

Governor School Visits Policy

St. Thomas of Canterbury Church of
England Primary School



Approved by:	Full Governing Body	Date: April 2024
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1. Aims

One of the key roles and responsibilities of the Governing Body is to monitor the progress and performance of the school. Undertaking regular visits demonstrates the Governors' role in the strategic management of the school by helping to hold the school to account and evaluate its progress.

The Governing Body is a corporate body and every Governor will visit the school as a representative member of that body, not as an individual. An effective partnership between Governors and staff, based on mutual understanding and respect, benefits the whole school community.

This policy aims to set and maintain standards of conduct that we expect all Governors to follow when making visits to the school. Governors do not have an automatic right to enter St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Primary School. When they do so, they are invited guests.

This policy sets out the procedure which all Governors are expected to follow when visiting our school and how they are expected to report back on that visit to the Governing Body.

By creating this policy, we aim to ensure that all Governors understand their role and purpose so school visits are a productive and enjoyable event for all involved.

2. Guidance and scope

Monitoring visits should focus on the progress made against the School Development Plan (SDP) or one of the Governors' statutory duties. At St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Primary School each Governor is linked to at least one area of the curriculum and/or has one specific responsibility. Visits range from two hours to the whole day. Each Governor should aim to attend the school for a whole day visit once a year.

This policy takes account of best practice and guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/governance-in-maintained-schools>

2.1 Governors are observers

The Governing Body must know their school in order to maintain robust accountability. Through pre-arranged visits that have a clear focus, Governors will:

- › Observe whether the school is properly implementing school policies, and actions from the School Development Plan
 - › Observe how those procedures are working in practice
 - › Have the opportunity to gather the views of pupils and staff
 - › Witness the Christian ethos of the school in practice
 - › See the school at work and observe the range of attitudes, behavior and achievements
 - › Get to know the staff and demonstrate their commitment to the school
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- › 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

2.2 Governors are not inspectors

Governors:

- › Will not assess the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom
- › Will not make judgements about the professional expertise of the teacher
- › Will not manage the school or interfere in the day-to-day operations of the school
- › Will not use it as an opportunity to check on their own children
- › Will not pursue a personal agenda
- › Will not arrive with inflexible pre-conceived ideas
- › Will not break confidentiality

For those Governors who wish to spend time in a classroom, they will make it clear about their purpose in doing so.

3. Visits programme

Governors will carry out regular school visits in order to meet the Governing Body's statutory obligation to monitor the school's effectiveness.

There are 2 types of visits:

- › **Formal monitoring visits**, where Governors discuss the progress of the school in a particular area with the relevant staff member
- › **Learning walks**, where Governors will go around the school with the relevant staff member to get a feel for a particular area and are likely to talk to a range of staff members and pupils

Governors will carry out school visits according to the following schedule:

<u>Visit Focus</u>	<u>Regularity</u>
Core Curriculum monitoring visit	Once a term
Foundation Curriculum monitoring visit	Twice a year in different terms
New Governor Induction visit	One morning/one afternoon

3.1 Governors for Health and Safety, Special Educational Needs, and safeguarding

These governors will attend:

- › A termly 1:1 monitoring visit with corresponding staff leads
- › Ad hoc meetings as required or requested on issues specific to their areas of responsibility

3.2 All Governors

All Governors will:

- › Carry out at least 1 learning walk in the year
- › Attend at least 1 school Collective Worship in the year
- › Where possible, attend at least 1 educational visit in the year
- › In addition to the above it is important that the Governing Body maintains a profile at school events, e.g. Parents' Evening, the Summer Fair, Eucharists, school performances and concerts.

4. Before a visit

Governors will:

- › Notify the Headteacher (and the Chair, if appropriate) when scheduling a visit, even if the Headteacher will not be involved in the visit. They should be made aware just as a matter of courtesy
- › Schedule an appointment with relevant members of staff in order to avoid friction and ensure visits are scheduled for times that are mutually convenient. Generally, Governor visits are more productive when conducted during a school day
- › Be sensitive to the numerous demands staff have on their time
- › Clarify the purpose of the visit in advance with the Headteacher and/or relevant member of staff and/or Chair ahead of the visit. (Refer to Appendix 1 – Part 1 – Plan your visit)
- › Send questions in advance to the staff member so everyone can feel properly prepared
- › Be familiar with the school's safeguarding policies and procedures
- › Prepare for the visit by reading the relevant section of the School Development Plan, subject policy and subject area action plan (you may need to request this directly from the Subject Leader)

5. During a visit

Governors should know how to conduct themselves appropriately during visits in order to minimise disruption for staff and pupils and to receive the maximum benefit from the time spent. At the start of your visit you may wish to clarify the etiquette, courtesies and expectations for your visit, e.g. how will you be introduced, where will you stand, if you can join in.

Governors will:

- › Be on time and meet with the Headteacher ahead of the visit if available
- › Always wear a visitor's badge
- › Use the agreed recording method for the visit. Photographs and videos are to be avoided unless specifically agreed with the Headteacher for a specific purpose
- › Remain as observers; they are not there to pass judgement on staff or inspect them
- › Ensure all parties are clear about why a Governor wishes to spend time in the classroom, if they wish to do so
- › Check with teachers before speaking to pupils
- › Pass on any concerns the staff raise to the relevant people
- › Be friendly but professional and dress appropriately, bearing in mind the standards of dress set for teachers and pupils
- › Be calm and enjoy the visit!

Governors will not:

- › Pass comment on classroom practice or any specific incidents that happen, judge teaching methods, assess the quality of teaching, or comment on the extent of learning
- › Interfere with the day-to-day running of the school
- › Intervene with matters pertaining to poor behaviour of pupils
- › Behave in a manner than would make staff feel that they are there to inspect, e.g. sit at the back of the classroom with a clipboard
- › Raise concerns in the moment. Governors should note down any concerns they may have and raise them with the Chair of Governors or Headteacher after the visit

6. After a visit

Remember to thank the teachers and pupils!

Briefly meet with the Headteacher to give a verbal report and to raise any issues that arose if possible.

Governors will complete a written report within 5 working days using the form attached as Appendix A (monitoring visit) or Appendix B (learning walk), as appropriate.

The written report must be shared with the Governing Body at least **10 working days** before a full Governing Body meeting. This will give time for Governors to prepare any questions in relation to the report. Governors' visits are always an agenda item at full Governing Body meetings and Governors should be prepared to take questions based on their written reports.

In completing the report, Governors will ensure to:

- › Use neutral language at all times
- › Ensure no individual can be identified
- › Remain observational, and describe only what they see
- › Focus closely on the agreed reasons for the visit, and its strategic role

Once complete, Governors will submit their reports to the following people, in the following order:

- › A more experienced Governor for initial feedback - if they've been in place for less than one academic year
- › The relevant staff member, both as a courtesy and to check for accuracy and any further comments (within 5 working days of the visit)
- › The relevant staff member then has 2 working days to respond to the report
- › The Headteacher, as a courtesy (within 7 working days of the visit)
- › All members of the Governing Body (within 10 working days of the visit)

The final visit report should be kept with the minutes of the full Governing Body meeting.

Governors are an important part of the school community and are welcomed into the school by staff and pupils. It is important that Governors remember to respect the professionals and the children, support the Headteacher and staff, and acknowledge that they represent the full Governing Body.

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

Appendix 1: Template report for a monitoring visit

Formal monitoring visits are where you discuss the progress of the school in a particular area with the relevant staff member. Use this form as a reminder of what to look for and what to ask.

Part 1: plan the visit	
Name and role of Governor(s)	
Name and role of staff member(s)	
Date and time of visit	
Agreed focus Make sure you focus on this agreed reason for the visit. Avoid getting distracted by other issues that have not been agreed with the member of staff.	
Relevant school objective or priority This might be taken from the School Development Plan (SDP) objectives or the school's overarching vision.	
Questions to ask Note specific questions you want to ask based on the SDP, or points to follow up on from a previous visit. Share these questions with the staff member you are visiting in advance, so they can prepare.	

Part 2: in the meeting

What is the school doing within this area of focus?

Tips:

- Ask open questions beginning with 'what', 'how', 'when', 'how often', 'why', 'who' and 'where'
- Do not be afraid to clarify any terms or acronyms you're not familiar with
- Remember you are **not** there to pass judgement on staff or inspect them – you remain an observer
- When writing the report, use neutral language and do not name individual teachers and pupils

How do you know the school's actions are having an impact?

Remember:

- Include specific evidence that demonstrates the positive impact the school is having in this area
- Where a positive impact has not been made yet, note down why that is and what steps are being taken to make progress
- Add any further evidence you would like to see to help you make a better assessment of the impact

What successes stood out and why?

Comments on Collective Worship (if attended)

Comments on playground climate walk (break/lunch)

Questions and clarifications to follow up with the Headteacher or Chair of Governors

Appendix 2: Template report for a learning walk

Learning walks are where you will go around the school with the relevant staff member to get a feel for a particular area. You are likely to talk to a range of staff members and pupils. Use this as a reminder of what to look for and what to ask.

Part 1: plan the walk	
Name and role of governor(s)	
Name and role of staff member(s)	
Date and time of visit	
Agreed focus <i>Make sure you focus on this agreed reason for the visit. Avoid getting distracted by other issues that have not been agreed with the member of staff.</i>	
Relevant school objective or priority <i>This might be taken from the School Development Plan (SDP) objectives or the school's overarching vision.</i>	
Questions to ask <i>Note specific questions you want to ask based on the SDP, or points to follow up on from a previous visit. Share these questions with the staff member you are visiting in advance, so they can prepare.</i>	

Part 2: on the walk

General notes from discussions with staff

Tips:

- *Ask open questions beginning with 'what', 'how', 'when', 'how often', 'why', 'who', 'where' and 'can you show me...'*
- *Do not be afraid to clarify any terms or acronyms you're not familiar with*
- *Remember you are not there to pass judgement on staff or inspect them*
- *When writing the report, use neutral language and don't name individual teachers*

General notes from discussions with pupils

Remember:

- *Do not ask them for pupils' views on a specific teacher*
- *Do not record pupils' names*

General notes on the school environment and overall atmosphere

Note:

- *Whether the governors' vision of the school is replicated on the ground*
- *Any issues with the school site you see e.g. broken equipment or lack of resources*

What successes stood out on the learning walk and why?

Questions and clarifications to follow up with the Headteacher or Chair of Governors