The Federation of Cowick and Pollington-Balne CE Primary Schools

Governor Visits Policy

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Statement of intent

One of the key roles and responsibilities for the Governing Board is to monitor the progress and performance of the school. Undertaking visits demonstrates the Governors 'role in the strategic leadership of the school by helping to hold the school to account and evaluate its progress. The Governors visiting programme is an integral part of the school's yearly monitoring calendar. Each Governor is encouraged to make at least two visits a year during school time and governors will often monitor an area of the School Development Plan in pairs in accordance with the agreed timetable.

Policy in brief

This policy sets out the following:

- Purpose of School visits
- How governor visits are conducted
- What governor visits are not
- Guidance and feedback relating to governor visits

School Visits for Governors

What is the purpose of the visit?
What/who has prompted my decision to visit?
Is the reason specific or general?
What are my/other people's expectations?
How can my visit benefit the school?

How shall I carry it out?
What particular areas of the school am I interested in?
What particular activities am I interested in?
What particular age-group(s) am I interested in?
What questions should I ask?
Who should I ask?

Did I achieve my aim?
To what extent did I address the reason for my visit?
Which of my questions did I answer?
To what extent did I fulfil my own/other people's expectations?
What difficulties did I meet and why?

Is there any follow-up?
Have I recorded my experiences?
Did I 'report back 'to the head and staff?
Have I prepared a short report for the next governors 'meeting?
How can I build on this for the next visit?

Visits enable Governors to:

- See the school at work and observe the range of attitudes, behaviour and achievements
- Get to know the staff and demonstrate their commitment to the school
- Give active support to the staff and the activities of the school
- Be aware of the effect of change and different approaches to teaching and learning
- Evaluate resources and discuss with staff further requirements
- Gain first-hand information to assist with policy making and decision taking
- Work in partnership with the staff

Before making a visit Governors will:

- Contact the Headteacher and agree a date, time and focus for the visit
- Clarify the etiquette, courtesies and expectations for the visit
- Plan which classes will be visited and the expectations on them.

On the day of the visit the Governor will remember to:

- Arrive on time and clarify the timetable
- Act as an observer and only participate in the class at the invitation of the teacher
- Respect the professionalism of the teacher, supporting but not interfering
- Be calm and enjoy the visit

After the visit the Governor will:

• Remember to thank the teachers and children
• Meet with the Headteacher to give a verbal report, and to raise any issues that arose
• Complete the Governor Visit Proforma, reporting on the focus. The completed form should be emailed to the Headteacher and Chair of Governors and then, after any possible alterations, the form will be circulated to the governing body and staff
• Governors must report without giving opinions and where possible individuals should not be able to be identified. It is important to remember that visits are a snapshot in time, and judgements should not be made arbitrarily.

The visit is not about:

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

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. If the agreed principles and procedures are followed then Governor Visits will be an enjoyable experience for all involved, and will result in effective monitoring by the Governing Body, which will contribute to school improvement.

Guidelines for Governors - Advice on conducting visits

Rationale
The Governing Board at the Federation of Cowick and Pollington-Balne 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 Board
to understand some of the issues they are required to discuss and make decisions about with greater clarity.

Objectives
The Governing Board should aim to:

- Inform their decision-making by having visited at least twice during the year.
- Be aware of the feelings of members of staff and the issues they face by having had a more lengthy discussion with at least one member of staff during the year.
- Read and keep up-to-date with school newsletters and other documents that are set out.
- Keep up-to-date with their nominated area, introduce themselves and spend time discussing with the area lead.

The benefits of visiting
Closer links between Governors and teachers has potential benefits to both.

For governors these include:

- More informed understanding of classroom life and practice.
- Opportunity to meet and chat with the pupils.
- Opportunity to meet class teachers and put faces to names.
- Seeing policies and schemes of work in action
- Finding out what resources are being used and what are needed.

For Teachers these include:

- Opportunity to find out more about the role of the Governor.
- Having chance to illustrate the theory and policy in practice.
- Opportunity to draw attention to any issues or questions they wish to raise.
- Opportunity to reflect upon practice through discussion.

What to Avoid

- 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 code of conduct as it is outlined here.
- 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.
- Please 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.
- 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.
- Never break rules of confidentiality.

Conducting the visit

After planning your visit with the class teacher or subject coordinator you might have agreed to:

- take part in a lesson acting as classroom helper during your visit
- talking to the children about what they are doing
- work with a small group
- introduce yourself to the class and answer any of their questions
- meet with the class teacher or subject lead to discuss particular issues or set the context
- observe - focussing on an agreed area/issue that the class teacher would like some feedback on e.g. the involvement of a particular group of pupils.

Please remember that monitoring visits do not require judgement on the teacher. It might also be useful to clarify some 'what ifs 'beforehand. For example:

- What if I see children misbehaving when the teacher doesn't?
- What if a pupil asks me how to do something?
- What if I have a suggestion to make?

Providing Feedback

It is important that a time is agreed between yourself and the headteacher to discuss the monitoring activity you have taken part in or observed. During this feedback you might refer to notes you have made. The structure might include:

1. Asking for any further clarification.
2. Giving your own impressions on what you saw
3. Providing any positive comment.
4. Raising any issues that appeared to develop.
5. Any further questions you might have
6. A summary of the feedback you will be giving to the governing body.

At the end of the feedback both you and the headteacher should be clear about what you will be sharing with the governing body- there should be no surprises!
The **Governors 'visits** pro forma should be completed as soon as possible after the visit. It should reflect the discussion you have had with the teacher. The report should be emailed to the headteacher and Chaor of Governors for distribution.

Policy Review

This policy should be reviewed every two years. The key questions should be:

- Has every Governor visited at least once during the year?
- Has each Governor made links concerning their allocated roles
- Has every Governor had a conversation with the subject leader they are linked to?
- Are our visits achieving the potential benefits identified in this policy?
- Have there been any unexpected benefits?
- How can we make policy and practice even better?