

# Governors' Visits Policy



**“Learning to make the world a better place”**

<b>Reviewed</b>	<b>Spring 2016</b>
<b>Next Review</b>	<b>Autumn 2017</b>

## **Governors' Visits Policy**

St John's Angell Town welcomes and values visits by members of its Governing Body, believing that such visits make an important contribution to understanding the school and its community, thereby enabling Governors to carry out their roles and duties with greater effectiveness.

All new Governors are encouraged to plan a general visit in order to understand how the school is organised and operates, to meet some of the staff and pupils, appreciate its distinctive Christian ethos and perhaps have a brief discussion with the Headteacher or other school leaders regarding the school's priorities and purpose.

Governors may wish to visit with a particular purpose, perhaps on a regular basis, related to their role on the Governing Body, e.g. subject link Governor or to gain a deeper understanding of a particular aspect of school life.

Every Governor is encouraged to attend our important school events, such as awards assemblies, School Leavers ceremonies, various concerts, performances and celebrations as well our end of term services and Eucharists. The dates of these events are published annually and available from the Clerk to the Governors.

In order that your visit might be made as effective as possible, we ask that the following protocol is followed:

### **Beforehand**

1. Appointment for visit to be made initially with the Headteacher via Clerk to the Governors or the Headteacher's PA, giving at least one week's notice
2. Purpose and focus of visit to be agreed with the Headteacher
3. The school will then plan an appropriate programme for your visit which could include lunch as required
4. Please inform yourself about the school from website, prospectus, school profile, policies etc.

### **On the day**

1. On arrival, please report at reception so that you can sign in and receive a visitor's pass
2. If your visit includes a general tour of the school, please feel free to ask all that you want of your guides – they will be delighted to inform you.
3. If you are visiting classes at work, please be aware that you are an empathetic observer. If you wish to talk to the learners about their work, please do so only when an appropriate moment arises.
4. You may wish to have a short conversation with your host (Headteacher or other school leader) regarding your experience before you leave, particularly if you have any concerns or anxieties about your visit.
5. Before you leave, please ensure that you sign out at reception.

### **Afterwards**

1. Please make a record of your visit using the attached proforma as a guide so that this can be reported back to the rest of the Governing Body at a future meeting as appropriate.
2. Any report should be agreed with the staff link at the school before being reported back to the Governing Body.

# GOVERNOR VISIT FORM

NAME:

GOVERNOR  
RESPONSIBILITY:

DATE:

DURATION:

AREA OF SCHOOL/STAFF/CLASS VISITED:

PURPOSE OF VISIT/ OBJECTIVES:

GOVERNOR'S COMMENTS:

STAFF COMMENTS:

HEADTEACHER'S COMMENTS:

SIGNED:

GOVERNOR: \_\_\_\_\_

STAFF MEMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

HEADTEACHER: \_\_\_\_\_

For further guidance, you may wish to view the attached SDBE Governors Guide Factsheet No.8 on Visiting Your School.

**1 INTRODUCTION**

**1.1** All governors, whether appointed by the Church or the local education authority, elected by the parents or the staff of a school, or co-opted, bring with them a particular and valid perspective. It is important to ground an individual's perspective in a sound knowledge of the school as a whole. Reading the school prospectus and other papers and statistics is a useful starting point, but cannot be a substitute for first-hand knowledge, that is, a visit to the school during "working" hours.

**2 TIME OFF WORK**

**2.1** Some governors find it difficult to take time off work in order to visit their school. Under employment law, employees are entitled to "reasonable time off" to carry out their duties as a governor. There needs to be agreement between the employee and employer as to what "reasonable time off" means in practice. It will be necessary to consider the amount of time needed to carry out the duties; the effects of an employee's absence on the employer's business; and whether time off is given to the employee for other activities. An employer is not obliged to give time off with pay. Some governors find it difficult to get time off work during the school day; governing bodies need to be sensitive to this and ensure, as far as possible, that all governors benefit from the experiences of those who are able to get into school during the working day.

**3 SCHOOL VISITS POLICY**

**3.1** Governors sometimes ask whether they have a right to visit their schools. There is nothing set down in law, but it is generally agreed that governors need to visit during the school day in order to understand and fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Governors make important decisions about their schools and it is vital that those decisions are grounded in a sound, first-hand knowledge of the school. Governors of Church of England schools also need to be aware of the quality of Religious Education and worship in their school. Part of the governing body's role is to monitor the progress of the school improvement plan and also the teaching and learning that takes place in the school; it is very difficult to fulfil this role without visiting the school. Schools are, however, complex places and it is vital that visits are organised properly in consultation with the headteacher. Many governing bodies choose to link governors to a class, year group or curriculum subject; in this way individual governing bodies can get to know part of the school in greater depth and develop relationships with staff and pupils.

**4 GROUND RULES FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOL VISITS**

**4.1** There are four main rules for an effective school visit:

- (i) **clear agreed aims:** governing bodies should be clear about why governors need to visit and draw up a planned programme of visits; individual governors must know why they are visiting the school. When developing a visiting policy some Governing Bodies set up a small working party involving both teachers and governors to agree the way visits will be conducted and their purpose;
- (ii) **clear channels of communication:** visits must be arranged in consultation with the headteacher and other staff. Feedback is an important part of any visit. Any concerns must always be discussed with the headteacher in the first instance;
- (iii) **careful planning :** governors should be as fully prepared as possible; read relevant policy documents and talk to more experienced governors and the headteacher;
- (iv) **empathy:** if you are visiting a classroom, try to put yourself in the place of the teacher, remember that you are not there as an inspector, sharing your anxieties beforehand may help to improve the partnership.

**5 BEFORE YOU VISIT**

**5.1** First answer a few questions:

- (i) why are you visiting the school?
- (ii) is this your first visit? (If yes, see next section)

(iii) will you go alone or accompanied? (For example, by a member of the teaching staff if visiting classrooms.)

(iv) will you have a "focus" for your visit? (You cannot expect to find out everything in one go.)

(v) are you up-to-date with what is happening in your school?

(vi) is your visit part of a planned rota of visits, and/or linked to the School Improvement Plan?

## **6 PLANNING YOUR FIRST VISIT**

**6.1** A first visit to school will be a familiarisation process. If you are a parent, you may be familiar with a particular class or year group, but have little knowledge of what happens in the rest of the school; others may not have visited a school for a long time. Governors planning their first visit should consider the following:

(i) going with an experienced governor who is used to visiting, or at least talking to other governors who have visited the school;

(ii) accepting any offer from the headteacher, staff or pupils of a guided tour of the school;

(iii) finding out what material is available and reading it before your visit, eg, school prospectus, the school profile, school policies on more general aspects of school life, eg, behaviour policy. If you are new to "education" your headteacher may be able to supply you with information on the particular stage of education which concerns you, whether nursery, infant, junior, or secondary.

## **7 ARRANGING A VISIT**

**7.1** First and foremost, always make an appointment with the headteacher and plan with him/her what you will do during your visit. You cannot expect to learn everything about the school in one visit, concentrating on one aspect, which interests you, is a good starting point. If you are visiting a class make sure you liaise closely with the teacher, you will need to be flexible and respond to situations in the classroom as they arise. Make sure that the teacher is happy for you to sit with the pupils and to talk to them before you do so.

## **8 WHAT TO LOOK FOR**

**8.1** It is vital for governors to remember that a visit to school is not an inspection; misunderstandings may arise if notebooks are in evidence, particularly in a classroom. Depending on the type of visit, you may wish to answer some questions for yourself, below are some examples:

(i) how many pupils are there in a class?

(ii) are the pupils working alone or in groups?

(iii) is there enough equipment/books to go round? Can pupils explain what they are doing?

(iv) are all pupils occupied on the same task? Why are they engaged in this task?

(v) what is the atmosphere like in class and corridors - is it quiet/calm or noisy?

(vi) is there an adequate, comfortable staff room?

(vii) are there attractive displays on the walls? Do these include Religious Education?

(viii) is the library well stocked and well used? What level of access do pupils have to ICT?

## **9 AFTER YOUR VISIT**

**9.1** Always thank the headteacher, staff and pupils for their time; it is not always easy to cope with visitors on a busy day! If you visited a particular class, you may wish to write to the pupils and class teacher. If possible, before you leave the school talk over your impressions with the headteacher. If you intend to write a brief report for the governors ensure that the headteacher knows this and let him/her see a copy before it is circulated to the governors. If you have any serious misgivings or questions you must discuss these first with the headteacher. If it is agreed practice that a report or record of the visit be produced, any teacher or head of department involved in the visit should see the report first. Always inform an individual if a report is circulated to governors which relates in any way to them.

## **10 CONCLUSION**

**10.1** Visiting your school should be a pleasant experience; time spent in preparing for your visit will reap benefits since you will have a clearer idea of what you are trying to achieve. Visits are an opportunity for getting alongside the headteacher, staff and pupils; being with pupils may be daunting to some governors at first, but it will serve as a reminder that you are a governor essentially in order to benefit the children in the school's care.

Agreed/ Ratified by Governors: Spring 2015

Signed By: *Rev Rosemarie Mallett*

Designation: Chair of Governors

Next Review: Spring 2017