

# **Bentley and Copdock Primary Schools**

## **Governor Schools Visits Policy**

**Date policy adopted: May 2023**

**Date for review: Summer 2025**

**Signed: Simon Hurst**

(Chair on behalf of Governing Board)

**Signed: Joanne Austin**

(Headteacher on behalf of the school)

### **Policy aims**

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. This policy aims to ensure that all governors understand:

- the purpose of monitoring visits
- the expectations for carrying out visits including preparation, expected conduct and reporting back to the Governing Board

When they visit the schools, they are invited guests

### **Guidance and scope**

This policy takes account of best practice and guidance from the Governance Handbook (section 3.4.2) and the NGA Guide to School Visits – April 2022.

Governors are observers, they must know their schools in order to maintain robust accountability. Through regular pre-arranged visits that have a clear focus, governors will:

better understand their schools, their strengths and areas for development

- observe whether the schools are properly implementing school policies and procedures and, actions from the School Development Plan
  - observe how these procedures are working in practice
- identify how resources are being used
- show staff and pupils that they are interested in the life, work and achievements of the schools
- experience the culture and ethos of the schools
  - have the opportunity to gather the views of pupils and staff

Governors are not inspectors, they are not qualified to assess the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. Their role is strategic, not operational, they will not attempt to manage the schools or interfere in the day-to-day operations.

### **Monitoring visits should focus on:**

- strategic priorities and key policies agreed by the Governing Board
- the evaluation of progress: are the things people say are happening actually happening?
- seeking assurance that the needs of pupils are being met (such as safeguarding and SEND)

Staff wellbeing

## Frequency of visits

Governors will carry out regular school visits in order to meet the Board's statutory obligation to monitor the schools' effectiveness. There are two types of visit:

- formal monitoring visits, where governors discuss the progress of the school in a particular area with the relevant member of staff
- 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 for health and safety, special educational needs and safeguarding will attend termly for a 1:1 meeting with corresponding staff leads, together with ad hoc meetings as required or requested on issues specific to their areas of responsibility. The frequency of governance visits should be in accordance with the schedule established by the Governing Board and agreed with school leaders and relevant staff. Visits should be scheduled to allow governors to see relevant activities and strategic milestones.

## Arranging and preparing for visits

Visits should be arranged through the Headteacher, with adequate notice, and agreed with the relevant members of staff.

Due regard should be given to:

- how the visit fits with the schedule of Board and committee meetings, to allow for timely feedback and discussion
- how to avoid visits clashing with important events and/or busy periods in school life
- the workload implications for staff who are likely to be involved in the visits

Governors are encouraged to prepare for their visit. This may include:

- reading and familiarising themselves with the Governing Board's protocol for visits and the expected conduct
- reading and familiarising themselves with the schools' policy for visitors (this is different from the governor visits policy) that includes relevant health, safety and safeguarding instructions
- reading the background information relating to the focus of the visit, such as relevant section(s) of the School Development Plan, performance data, policies, stakeholder information
- clarifying the purpose of the visit with the Headteacher and / or relevant member of staff
- confirming the visit schedule and activities

## Conduct on visits

When visiting the school in a governing capacity, governors should:

- arrive in good time and follow the schools' procedures (such as signing in and wearing their photo lanyard)
- adopt a friendly approach that puts everyone at ease
- be respectful of the school at work and if governors wish to take notes, check that those persons you are with are comfortable with this
- if taking notes, be clear with everyone that this is for feedback purposes and that you are **not** recording judgements (for example on the quality of their teaching)
- ask relevant questions that are closely linked to the purpose of the visit  
check with teachers before speaking to pupils

- acknowledge the staff and pupils you meet
  - pass on any concerns that the staff raise to the relevant person

Governors are also expected to behave in line with the Governing Board's Code of Conduct, being especially aware of the need to maintain confidentiality.

### **Expectations following a visit**

A report should be completed as soon as possible after each visit.

In completing the report, governors will:

- use neutral language at all times
- remain observational and describe only what they see
- focus closely on the agreed reasons for the visit and its strategic role

A draft will be shared with the Headteacher and any other members of staff involved in the visit and, when agreed, a final version will be included in the papers for discussion in the next Governing Board meeting (this may be the full Governing Board or a committee, as appropriate).

### **Appendices:**

**Appendix A:** Guide to Governor Visits to Schools

**Appendix B:** Governor Visit Report Form

**Appendix C:** Governor School Visits Schedule

## **Appendix A**

### **Guide to Governor Visits to Schools**

**(Based of NGA Guide to School Visits April 2021)**

#### **Contents**

This guide covers four areas:

1. The focus for school visits
2. Planning and preparation
3. During and after visits
4. Reviewing your visits policy

#### **Introduction**

Monitoring visits provide governing boards with essential information about how their strategy is being implemented and how issues discussed at board level translate into the everyday life of the school.

Visiting school on a planned, regular basis allows governors to:

- better understand the schools' strengths and areas for development
- determine if agreed policies and procedures are working in practice
- identify how resources are being used
- show staff and pupils that they are interested in school life, work and achievements
- experience the culture and ethos of the school

School visits can cover several activities, such as:

- meeting staff with leadership responsibility for specific areas, such as safeguarding or SEND
- talking to staff and pupils
- experiencing a lesson being taught (as part of getting to know the school, rather than making judgements about quality of teaching)
- seeing examples of pupil work

#### **Purpose of this guide**

This guide explains the purpose of school visits and includes advice on what to do before, during and after visits. This guide should help all governors and trustees to:

- ensure your visits are well planned and focused on school or trust priorities
- make the most of visits and ensure they have a positive impact

## **1.The focus for school visits**

Monitoring visits should have a strategic rather than operational focus. In practice, this means visits should focus on:

- Strategic priorities and key policies agreed by the governing board.
- The evaluation of progress: are the things people say are happening actually happening?
- Seeking assurance that the needs of pupils are being met (such as safeguarding and SEND).

There may be opportunities to visit your school on an informal basis, such as attending performances or events. Whilst these visits are valuable, they are not a substitute for scheduled visits with a clear focus linked to strategic priorities.

## **2.Planning and preparation**

### **2.1 Scheduling visits**

Governing boards should plan a schedule of visits for each academic year. (Appendix C)

When making these plans, boards should consider:

- Strategic milestones (things that the board expects to have happened) – these should be outlined in the school improvement plan.
- How the visits schedule fits with the schedule of board and committee meetings, to allow for timely feedback and discussion.
- How to avoid visits clashing with important events and/or busy periods in school life.
- The workload implications for staff who are likely to be involved in the visits.
- The board's own capacity to fulfil the schedule: is it manageable?

The schedule of visits should be agreed between the governing board, school leaders and relevant staff. This will help ensure that the timing of visits allows governors/trustees to see relevant activities.

### **2.2 School visits policy**

The governing board should adopt a policy which sets out how visits are to be conducted and explains what you should do prior to, during, and after a visit.

### **2.3 Pre-visit planning**

Visits are more effective when governors and trustees prepare in advance. This preparation might include:

- Reading and familiarising yourself with your governing board's policy for visits and the expected conduct.
- Reading and familiarising yourself with your school's policy for visitors (this is different from the governor/trustee visits policy) that includes relevant health, safety and safeguarding instructions.

- Reading background information relating to the focus of the visit, such as relevant section(s) of the strategic plan, performance data, policies, stakeholder information.
- Clarifying the purpose of the visit with the head teacher and or relevant member of staff.
- Confirming the visit schedule and activities.

## **2.4 Virtual visits**

School visits are an opportunity for you to meet with staff, pupils and other stakeholders, helping you get to know your school and build relationships.

However, there are circumstances where it may be appropriate and more convenient to carry out a virtual visit. This has been a necessary approach for all boards during the COVID-19 pandemic and usually involves meeting with a member of staff and or pupils by video conference.

When planning a schedule of visits, governing boards should be aware that, whilst some areas of focus lend themselves to virtual visits, this does not allow governors and trustees to readily experience school life, culture and ethos first-hand – it is not possible to carry out effective monitoring without regular in-person visits to the school site.

Virtual visits should be planned in much the same way as in-person visits and might consist of:

- virtual meetings or phone calls with staff
- experiencing school life virtually (perhaps attending events like virtual assemblies)

Chairs should talk to school leaders about what a practical and appropriate approach to virtual visits might be.

## **2.5 Frequency of visits**

Governing boards are best placed to determine how often and when their visits should take place, with the aim of balancing board visibility and minimising disruption for the school.

In most cases, governors can expect to carry out monitoring visits at least twice a year.

## **3. During and after visits**

### **3.1 During a visit**

Governors are usually accompanied on their visits by a relevant member of staff to help guide their monitoring, answer questions and clarify learning points or lines of enquiry.

When visiting the school in a governing capacity you should:

- Arrive in good time and follow the school's procedures (such as signing in and producing identification).
- Adopt a friendly approach that puts everyone at ease.
- Be respectful of the school at work and if you wish to take notes, check that those you are

with are comfortable with this.

- If you are taking notes, be clear with everyone that this is for feedback purposes and that you are not recording judgements (for example on the quality of their teaching).
- Ask relevant questions that are closely linked to the purpose of your visit.
- Acknowledge the staff and pupils you meet.

### **3.2 After a visit**

Following a visit to school, you may wish to:

- Send a follow up message thanking everyone involved in supporting your visit for their time and assistance.
- Emphasise the positive aspects (such as the behaviour of the pupils, welcoming atmosphere) with the headteacher and or relevant member of staff who acted as your guide.

### **3.3 Reporting back to the board**

The impact of visits is increased when the learning is shared through structured feedback to the governing board. As soon as possible following a visit, use any notes you have taken to complete a report on your visit. Your report should detail the key learning points, discussion points for the governing board, the follow-up required, and next steps.

When writing your report, we suggest that you:

- Use neutral, collaborative language to describe what you observed (for example, 'reading attainment in key stage 1 is poor, the school needs to improve this' could be written as 'we have discussed the school's strategy to improve reading in key stage 1').
- Detail the agreed reasons for the visit and focus your report around this.
- Consider asking an experienced governor for feedback on your report.
- Send a draft of your report to the headteacher and relevant staff member as a courtesy and to invite feedback before circulating more widely.
- Submit your report in line with your visits policy.

You may also need to give oral feedback on your visit at a future board or committee meeting.

## **4. Reviewing your visits policy**

It is recommended that governing boards review the impact of their school visits when reviewing their policy, building lessons learned into future plans and considering:

- Are our visits proving useful?
- What benefits, particularly unexpected benefits, have come from our visits?
- Are we better informed and enabled to make sensible decisions?
- Is there anything we need to change about how visits are conducted, taking into account feedback from school staff?





## Appendix B

### Governor Visit Report Form

<b>Governor name:</b>	<b>Date of visit:</b>
<b>Focus of visit and name of lead staff member:</b> <i>Visits should focus on:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ <i>strategic priorities and key policies agreed by the governing board</i></li><li>■ <i>the evaluation of progress: are the things people say are happening actually happening?</i></li><li>■ <i>seeking assurance that the needs of pupils are being met (such as safeguarding and SEND)</i></li></ul>	
<b>Safeguarding focus:</b> <i>Visits should ask at least one questions of pupils <u>and</u> staff</i>	
<b>Evidence of pupils' spiritual development? (Awareness of themselves, relationships with others, the natural world around them, awareness of God)</b>	
<b>Summary of activities:</b> <i>For example:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ <i>meeting staff with leadership responsibility for specific areas, such as safeguarding or SEND</i></li><li>■ <i>talking to staff and pupils</i></li><li>■ <i>experiencing a lesson being taught (as part of getting to know the school, rather than making judgements about quality of teaching)</i></li><li>■ <i>seeing examples of pupil work</i></li></ul>	
<b>What have I learned as a result of my visit and how will I feed this back to my board?</b> <i>Relate this back to focus of your visit.</i>	

**Discussion points for the governing board:**

*Questions and suggestions for further monitoring.*

**Staff comments:**

*An opportunity for the relevant staff member to provide comments on your report.*

**Signed**

**Governor:**

**Staff Member(s):**

## **Appendix C**

### **Governor School Visits Schedule**

It is recommended that governing boards plan a schedule of visits for the year ahead. When making these plans, consider:

- Strategic milestones (things that the board expects to have happened) – these should be outlined in the school improvement plan or trust strategy document.
- How the visits schedule fits with the schedule of board and committee meetings, to allow for timely feedback and discussion.
- How to avoid visits clashing with important events and/or busy periods in school life.
- The workload implications for staff who are likely to be involved in the visits.
- The board's own capacity to fulfil the schedule: is it manageable?

The schedule of visits should be agreed between the governing board, school leaders and relevant staff. This will help ensure that the timing of visits allows governors to see relevant activities.

<i>Focus of visit</i>	<i>Proposed visit date</i>	<i>Governor/trustee name</i>	<i>Lead staff member and role</i>	<i>Reporting arrangements</i>
<i>Eg: To review recent updates to the school's safeguarding policy, including attending and observing staff training to ensure these changes have been embedded.</i>	<i>[To be confirmed between relevant parties ahead of the visit.]</i>		<i>Designated safeguarding lead  [A relevant member of staff will usually help guide monitoring, answer questions and clarify learning points or lines of enquiry during a visit.]</i>	<i>Report to be circulated to chair, DSL and the clerk and a verbal summary to be given at the next full governing board meeting.  [Reports produced following a visit should detail the key learning points, discussion points for the governing board, the follow-up required, and next steps.]</i>