

Stillington Community Primary School Governing Board

Governors' School Visits - Policy, Protocol and Procedures - 2022/2023



Love, Learn and Grow Together

At Stillington Community Primary School our commitment to promoting inclusivity, affirming diversity, embracing community and inspiring creativity is rooted in the core values of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These core values are fostered in the pupils and staff, building an ethos where all can flourish.

Date of last review:	Oct 2022	Responsibility:	Governing Board
-----------------------------	----------	------------------------	-----------------

Policy aims

This policy aims to ensure that all governors/trustees understand:

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

Purpose of visits carried out by governors

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 their school's 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 the life, work and achievements of a school
- experience the culture and ethos of the school

School visits should:

- Have a clear focus, linked to strategic priorities and designated statutory governor roles and be timely, planned in line with the approved monitoring schedule which is agreed by the full governing board (FGB)
- Be arranged with adequate notice through the Headteacher who will agree it with the relevant members of staff
- Be of value to the governing board which can be demonstrably evidenced to outside agencies e.g. Ofsted, HMI or the LA
- Include consideration of: pupils with SEND, vulnerable pupils, safeguarding and equalities implications
- Include observations of the culture and ethos of the school

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

The focus for school visits

Monitoring visits should have a clear focus, linked to the school's strategic priorities and designated statutory governor roles. 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)

It is not the role of those governing to form judgements about the performance of school staff during visits and individuals should make every effort to avoid this impression. It would be inappropriate, therefore, for governors to: make judgements about the quality of teaching; report on the progress of individual children; pursue personal agendas; monopolize teachers' time; or arrive with inflexible, pre-conceived ideas.

Arranging and preparing for visits

A 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.

In considering the monitoring schedule, Governors will have due regard to:

- Strategic milestones (things that the board expects to have happened) – as outlined in the School Development Plan (SDP).
- 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?

Governors will undertake visits as agreed in the approved monitoring schedule **with an expectation that each Governor will visit the school once per term.**

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

- reading and familiarising yourself with the governing board's protocol for visits and the expected conduct
- reading and familiarising yourself with the school's current policy for visitors (this is different from the governor visits policy) that includes relevant health, safety and safeguarding procedures
- reading the background information relating to the focus of the visit, such as relevant section(s) of the SDP, 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

Conduct

Before the visit Governors should:

- Arrange date and time of visit with Headteacher, who will agree details with relevant members of staff, at least one week in advance.
- Agree the focus of the visit based on link or SDP responsibility
- Seek clarification of priority/link issues and actions relevant to focus of visit.
- Discuss the context of the activities to be observed with the Headteacher or lead teacher
- Agree their role within the activities

During the visit Governors 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

Governors are expected to behave in line with the governing board's code of conduct at all times, including the need to maintain confidentiality.

Following the visit:

Governors may wish to send a follow up message thanking everyone involved in supporting the visit for their time and assistance.

Governors undertaking visits will have the opportunity to discuss the visit, including any concerns, with the Headteacher immediately or soon after the visit.

Comments should be limited to the Headteacher and not with other staff or with parents.

Virtual visits

School visits are an opportunity for governors to meet with staff, pupils and other stakeholders, helping them get to know the school and build relationships. However, there are circumstances where it may be appropriate and/or more convenient to carry out a virtual visit. This has been a necessary approach during the COVID-19 pandemic and has usually involved meeting with a member of staff and/or pupils by video conference.

When planning a schedule of visits, the governing board should be aware that, whilst some areas of focus lend themselves to virtual visits, this does not allow governors 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.

When planning a school visit, Governors should consider (with the Headteacher) whether a virtual or in-person visit would be the most practical and appropriate approach - with due regard to the prevailing circumstances at that time.

Virtual visits should be planned in much the same way as in-person visits and may include:

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

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, Governors should complete a 'Governor Visit Report' (*Appendix A*) Governors should:

- Use neutral, collaborative language to describe what was observed
- Take care to not identify, by name, individual children or staff members
- 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 **within one week** of your visit
- Once agreed, submit the final report to be included in the supporting papers for discussion in the next FGB meeting
- Be prepared to give oral feedback on the visit at a subsequent board or committee meeting

Reviewing Governors' School Visits - Policy, Protocol and Procedures

The Governing Board will review the School Visits Policy, Protocol and Procedure annually, alongside the GB Code of Conduct.

The Board will review the impact of their school visits when reviewing their policy, building lessons learned into future plans and considering:

- Are our visits proving useful?
- Are visits of value which can be demonstrably evidenced to outside agencies e.g. Ofsted, HMI or the LA?
- 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?

The approved policy should be circulated to all staff and will be published on the school website.

Appendix A

**Stillington Community Primary School Governing Body
Governor Visit Report**

Love, Learn and Grow Together

Name:	Date:
Focus of visit	Classes/staff visited
Summary of activities	
What have I learned as a result of my visit?	Positive comments about the visit
	Evidence of our Values in action
Aspects I would like clarified/questions that I have:	
Ideas for future visits:	
Any other comments:	
Signed (Governor)	(HT)