draft the report ensuring individual children or staff members (other than the member of staff involved with the visit) are not identified in school visit reports.
- Send the draft to the Headteacher and once you have taken their comments into account upload the final written report to GovernorHub prior to the next governing board meeting.
- Ensure that your visit is included as an agenda item at the next governing board meeting.
- Reflect: how did that go? Has the visit enhanced relationships? Have I learned more about the school? Have I helped the governing body collectively fulfil its duties by ensuring challenge and collective understanding of my delegated area? Do I need to undertake training to increase my skillset to fulfil the delegated monitoring role effectively?

## **Informal or outside of delegated role visits**

Outside of delegated monitoring to replace committees, visits may also take place to gain stakeholder view or monitor the boards ethos, vision and values. These can take place using the approved formal visits template or as a governing board day with documented feedback. Visits may also take place in an informal capacity for less formal occasions such as school

plays, sports day, and celebration events. 'Discreet' information can be gathered on these visits which build on your knowledge of the school.

For example, times when governors may be visiting the school as governors not against an agreed monitoring schedule

- The chair making a regular visit to see the Headteacher
- To get information from the office relating to a committee meeting
- New governor tour of the school
- Attending working groups, committee or board meetings
- Invited to attend prize giving or celebration events

### **Areas not considered as a governor monitoring visit**

It is vital that everyone is clear about the capacity in which they are visiting and not to confuse the role.

For example, times when governors may be visiting the school **NOT** as a governor to ensure they do not confuse the role.

- To help in a class as a volunteer
- To lend a helping hand with a school event as a volunteer
- To speak to a teacher/ Headteacher in relation to your own child
- Attending a school function, not invited as a governor, or educational visit
- Visit in relation to your position as the local priest, councillor, member of staff, professional capacity. E.g. advising on finance, amending/devising the school website etc

### Governor Monitoring Visit Record

<b>Name of Governor/s:</b>	
<b>Monitoring pair / Delegated Named Governor Role/s:</b>	
<b>Date and time of Visit:</b>	
<p><b>Focus of visit, links with the Schools values and School Development Plan.</b>  <i>(How does the visit relate to a priority in the School Development Plan, the schools values and any specific responsibilities referred to in the monitoring pair role descriptions and annual planner?)</i></p>	
<p><b>Summary of planned activities. Including departments or areas of school visited, staff and pupils that the governor met during the visit</b>  <i>(Previously agreed with the Headteacher)</i>  <i>(Governors should refer to staff by their role or job title and not by name)</i></p>	
<p><b>Observations, evidence gathered, questions asked, and answers reported to the governor</b>  <i>(e.g. what you saw; questions asked with answers and what you learned relating to the focus of the visit; how long the visit lasted)</i>  <b>ENSURE THIS SECTION CONTAINS THE CHALLENGE AND ACCOUNTABILITY</b> Against the required governance statutory responsibilities and functions. See Governance handbook.</p>	
<p><b>Any aspects I would like clarified and any key questions I would like to raise</b></p>	
<p><b>Links to Supporting Evidence</b>  <i>If you have uploaded any other documents or forms to GovernorHub please include a link to these here</i></p>	

**Feedback to the Headteacher:**

*The Headteacher should be given the opportunity to review this feedback prior to it being shared on GovernorHub*

**Actions for the governing board to consider**

*(e.g. the way resources are allocated; the way the school communicates; progress in implementing a key policy) Are there any aspects that require further monitoring?*

<b>Meeting to be considered at:</b>	
<b>Date uploaded to GovernorHub:</b>	
<b>Signed:</b> (Governor/s)	