

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Malmesbury

Governor Visits Policy



“Walking in the footsteps of Jesus, loving and serving together”

Introduction

The Governing Body has a duty to oversee the direction and policies of the school, to monitor its standards and be held to account for its conduct and performance. Visiting the school is the best way for governors to learn how it functions, and to keep under review how it operates so that we can increase our first-hand knowledge, thereby informing strategic decision making.

Ofsted inspectors assume that governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Regular visits by governors are an important way of acquiring this knowledge. Visits may relate to the priorities determined by the School Development Plan, they may relate to particular areas of the curriculum or they may be general visits, which include taking part in assemblies and Masses, or attending a school production.

Governors will plan visits to cover a wide range of school work and activities. Each visit will be agreed in advance with the Headteacher. Each visit will have a clear purpose, which will be discussed with the Headteacher and, where appropriate, the teacher who will be hosting the governor for the duration of his/her visit.

The Governing Body has formulated this policy in consultation with the Headteacher and school staff.

Link Governors

The Governing Body has the responsibility for raising standards in all areas of the school working in partnership with the Headteacher and the teaching and support staff. Linking individual governors to curriculum areas is a well-established way of helping governors to understand something about the curriculum and learning and teaching. Whilst governors do not need to be curriculum experts, collectively they need to have a broad understanding of the curriculum.

We could link governors to year groups, teachers or classes. However, at St Joseph's we have decided to link governors to curriculum and key focus areas highlighted in the School Development Plan SDP, in order to encourage them to learn more about a particular subject or area.

The Link Governor is not a teacher, or an inspector, but a source of support and a friend to the school.



The role played by the Link Governor will vary from governor to governor, depending on the person and the amount of time they are able to commit to the role. However, the role should include all of the following features to some extent:

- Provide a link between the Governing Body and the relevant teacher/member of staff
- Provide a link between the Governing Body and the school, parents and wider community
- Promote the interests and development of the subject / key area
- Undertake relevant training/development
- Liaise regularly with relevant teachers
- Find out about local activities and develop networks with governors in neighbouring schools
- Visit classrooms to observe the subject being taught
- Meet with staff to support and develop link areas
- Carry out Learning walks around the school with a specific focus
- Monitor/Evaluate the provision and use of relevant resources

In addition, the Link Governor might consider including some or all of the following:

- Attend an annual meeting with the curriculum area co-ordinator
- Attending meetings involving development planning
- Inform the co-ordinator of relevant outcomes of Governing Body meetings and provide clarification, where necessary
- Form part of the interview panel for appointments in the curriculum area
- Shadow the co-ordinator, by arrangement and agreement

Annual Programme of Visits

We recognise that governors are busy people, who have their own family and professional commitments. Some of our governors are parents of children at the school and often visit the school to watch productions, help out with events, attend Masses and assemblies, and to speak to staff. Governors also come into school frequently during the term to attend meetings and school events. For those reasons we do not impose a minimum number of visits during each school year. However, where a governor is linked to a specific curriculum area we ask that they visit their curriculum subject co-ordinator at least once during the academic year.

Purpose of Visits

Potential benefits

To governors:

- To recognise and celebrate success
- To develop relationships with the staff
- To develop teamwork and to give support and encouragement to 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 assess the impact of learning walks and visits

To teachers:

- To ensure governors understand the reality of the classroom
- To get to know governors
- To understand better the governors' roles and responsibilities
- To have an opportunity to reflect on practice through discussion
- To highlight the need for particular resources

What a visit is not about

- A form of inspection to make judgements about professional expertise of the teacher. Most governors are not employed in the teaching profession nor have they been trained to inspect a school.
- Checking on the progress of their own children or pursuing a personal agenda. Governors represent the Governing Body and must be professional and discreet at all times.
- Monopolising school/teacher time.

Protocols for Visits

Principles of Good Practice for both formal and informal school visits have been agreed between governors and staff, and these are set out below.

Governors are expected to respect the confidentiality of any information that comes into their possession as a result of making a visit. This could include information relating to individual children, visitors or staff at the school.

Providing Feedback

- Honest comments
- Areas of concern
- Questions
- Suggestions

To whom should I provide feedback?

- If there is time, discuss your visit with the member of staff who has hosted your visit



- Complete a School Visit Review Form and return it to the Headteacher, who will discuss your feedback with the member of staff who hosted your visit
- Your School Visit Review Form will be put to the relevant committee at its next meeting



School Visits

This policy recognises that there are two types of visits governors can make:

1. **Link Governor Visits** – these relate the particular curriculum and key focus areas to which individual governors are linked, e.g. numeracy, literacy, science, RE, etc.
2. **General Governor Visits / Learning Walks**– these are more informal visits and may be shorter and have a different focus to Link Governor Visits. Appropriate foci for such visits might include:

Assemblies	Masses	Playtimes
Lunchtimes	Swimming Sessions	Before/After School Clubs
Traffic Problems	Fire Drills	Behaviour
School Appearance	Litter	Uniform
Play Equipment	School Grounds	Before/After School Procedure
Learning walls	Displays	

Some of the foci suggested above for General Governor Visits require governors to be in school for a very short time, for example at the start of the school day. Some of these visits can also be carried out at the weekend, e.g. to look at the grounds. These visits may be more appropriate, therefore, for those of our governors whose time is limited during the day.

Visit Focus

Although not an exhaustive list visits may focus on:-

- Particular subjects, key stages or classes
- Linked to the School Development Plan, SDP
- The use made of the buildings or the site
- The condition and maintenance of the premises
- Special educational needs
- Literacy and numeracy
- Impact of the Catholicity of the school
- Lunch and break times
- The use and condition of resources e.g. furniture or ICT equipment
- Deployment of staff, e.g. office staff, teaching assistants
- The impact on the school of any changes e.g. reduced or increased class sizes in a key stage
- Relative numbers of questions and responses to the teacher from boys to girls



Formal School Visits - Good Practice

Preparing for a Visit

- Check the agreed policy for governors' visits
- Clarify the purpose of the visit. Is it linked to the School Development Plan? What are the relevant school policies? How does this determine the activities I am interested in?
- Discuss an agenda with the Headteacher well in advance. Make sure that the date chosen is suitable.
- Use the Information Sheet annexed to this policy to guide your visit.
- Time permitting, discuss the proposed agenda with the staff involved. How do they want you to integrate into the lesson? It might be possible for you to see a copy of the lesson plan beforehand.
- Be clear beforehand exactly what you are observing. Try to prepare questions for staff in advance. The Headteacher may be able to guide you on this.
- Discuss with the Headteacher if any supporting information is available – Ofsted report, development plan, performance data.

During the Visit

- Remember you are making the visit on behalf of the Governing Body; it is not appropriate to make judgements or promises on behalf of the Governing Body.
- Be punctual.
- Keep to the agreed timetable but be flexible.
- Decide with the teacher how you will be introduced and what your role in the classroom will be.
- Get involved with the children if the teacher has agreed that this would be appropriate.
- Remember it is a visit not an inspection.
- Observe discretely. Remember that excessive note taking can be disconcerting and may make your visit look like an inspection.
- Don't distract the teacher during the lesson from his/her work but be prepared to talk and show interest.
- Be courteous and friendly, not critical.
- Interact, don't interrupt.
- Don't interfere with school/classroom discipline
- Remember why you are there. Don't lose sight of the purpose of your visit.
- Listen to staff and pupils.

After the Visit

- Discuss what you have observed with the Headteacher and teacher. Use the opportunity to clarify any issues you are unclear about. For example, did your presence have any impact on the atmosphere in the classroom? If so, how?
- Refer to the purpose of the visit. Consider together whether it has been achieved.
- Thank the teacher for supporting you in your role as a governor. Be open, honest & positive.



- Make notes as soon as possible after your observation while it is still fresh in your mind.
- Discuss your observations with the Headteacher. Be prepared to take the comments of others on board.
- Agree with the Headteacher how and when you will report on your visit to the governing body.
- Reflect: how did that go? Has the visit enhanced relationships? Have I learned more about the school? Have I helped the governing body fulfil its duties?

Reporting your Visit

- Complete a School Visit Review Form setting out what you learned during the visit and the overall impression that was made. This will be easier if the visit had a focus.
- Pass your School Visit Review Form to the Headteacher who will discuss it with the staff involved in your visit. Be prepared to amend it. Aim to achieve a report that is agreed by those involved.
- Circulate this at the next appropriate committee/governing body meeting.

Informal School Visits – Good Practice

Visits may also take place in an informal capacity. It is vital that everyone is clear about the capacity in which you are visiting the school particularly if you are a parent of a child at the school. If the primary purpose of your visit to the school is in your capacity as a governor you must let the school (via the Headteacher) know first.

The FGB Chair of the Governing Body should make a regular visit to see the Headteacher.

Arrangements for monitoring, evaluation and review

Responsible committee for monitoring & evaluation:	Learning and Standards Committee
Policy reviewed by:	Learning and Standards Committee
Policy review & approval date:	Approved FGB 16 th May 2020
Next review date:	September 2021

Appendix 1 - Governors' School Visit Review Form

Appendix 2 - Visiting Governor Programme Information Sheet

Appendix 3 - Questions for Link Governors to Ask



Governors' School Visit Review Form

NAME	DATE
Area of Responsibility or Interest	
Staff Visited	
Area of focus	
Details of Visit <i>(Eg. Observations, work undertaken, discussions with staff/pupils, etc)</i>	
Remarks or Comments about the Visit <i>(Eg. How does the visit relate to a priority in the school development plan?)</i>	



Information Points (*Eg. Observations you may wish to pass on to the Headteacher*)



**St Joseph's Catholic Primary School
Visiting Governor Programme**

Information Sheet

These are some things you might like to consider during the course of your visit.

What is the purpose of the visit?

- To familiarise oneself with the school environment and to get to know the staff and pupils
- To evaluate school practices and procedures, especially health and safety, order and purpose, respect and welcome.
- To evaluate the aims of the school – have you seen evidence of them during your visit?

To evaluate the religious dimension of the school – its Catholicity, its worship, its teaching of the faith.

- Would you know this was a Catholic school when you entered?
- How does the school promote its Catholicity – it is evident in every aspect of the work it does?
- Are there resources around to help promote this aspect of our school?
- Do the children reflect the behaviour and attitudes that you would expect to see in a Catholic school?
- Is worship a significant part of the school day?

To look at the way the building helps to support the education of pupils.

- What do you notice about the upkeep and maintenance of the building?
- Is the site carefully organised and tidy?
- How does the outside of the building present itself when you arrive?
- Does the school have a welcoming ethos?
- Are people calm and orderly – staff and pupils?
- Is it a safe environment?

To appreciate the classroom organisation and management.

- When you entered the classroom – what first caught your attention?
- Was there a working atmosphere within the class?
- Did you notice the displays of children's work?
- Was there a book corner?
- Were you able to identify the R.E. work that had taken place?



- Do people seem to work closely to time?
- What sort of lesson was it?
- How had the teacher organised that lesson i.e. groups, whole class, individual?
- Were all of the children doing the same work or was the work differentiated i.e. to suit a particular ability?
- Were the children “on task” i.e. at work?
- What exactly was the teacher doing?
- How warmly were you invited to join in?

If time allows, to be able to meet all employed staff that play a vital role in the school organisation. For example but not limited to:

The teaching staff and teaching assistants

- What do they value about the school?
- How do they feel about working here?
- Do they feel empowered and supported?
- How does the role of the TA impact on the work of the teacher?

Admin & Finance Staff

- Do their jobs seem clearly defined?
- Is their workspace well organised?
- Do they give the feeling of welcome?
- Do they seem happy in their work?
- What does their job entail?
- How does this work impact on the effectiveness of the school?

To meet and talk to the children

The children are what the school is about. Talk to them about the work they are doing – what do they like and dislike – they will tell you quite honestly. How do the children feel about the school – is there something different about this school that makes it special for them or perhaps they do not like the school. How would they like to change the school –How, realistically, could things be improved?

The children, hopefully, will be polite and respectful. The only problem is that if you do ask children their views they can become relaxed and even over familiar and this could be interpreted as cheekiness. Should this happen or if anyone does disgrace themselves in anyway please draw this to the attention of the teacher who will discipline them. There are so many things that one could say to look for – most of all please enjoy your day and do join in with prayers at the end of the day with the class you are with.



Questions for Link Governors to Ask (Primary English and Mathematics)

The Governing Body retains the responsibility for raising standards of literacy and numeracy. Nominated governors who take a special interest in literacy or numeracy can help to ensure that these issues remain on the Governing Body's agenda. The following questions will help you in your role as literacy/numeracy governor, as you find out about the teaching of English/Mathematics across the school. Use them as a guide in a meeting or on school visits - it is not intended you work systematically through the list.

Discuss with the Headteacher how best to use these questions to help you gradually build up a picture of the school's strengths and areas for development. These questions could be adapted for use with other subjects.

Achievements and attitudes

What are the broad trends in the school's achievement in English/Mathematics?

- Compared to similar schools?
- In relation to the national rates of increase?
- In relation to the national picture in terms of gender?

Where have we improved? Do we know why?

Are there differences between the achievement of different year groups, and if so, why?

How do our results in English/Mathematics compare with those in other subjects?

What aspects of the subject do pupils find easy and which hard?

Are there significant differences in reading and writing between?

- girls and boys
- pupils with special educational needs
- more able pupils
- pupils with English as an additional language
- the majority and any other minority groups, such as travellers?

In meetings with the English/Mathematics coordinator can you tell how much progress pupils are making? For example, you could look at:

- Key Stage 1 and 2 test results
- the work of a range of pupils of differing abilities
- other evidence, e.g. special needs



How are pupils with special educational needs integrated into the daily English/mathematics lessons?

How have Individual Education Plans (IEPs) been adapted to support children in their daily English/mathematics lessons?



Management of the Subject

How is the role of the English/Mathematics/Geography coordinator developing?

Does the school development plan match the identified needs?

What is the allocation of funding to English/Mathematics/Geography for this financial year?

How has it or will it be spent?

Is there a need for additional resources for any aspect of the work?

What further training do teachers and support staff need?

How much additional adult support does each class have?

What was the outcome of the local authority's literacy/numeracy monitoring visits?

(Literacy only) Does the school offer a range of reading books catering for all abilities, cultural backgrounds and tastes, especially boys? Are pupils using the library? What links does the school have with the local library?

How does the school use all its resources (books, materials and displays, as well as electronic media) to promote reading and writing/numeracy?

Communication

How are parents kept informed of progress?

What steps are being taken to encourage parents to support their children in reading and writing at home?

How are governors kept informed about standards and the progress of pupils?

How do governors celebrate the school's success when things go well?