

BISHOP HOGARTH CATHOLIC EDUCATION TRUST

GOVERNOR VISITS AND PROTOCOL POLICY

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Introduction

The Local Governing Body has three main roles as follows:

- **Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;**
- **Holding the Headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils;** and
- **Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent.**

Visiting the school in session helps to develop and understand the roles and is the best way to learn how the school functions so that you can increase the governing body's firsthand knowledge and inform strategic decision making.

Through visits Governors will have the opportunity to observe policies and plans being implemented which will help them make well-informed judgments about the progress being made towards the priorities and targets in the School Improvement Plan. The number and frequency of visits will vary.

The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) also states that:

“If governing bodies 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”.

Formal visits should have a clear focus and should be linked to the priorities in their School Improvement Plan; be part of the self-evaluation process; and provide the opportunity to see policies in action. Each visit should be agreed in advance and have a clear purpose. Governors should arrange these visits with the Headteacher who has the responsibility for the day-to-day management of the school.

In addition to formal visits there is also a continuing role for informal contact and visits to the school. It is important that the Local Governing Body maintains a profile with the school community and regularly attend school events, for example, the school fete, school play, Mass, or award ceremonies. This ensures that both staff and pupils feel supported and your Local Governing Body can praise the work done by the school for the local community.

Some visits will relate to specific responsibilities that Governors may have, for example, SEN, safeguarding or Health & Safety, or where individual Governors are attached to a specific class, year group or Department/subject in the school.

Potential Benefits

To Governors

- Recognise and celebrate success
- To increase the Governing Body's understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school
- To increase Governors' understanding of the teaching and learning process
- Develop relationships with staff
- Get to know the children
- Recognise different teaching styles
- Understand the environment in which teachers teach
- Monitor policies in action
- Find out what resources are needed and prioritise them
- Deepen understanding and increase confidence and knowledge
- Inform decision making

To Teachers

- Ensure Governors understand the reality of the classroom
- Get to know governors
- Understand better the governors' roles and responsibilities
- Have an opportunity to reflect on practice through discussion
- Highlight the need for particular resources

Governor visits are not

- A form of inspection to make judgments about professional expertise of the teacher
- An opportunity to check on the progress of their own children
- An opportunity to pursue a personal agenda
- The chance to monopolising school/teacher time

Roles and responsibilities of Governors, the Headteacher and other Staff

It would be helpful if the Local Governing Body could, with the help of the Headteacher and staff, organise an annual schedule of school visits throughout the year. The Headteacher will guide the governing body on the areas of the curriculum; policies and school improvement plan priorities and targets to be covered each term. Individual Governor or pairs of Governors will, with the guidance of the whole governing body, identify an aspect of the school's work to focus on in order deepen their understanding.

Monitoring and Review of Governors' School Visit Policy

This policy will be monitored and reviewed regularly to ensure that:

- Visits are achieving the potential benefits identified?
- What unexpected benefits have there been?
- Practice is reviewed regularly.

Preparing for a visit

It should be noted that school visits can sometimes be daunting to Governors. They may feel they are intruding or interrupting in the normal functioning of the school or making staff feel uncomfortable. To help overcome this the Headteacher with the Local Governing Body should agree a programme of formal visits for the academic year to which Governors are invited to attend and staff made aware of in advance. For each formal visit:

- Clarify the purpose. Is it linked to the School Improvement Plan? What are the relevant school policies?
- Agree an agenda with the Headteacher, and or subject leader/co-ordinator well in advance.
- Make sure that the date chosen is mutually agreed and convenient.
- Ensure that there is a clear timescale for the visit – start and end times
- Ensure that the visit starts and finishes with a short meeting with the Headteacher.
- Use the school visits proforma – see **Appendix A**

The Headteacher will share the agenda with staff involved letting them know if Governors will visit a class or undertake a learning walk.

During the Visit

Governors should:

- Remember you are making the visit on behalf of the Local Governing Body
- Not make judgments or promises - it is a visit not an inspection
- Be punctual, courteous and considerate at all times, respecting the professional roles of the Headteacher and staff.
- If visiting a class, agree with the teacher how you will be introduced and what your role in the class will be and what involvement you will have with children
- Ask if it is alright to look at pupils work and discuss it with them
- Observe discretely - don't distract the teacher during the lesson but be prepared to talk and show interest
- Interact, not interrupt and listen to staff and pupils

Teachers and support staff will at all times be courteous and considerate, recognising the contribution made by the Local Governing Body to the school.

Staff can also make practical suggestions on the focus for Governors' visits to ensure that they are productive and enjoyable for all concerned. This could include specifying the evidence that could be shared with Governors. See **Appendix B** for a list of things which Governors could examine/explore. Whenever practical staff should invite their link/curriculum governors to relevant staff meetings and training sessions.

During visits Governors should familiarise themselves with other areas in school such as:

- the school grounds
- the playground
- sports facilities
- how pupils and parents act coming into and leaving school at each end of the school day
- shared space around the school like the school hall, the learning resource area/library and corridors
- those areas that are used for school admin or are the responsibility of premises staff

Questions will be invited from governors, while being sensitive to issues of confidentiality. See **Appendix A** for examples of questions which could be asked. Although these focus on literacy, numeracy and SEN, many of the questions can easily be adapted to other areas of the curriculum.

After the visit

- Discuss what you have observed with the teacher. Use the opportunity to clarify any issue you are unclear about.
- Refer to the purpose of the visit. Consider together whether it has been achieved
- Thank the teacher for supporting you in your role as a Governor. Be open, honest & positive.
- Make notes as soon as possible after your visit while it is still fresh in your mind and share the report with the Headteacher for agreement that it is a true reflection of the visit.
- Reflect on the visit, for example: how did that go? Has the visit enhanced relationships? Have I learnt more about the school? Have I gained more confidence in my role as Governor?

Reporting your visit

- All Governor visits should be recorded and shared. This helps demonstrate the involvement Governors have in the life of the school and how they support their own learning.
- Write a short summary of what you learned during the visit and the overall impression that was made. This will be easier if the visit had a focus. See **Appendix A** for a report format.

- Immediately after the visit the Headteacher should take written and verbal feedback.
- A draft of the final written report must be sent to the Headteacher within 5 working days of the visit so it can be checked for accuracy and clarity. Aim to achieve a report that is agreed by all those involved.
- Ensure that the reports of school visits are added to the next available agenda of a Working Group and be prepared to answer questions from other Governors and the Headteacher.

Visit Focus

Although not an exhaustive list visits may focus on:

- Particular subjects, key stages or classes
- The use made of the building or the site
- The condition and maintenance of the premises
- Special Educational Needs
- Literacy and numeracy
- The use of ICT equipment
- The impact on the school of any policy changes
- Impact of specific priorities and targets identified in the School Improvement Plan
- Impact of Staff Development Training

Follow-up and Response by the Headteacher

It is incumbent on the Headteacher to respond to any issues raised and actions proposed following school visits. This will be addressed in the Headteacher's report to the Local Governing Body. It is, however, not incumbent on the Headteacher to accept the findings from school visits or to implement any or all of the actions proposed.

Appendix A - Record for a governor's school visit.

| | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Name: | Date: |
| Governor Responsibility (where applicable): | Staff seen during visit: |
| Focus of previous visit (if applicable); | |
| Reason for visit (i.e. routine monitoring, specific focus): | |
| Links with School Improvement Plan (identify specific priorities/actions to be reviewed) | |
| Preparation/background to visit (e.g. reading policy, discussion with Head/teacher) | |
| Information gathered during visit: (e.g. What you saw, what you learned, would you would like clarified. How long the visit lasted) | |
| Any key issues identified or actions proposed as a result of the visit (e.g. the way resources are allocated; the way the school communicates; progress in implementing a key policy) | |

Appendix B – Monitoring & Questions

Governor Monitoring can take several forms:

- Meeting with subject leaders/head of year/house/support staff
- Snapshot of a lesson
- Discussions with pupils
- Walk around the school

Aims:

- To know and understand the level of enjoyment pupils have for a subject
- Understand what pupils like best/least in the school
- Know the standards of achievement in a subject area
- Know what steps are being taken to improve standards
- Know how well strategic policies approved by governors are working
- To report main findings back to the full governing body

Observations to make when visiting a classroom

- Relationship between all staff in the classroom and pupils
- Relationship between pupils
- Variety of teaching styles
- Availability and role of support staff
- Behaviour and attitude of pupils – are they attentive, motivated, listening, questioning, responding
- Enjoyment and enthusiasm of both staff and pupils
- How pupils are grouped
- How different abilities are catered for
- Children's work & Displays
- Ethos – the atmosphere and values that are evident (are expectations high, encouragement, praise, equality of opportunity apparent?)
- Use of space, quality and quantity of equipment and resources
- Health and safety regulations practiced i.e. fire exits kept clear

Questions

To ask pupils

- Tell me about what you are learning today
- Do you like (select curriculum area being monitored)
- Tell me what you most like doing in (select curriculum area being monitored)
- Is there anything you don't like in (select curriculum area being monitored)
- Do you get regular homework with feedback from your teacher?
- Do you know your targets?
- Do you know how you can improve/what your next target is in (select curriculum area being monitored)?

To ask subject leaders/co-ordinators

- What is your vision for the subject?
- What were the Ofsted findings about the subject?
- What are the strengths of the subject and areas for development? How do you know?
- How do you keep a track of standards and progress across the school in this subject?
- What improvements have you made/planned for this year in the subject?
- What resources does the school have for the subject and how are these organised?
- How do you help develop other teachers' skills in teaching this subject?

In the classroom

| Question | Possible features of answer | Notes of answer |
|--|--|-----------------|
| Help me to understand how you plan your lessons: how do you get from the National Curriculum to deciding what Karen or Tom will be doing in Science today? | National Curriculum Key stage plan Scheme of Work Year/termly/weekly/daily plans Individual plans | |
| How do you judge how well pupils are learning and making progress? | Questioning in lessons Marking Assessments, including tests SATs Target-setting and achieving Value-added data | |
| What learning resources are available to your pupils and how do they learn effectively? | ICT – access to computers Use of library Classroom library Use of basics like pens and pencils. Good labelling Borrowed resources | |
| How do you cope with the needs of different pupils? | Boys v. girls Most able/ SEN English as an Additional Language Badly Behaved Disabled | |
| How do you decide to seat children and arrange the | Ability groups Mixed or single age groups Boy-girl patterns | |

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| classroom? Does it ever vary and why? | Different for different activities | |
| How do you encourage parents to be involved in their children's learning? | Regular contact Reports Parent evenings Letters Diaries | |

Communication

- Are parents kept informed of their Child's progress and how?
- How does the school gather parent's views? Has action been taken on their views?
- What steps are taken to encourage parents to support their children in their learning at home?
- Are parents/carers aware of the curriculum?