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Rationale

One of the key roles and responsibilities of the Governing Body is to monitor the progress and performance of the school. Undertaking 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 annual monitoring schedule sets out the expected number and type of visits for link governors each term but in some cases, more frequent monitoring may be appropriate. The schedule of monitoring visits will take account of the priorities set out in the approved School Development Plan.

A visit does not necessarily have to take place during the time when pupils are in school and could be carried out by meeting the headteacher/lead professional before the start of, or at the end of the school day.

Visiting the School

Benefits of visiting the School:

Visits enable Governors to:

- See the school at work and observe attitudes, behaviour and achievements
- Meet and chat with the children
- Get to know the staff (put faces to names) and demonstrate their commitment to the school and to working in partnership with staff
- Give active support to the staff and the activities of the school
- Be aware of the effect of change and different approaches to teaching and learning
- Monitor progress and inform their evaluation of the school
- Find out what resources are being used, evaluate resources and discuss further requirements with staff
- Gain first hand information from seeing policies and schemes of work in action, which can assist with policy making and decision taking
- Gain a more informed understanding of classroom life and practice.

They also can be positive for staff, by giving them:

- The opportunity to find out more about the role of the Governor;
- The chance to illustrate the theory and policy in practice;
- The opportunity to draw attention to any issues or questions they wish to raise.
- An opportunity to reflect upon practice through discussion.

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Arranging a visit to the School:

Before making a visit, Governors should:

- Contact the Headteacher and agree a date, time and focus for the visit
- Clarify the expectations for the visit (these should be shared with any staff who will be involved in the visit by the Headteacher)
- Agree which staff will be involved in the visit and, if appropriate which classes will be visited
- If appropriate, discuss the context of the lesson/activity to be observed and agree their role within it.
- Agree a timetable for the visit
- Never turn up for a monitoring visit unannounced!

Carrying out the visit: Ground Rules

On any visit to the School, Governors should:

- Arrive on time, sign in at Reception and wear an identification badge.
- Meet with the Headteacher/Deputy Headteacher/Subject Leader to confirm the timetable for and scope of the visit
- Act as an observer and only participate in a class or activity at the invitation of the teacher
- Respect the professionalism of the teacher, supporting but not interfering
- Keep an open mind about what you see
- Be sensitive to the circumstances and be flexible in their expectations. There may be times when arrangements have to be changed or alterations made.
- Remember that members of staff are very busy people whose first priority must be the children
- By all means ask questions (preferably at the end of the lesson/activity) but be sensitive to the demands that teachers and leaders face.
- Maintain confidentiality
- Enjoy the visit!

Remember that the aim of the visit is NOT to:

- 'Inspect' the school or staff
- Make judgements about the professional expertise of the teacher - that remains the responsibility of the Headteacher and other education professionals.
- Check on Governors' own children (Governors should avoid visiting classrooms where their own children are present where possible.)
- Pursue a personal agenda
- Arrive with inflexible pre-conceived ideas

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Additional points for visiting:

Governors should:

- As part of the planning process, agree what their role will be e.g. acting as a classroom helper during their visit; talking to the children about what they are doing; working with a small group; looking at books alongside the subject leader; carrying out a learning walk with a member of the senior leadership team
- Discuss particular issues or set the context with the class teacher or subject leader before the activity starts
- Introduce themselves when they go into a classroom and answer any questions
- Do not interrupt the teacher or distract the pupils from their tasks
- Be sensitive to the mood in the classroom and the expectations of the children
- Establish whether it would be useful to find out anything before their visit e.g. background reading on the topic of their visit, reading external audits and documentation relevant to the visit
- Make a list of any questions they may want to ask

Informal Visits:

In addition to formal monitoring visits, Governors might like to visit to meet the staff or the children, to find out about an aspect of the school in which they have a particular interest, or to get to know more about the school generally. This may include:

- Visits to class or school assemblies and productions
- Attending events or activities
- An induction visit with the headteacher to see the school in action

Observing the 'ethos' of the School

Whilst in the school, during a 'formal' or 'informal' visit, Governors should observe the 'ethos' of the School, including the learning environment and children's behaviour and attitude towards each other - for example:

- Do the parents, pupils and staff uphold the school values of respect, responsibility and honesty?
- Is the School friendly and welcoming to visitors?
- Is the environment attractive and clean and free of litter?
- Do the children show a positive attitude: are they interested in the questions asked? Are they focused or easily distracted?
- Are children presented with a variety of materials and resources to learn with?
- Is there evidence of children's work, displays and/or information within the classrooms and around the School?
- Are children encouraged to help each other where appropriate? Do they play well together and are they caring towards each other?

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After the visit

Governors should:

- Not leave the site without acknowledgement/signing out
- Remember to thank the teachers and children if they have been observing a lesson or activity, or any other staff who have been involved in their visit
- Acknowledge openly to the staff what a valuable gesture they have made in welcoming them into their workplace, and comment on favourable impressions
- Meet with the Headteacher/lead professional to give a verbal report and raise any issues that arose
- Consider the value of the visit e.g. were the objectives of the visit realistic and appropriate? Were they achieved? Did Governors read the right material and talk to the right people when preparing for the visit? Was there anything, which Governors would like to have seen or have explained, or whether they would like to see something introduced or improved?
- Complete a written report on the visit: The report should be sent to the Headteacher and Chair within two weeks of the visit and sent to the Clerk, for inclusion on the agenda for the next meeting of the Governing Body. Governors must report without giving opinions and individuals should not be named (See Appendix 1).

