

Northamptonshire Local Social Partnership Governor Visits to Classrooms – Best Practice Guidance for schools – May 2011

The Guide to the Law

- 1) The Guide to the Law states that individual governors do not have an automatic right to enter the school whenever they wish.
- 2) However, in order to develop their understanding of the school, there is an expectation that governors will need to be able to visit from time to time. These visits enable them to fulfil their statutory responsibility for the conduct of the school, increasing the governing body's first-hand knowledge and helping to inform their strategic decision making.
- 3) The Guide states that governors should arrange their visits with the headteacher, who has responsibility for the day-to-day management of the school. While visits to the school by governors can be useful and informative, they do not replace professional inspection or the monitoring and evaluation carried out by the headteacher.
- 4) The governing body should plan visits to cover a wide range of school work and each visit should have a clear purpose. Visits should generally relate to the schools' improvement priorities

Purpose of this guidance document

- 5) Governor monitoring can take several forms including pupil interviews, meeting with subject leaders, walking around the school or entering lessons.
- 6) The purpose of this document is to ensure that governors who intend to enter classrooms to observe teaching and learning have clear protocols to guide them. These protocols pay regard to the professional role that teachers and teaching assistants undertake.

Annual programme of visits

- 7) A programme of governor visits should be planned and spread evenly across the school year in consultation with the head teacher and the appropriate member of staff who is responsible for the area being monitored/visited.
- 8) The head teacher should make sure that no individual teacher or teaching assistant is overburdened with observation, ensuring that the number of learning walks is reasonable and agreed in advance.

Purposes of governor visits

- 9) Visits may take place in a formal or informal capacity. It is vital that everyone is clear about the capacity in which they are visiting and not to confuse the role.

10) There may be occasions when governors visit the school but they are not acting in their formal governor role. Examples include

- To provide support at a school event
- To help in a class
- To speak to a teacher in relation to their own child
- Attend a school function or educational visit

11) The overriding purpose of a formal governor learning walk is to gather evidence rather than to make judgements about an individual teacher's performance.

12) Where learning walks by governors are undertaken, the outcomes should be used for whole school evaluation purposes but must not be used to make judgements about the competence of individual teachers/ teaching assistants.

13) While notes may be taken about the specific agreed focus, there should be normally no written notes about an individual teacher or teaching assistant taken during a short visit to a classroom on a learning walk.

14) The written record of the learning walk should share generalised observations and outcomes around the agreed focus. No individual member of staff should be identifiable in the written record of the learning walk exercise.

15)

What governor classroom visits are...
To recognise and celebrate success
To develop relationships with the staff
To get to know the children
To recognise different teaching styles
To understand the environment in which teachers teach
To monitor policies in action
To inform decision making
To find out what resources are needed and prioritise them
To ensure governors understand the reality of the classroom
To understand better the governors' roles and responsibilities
To have an opportunity to reflect on practice through discussion

Duration of visit

- 16) Learning walks are, by definition, short visits to one or more classrooms up to a maximum of 10 minutes per classroom.
- 17) Governor learning walks should last no longer than a total of 1 hour on each occasion.

Monitoring and review of school's governor visit programme

- 18) The school's governor visit programme should be monitored and reviewed annually.
- 19) Governors should review
- whether the visits are achieving the potential benefits they anticipated
 - whether there have been any unexpected benefits
 - the ways in which the practice can be further improved

Preparing for a governor classroom visit

- 20) Governors should
- Check the agreed school policy for governors' visits
 - Clarify the purpose of the visit.
 - Discuss an agenda with the head teacher and or subject co ordinator well in advance.
 - Make sure that the date and time chosen is suitable.
 - Send the proposed agenda to the staff involved. Ask how they would like governors to participate in the learning walk?
 - Discuss with the subject co-ordinator if any supporting information is available – Ofsted report, improvement plan, performance data for the governor to read before the visit
 - Be clear beforehand exactly what you are looking for.
 - Prepare any specific questions and submit to staff in advance.

During the classroom visit

- 21) Governors should
- Remember they are making the visit on behalf of the governing body
 - Be punctual.
 - Keep to the agreed timetable but be flexible.
 - Decide with the teacher how they will be introduced to the class and what their role in the classroom will be.
 - Get involved with the children
 - Remember it is a visit not an inspection.
 - Observe discretely.

- Avoid distracting the teacher during the lesson from his/her work but be prepared to talk and show interest.
- Be courteous and friendly
- Be prepared to interact.
- Not lose sight of the purpose of your visit.
- Listen to staff and pupils.

After the governor classroom visit

22) Governors should

- Discuss what they have observed with the teacher or subject co-ordinator
- Clarify any issue they are unclear about.
- Consider together whether the purpose of the learning walk has been achieved.
- Thank the teacher for supporting them in their role as a governor.
- Be open, honest, positive.
- Make notes as soon as possible after the observation while it is still fresh in the mind.
- Submit their report to the head teacher and any staff involved in the learning walk to check for accuracy and clarity, being prepared to amend it if necessary
- Reflect on how and whether the visit has helped the governing body fulfil its duties
- Circulate their agreed report at the next appropriate committee/governing body meeting.

Northamptonshire Local Social Partnership – Active Membership 2011

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