

East Somerset Federation



Bruton
Primary School



Upton Noble
C of E VC Primary

Governor Visits Policy

**Approved by the Governing Body of
The East Somerset Federation**

Signed:

Date: March 2024

Date for Review: March 2025

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1. Aims

At East Somerset Federation we believe that in order to understand the way that each school works, its achievements and challenges and to foster good relationships it is important that governors make regular visits to the schools. This will help the governing body make sensible tailored policy decisions that best suit the circumstances of the schools.

The Executive Headteacher, who has the responsibility for the day-to-day management of the school, will guide the Board on the areas of the curriculum, policies and FDP to be covered each term.

This policy sets out the procedure which all governors are expected to follow when visiting settings within the East Somerset Federation and how they are expected to report back on that visit to the governing board.

The timetable for governor visits to school will be within an agreed appropriate timeframe, agreed by the Heads of School/s and Executive Headteacher. The Governor will know:

- The purpose of the visit
- The time and date that they have agreed for each visit
- The action plans in place to support that area of the curriculum
- The report format
- Arrangements for reporting back via the Heads of School/s and or Executive Headteacher.

2. Guidance and scope

This policy takes account of best practice and guidance from the Governance Handbook (section 3.4.2).

2.1 Governors are observers

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

- Carry out visits to help monitor and assess the progress towards the actions in the school and Federation Development Plan (FDP) and to observe whether the school is properly implanting school policies
- Observe how those procedures are working in practice
- Have the opportunity to gather the views of pupils and staff
- Have a chance to gain knowledge of the needs, priorities, strengths and weaknesses of the school

2.2 Governors are not inspectors

Governors:

- Will not assess the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom
- Will not manage the school or interfere in the day-to-day operations of the school other than that agreed by the Executive Headteacher

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

3. Visits programme

The Governance Board will organise a programme of visits with the help of the Executive Headteacher. These should be spread throughout the year, with the aim to achieve a minimum of one visit per term. In addition, new governors will make a general introductory visit of the school as part of their induction programme.

The focus of a visit could be on any policy in place in the school e.g., teaching and learning, assessment, behaviour, collective worship. It could also focus on a particular area, such as the management of the school's resources, the condition of the buildings, safeguarding, a particular year group or class.

Governors will carry out regular school visits in order to meet the board'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

Potential Benefits:

to governors:

- To recognise and celebrate success of pupils and staff
- To build an effective relationship with the staff and a better understanding of the context in which they work
- To get to know the students
- To recognise different teaching styles
- To monitor policies in action
- To inform decision making
- To find out what resources are needed and prioritise them

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

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 Subject lead governors

Subject lead governors will attend:

- A monitoring visit with the subject lead in September/February/May
- A learning walk in October/March/June

3.3 All governors

All governors will:

- Carry out at least 1 learning walk each term
- Attend at least 1 school assembly in the year
- Attend at least 1 educational visit in the year

4. Before a visit

Governors should, with the guidance of the whole Board and Executive Headteacher, identify an aspect of the school's priority within the FDP to focus upon. This will help to maximise the effectiveness of the Governance Board team.

Governors will:

- Notify the Executive Headteacher and the chair before scheduling a visit, even if the Executive Headteacher will not be involved in the visit. They should be made aware 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
- Confirm the date, time and focus of the visit in advance

- Be sensitive to the numerous demands staff have on their time
- Clarify the purpose of the visit in advance with the chair, the Executive Headteacher and/or relevant member of staff
- Confirm what will be observed and whom it would be useful to talk to and agreeing any protocols to be observed whilst in the school
- Send questions in advance to the staff member, so everyone can feel properly prepared
- Be familiar with the school's safeguarding policies and procedures and any other relevant documentation.

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.

Governors will:

- Be on time and meet with a member of the senior leadership team ahead of the visit
- Always wear a visitor's badge which will be handed to them on signing in at the school office
- Use the agreed recording method for the visit. Photographs and videos are to be avoided unless specifically agreed with the Executive 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 and ask about anything that may be unclear
- Pass on any concerns the staff raise with the relevant people
- Be friendly but professional and dress appropriately, bearing in mind the standards of dress set for teachers and pupils
- Ask questions in a manner that both challenges and supports
- If appropriate, ask for and look carefully at the evidence that is shared with them that demonstrates progress towards actions of the FDP
- Thank staff for their time

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
- 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 Executive Headteacher after the visit

6. After a visit

Governors will complete a written report as soon as reasonably practicable [using the form attached as Appendix A (monitoring visit) or Appendix B (learning walk)], as appropriate. 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

At the end of each visit, the governor will discuss what they have observed with the teacher and clarify any points they are uncertain about. Comments should be limited to the focus of the visit. Governors visiting cannot make personal judgements or promises on behalf of the Governance Board. They will discuss their observations with the Executive Headteacher and agree how and when they will report to the Board on the visit.

See appendix 1 for a checklist regarding governor visits when visiting a school and appendix 2 for the form to record and report on visits to the Board.

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

- A more experienced governor for feedback – if they've been in place for less than 1 year
- The relevant staff member, both as a courtesy and to check for accuracy
- The Executive Headteacher, as a courtesy and to refer any concerns immediately
- The chair of the governing board or the relevant committee, as agreed
- Send the report to the Clerk for publishing on the governors page and for discussion at the next governors meeting

Governors' visits will be an agenda item at the termly meeting of the Board. At the final meeting of each academic year, the Link Governor will report the number of visits conducted and the areas of focus. The Board will evaluate the extent to which visits have informed whole Board understanding of the school's work. Staff Governors will feedback from colleagues and describe the extent to which staff's understanding of the Board's role has been enhanced.

The Board can then consider:

- Are the visits achieving the potential benefits identified?
- What worked well?
- Have there been any unexpected benefits?
- How can we make our practice even better and make changes to the policy and protocol that may be required?

Formal School Visits - Good Practice

Appendix 1 sets out a checklist for questions to be asked in preparation, during and after the visit. Appendix 2 is a suggested format for a form to report back to the Board

- Write a short summary 'as a lay governor' of what you learned during the visit and the overall impression that was made. This will be easier if the visit had a focus.
- It would be polite to circulate a draft to the Head and any staff involved for them to check the accuracy and clarity. Be prepared to amend it. Aim to achieve a report that is agreed by those involved.
- Circulate this at the next appropriate Board meeting.

Checklist for governor/trustee visits to school/academy			
A = always S = sometimes N = never			
Before	A	S	N
Is there a policy for governors/trustees' visits which has been shared with staff?			
Is the purpose of the visit clear?			
Is it linked to the School/Academy Development/improvement plan or Ofsted Action plan?			
Has the agenda been discussed with the Executive Headteacher well in advance?			
Is there a prompt/checklist agreed by governors/trustees and relevant members of staff to guide the visit?			
Have arrangements been agreed with any staff involved?			
Are governors/trustees clear about the purpose of the visit?			
Has the Executive Headteacher or relevant member of staff been asked about whether any supporting information is available such as performance data, lesson plan, action plan etc.?			
During	A	S	N
Are visits punctual?			
Is the agreed timetable followed, though flexible where necessary?			
Are members of staff clear about the purpose of the visit?			
Do governors/trustees with prior agreement from the teachers get involved with the children i.e. asking about their understanding of the lesson, what they have learnt etc.?			
Is everyone clear that these visits are for information/learning and not for inspection?			
Is the visit disrupting the lesson?			
Are governors showing interest?			
Are visits courteous, friendly and non-judgemental?			
Is the purpose of the visit kept in mind?			
After	A	S	N
Is what you have learnt discussed with the teachers?			
Are any unclear points discussed?			
Do governors and members of staff who are involved consider whether the purpose of the visit has been achieved?			
Is the feedback form/report completed as soon as possible after the visit while thoughts are still fresh?			
Are observations discussed with the Executive Headteacher?			
Is the feedback form/report circulated to the Executive Headteacher and staff involved?			
Can they add comments or amend as necessary?			
Is the feedback form/report shared with the rest of the Board?			
Does the feedback consider any policy implications for pupils and staff with protected characteristics under the Public Sector Equality Duty?			

Governor Visit Monitoring Report

Date of visit:	
Name of governor or trustee:	
Name of class teacher	
S/ADP (School/Academy Development Plan) Priority	
Purpose of visit (i.e. which element of the S/ADP Priority are you finding out about)	
The learning environment	
My discussions with staff	
My discussions with pupils	
What I have learned from the visit	
Questions that I have	
Actions for the Board to consider	
Teacher comments:	
Executive Headteacher/subject leader comments:	
Signed Governor or Trustee / Subject Leader/Class Teacher / Executive Headteacher	

Appendix 1: Template report for a monitoring visit

Formal monitoring visits are where a governor discusses 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 improvement plan (SIP) objectives or the school's overarching vision.	
Questions to ask Note specific questions you want to ask based on the SIP, 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'
- Don't 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?

Questions and clarifications to follow up with the Executive Headteacher or chair of governors

Appendix 2: Template report for a learning walk

Learning walks are where a governor goes 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 improvement plan (SIP) objectives or the school's overarching vision.</i>	
Questions to ask <i>Note specific questions you want to ask based on the SIP, or points to follow up on from a previous visit.</i> <i>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 ...'*
- *Don't 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 Executive Headteacher or chair of governors

