

# Leominster Primary School



## Governor Visits to School

### Guidance and Protocol

*'Leominster Primary School welcomes and encourages Governors to visit our school.'*

Ratified by governors \_\_\_March 2022\_\_\_\_\_

# Governor Visits

## 1. Introduction

1.1 Governing Bodies have a statutory duty to promote high standards of educational achievement at their school and they must monitor the school performance accordingly. Governors can only do this if they know the school well. Their role is largely strategic, not operational, and includes ensuring vision is being turned into reality, ethos is being embedded and progress is being made against the strategic plan.

1.2 There are numerous ways in which Governors can know their schools; for example, through analysing pupil data, receiving feedback from the headteachers and seeking the views of parents, staff and pupils. However, actually visiting the school in person, provides a valuable insight into how the school operates, as well as an opportunity to put other information into context.

1.3 There are two types of “Governor Visit” the formal and informal. The informal visits may involve Governors offering to help run a stall at a major fundraising event, attending the Christmas Carol Concert or taking part in a school visit and other such things. All these are valuable at earning the good will of the staff, as well as helping to establish good working relationships with the staff and pupils. However they should not be regarded as an alternative to the formal visit.

1.4 A cycle of formal visits should be identified at full governing board meetings and will usually relate to the priorities identified on the School Improvement Priorities. A formal visit may last a whole or half a day, in which individual governors act as the representative of the governing board, with the expectation that they will subsequently report back. Some formal visits may be allocated to specific governors with designated responsibilities, for example Special Educational Needs, Premises, English, Maths etc.

1.5 The Department for Education’s (DFE’s) Governance Handbook (October 2020) states that:

*“Many boards find that visiting their school particularly during the day, is a helpful way to find out more about the school, its staff and students. Through pre-arranged visits that have a clear focus, the board can see for themselves whether the schools are implementing their policies and improvement plans and how they are working in practice.”*

## 2. Rationale for Governors Visiting School

- To enable governors to fulfil their statutory duties and responsibilities
- To enable governors to be better informed at governors’ meetings and to be able to make an informed contribution to the strategic work of the school
- To gain a better understanding of particular areas of school provision

- To understand more about the deployment of school resources
- To be better informed about the implementation of the school's policies
- To get to know staff better
- To talk to staff and pupils about their experiences in school
- To listen to the voice of the child
- To be able to demonstrate that the governing board of the school take their responsibilities seriously.

### 3. Setting Expectations Prior to the Visit

3.1 Governors, who are planning on making a visit to school, whether it is formal or informal, need to have made prior arrangements with one of the headteachers. They need to be clear about the purpose of the visit and what they will be focussing on. The length of the visit will be agreed before hand, and any additional information that may be useful will be circulated before hand.

3.2 It is important that everyone involved in the visit is prepared for it, and that all teachers are aware of the purpose. The headteachers will approach any teachers concerned before the visit takes place

3.3 In most cases, the visit will link to objectives and targets set out in the vision and strategy for the school and linked with the school improvement priorities. Visits will involve the member of staff responsible for the particular objective, meeting with the member of the governing board, to provide background information and context, showing the initiative in action, and where possible, providing the opportunity for them to speak to children or staff members who are affected by it.

3.4 Examples of what a visit could focus on include:

- Monitoring the implementation of a particular policy
- The use of resources, such as how the premises are utilised, a new teaching resource in action or a demonstration of a particular system
- Monitoring progress towards specific targets identified in the school improvement priorities, for example meeting with the subject leader of an area for improvement and learning about the strategy adopted and how this translates through to classroom practice and children's learning
- Gaining an understanding of a particular curriculum area or year group
- Gaining an understanding of how a particular issue (eg. provision of ICT, boys' achievement, reading) is dealt with on a day-to-day basis
- Gaining an understanding of the process of assessment and tracking pupil cohorts

3.5 During any visit to school, it is important to remember that the role of the governing board member is **strategic**, not **operational** and visits should not be confused with inspections.

### 4. During the Visit

4.1 Although not all the visits by Governors will involve seeing a lesson, a great deal of time will be spent in classrooms. As well as watching the teaching and learning

that takes place, there will also be the opportunity to move around and talk to the pupils about their work, as well as looking at the classroom environment i.e. displays, resources, books, labelled equipment etc. At the end of the lesson, time will be arranged for the governor and teacher to talk about the lesson and address any questions.

4.2 It can be easy to fall into the trap of referring to a school visit as a chance to “observe” teaching and learning, but by doing so you could be causing unnecessary confusion and stress amongst staff. “Lesson observation” is an activity undertaken by school leaders and is a professional task, carried out by the headteachers, or appropriate line managers. Most governors do not have the expertise to do this, and, even if they do, it is not within their remit. It is important for governors to avoid giving the impression that they are there to judge or inspect teachers’ performance.

*“Governors are not Inspectors, and it is not their role to assess the quality or method of teaching or extent of learning.” (Governance Handbook)*

4.3 When visiting the school, a protocol and clear focus should be in place that is understood and agreed by all involved – refer to protocol in Annex 1

## **5. Visit Follow up**

5.1 At the end of their time in school one of the headteachers will try to meet with the governor to discuss the visit.

5.2 All formal visits should be reported back to the full governing board. When reporting back it is important to remember that Governor visits should relate to their responsibilities as governors. It is the headteachers jobs to manage the school, in accordance with the aims and objectives and policies approved by the governing board. When governors use visits to gain information to help them in their role, they do so as observers and not as inspectors.

5.3 Feedback to the governing board should be written on the agreed feedback sheet – Annex 2. A brief written report serves better than an oral report in that it helps to clarify the issues for discussion or suggestions for further action. However, as a written report, like other papers from the governing board, it is open to public inspection and should avoid naming individuals.

5.4 The report should not be handed out at a meeting, but given to the Clerk in time for distribution alongside the agenda. The report should also be discussed with one of the headteachers and any staff involved in the visit, in advance of the governing board meeting.

## **6. Frequency of visits**

6.1 Governor recommendation is that each individual board member undertakes a minimum of one formal visit per academic year, but no more than once a term, unless as part of a pre-agreed monitoring cycle. This will ensure visits are kept to a sustainable level, and that they are spread out over the academic year.

6.2 Of course, individuals may also spend time in school in a non-governance capacity. Parent governors will visit the school in relation to their child's education, staff governors for their jobs and other governing board members may volunteer in school in a variety of ways. It is important to keep these roles separate from that of governing and to be clear about when you are visiting in a governance capacity.

## **7. What should I do on a visit?**

7.1 Governors do not have the right to visit the school unannounced and it is vital to plan visits in advance. Visits should be part of a planned programme agreed by the whole governing board.

7.2 Having a clear protocol in place that is understood by all, ensures that a disproportionate amount of time isn't spent planning each visit.

7.3 Each member of staff who will be involved in the visit should also know the purpose of the visit and what to expect.

7.3 As well as the more obvious questions of where, who, and what, those visiting should establish the finer details of how they will be expected to conduct themselves to ensure that everyone is comfortable and confident about the visit. They should also be familiar with the school's code of conduct, and may wish to ask specific questions such as:

- Where should I go on arrival at the school and who will meet me?
- How would you like me to be introduced to pupils ie.by first name or Ms/Mrs /Mr?
- What should I do if a pupil asks for help?
- What should I do if I see a pupil behaving inappropriately?

## **8. Monitoring and Reviewing the Effectiveness of Governor Visits**

8.1 After each visit to school, individuals should take time to reflect and consider anything they might do differently in future visits. In addition, the governing board should review their school visits protocol every academic year. The review should consider:

- Are our visits proving useful?
- What benefits, particularly unexpected ones, have come from our visits?

- Are we better informed about our school and enabled to make sensible decisions?
- Is there anything we need to change about how visits are conducted, taking into account feedback from the staff, and if possible, the children?
- What should I do if I have concerns about staff?

**9.0 Do's and don't's :** this table provides a summary guide to what those governing should and should not do before, during and after a school visit.

	<b>Do</b>	<b>Don't</b>
<b>Before</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Agree the visit focus in advance as part of a schedule at a governing board meeting, including identifying a clear purpose. (It can be useful to think of the governing board as 'commissioning' the visit and delegating responsibility for carrying it out to individual governor(s).)</li> <li>✓ Arrange a mutually convenient time, avoiding sensitive times such as exam or assessment periods.</li> <li>✓ Discuss the visit with one of the headteachers and ensure that any member of staff who will be involved in the visit understands the arrangements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☒ Turn up unannounced.</li> <li>☒ Approach staff directly without the approval of one of the headteachers</li> </ul>
<b>During</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Present yourself in a way which matches the professionalism expected of school staff.</li> <li>✓ Report to reception and follow procedures for visitors – even those familiar with the school should do this.</li> <li>✓ Only enter classrooms and other areas of the school – including the staffroom – following invitation by a member of staff.</li> <li>✓ Keep to the role agreed; only talk to pupils if invited to do so by the teacher</li> <li>✓ Be flexible if something urgent crops up which means the arranged tasks cannot take place – always keep in mind that the education of the pupils is of overriding importance.</li> <li>✓ Be courteous and professional, including thanking staff before leaving.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☒ Give the impression that you are inspecting, for example by using a clipboard or making notes while visiting a classroom.</li> <li>☒ Assume a different role to that agreed; parents and education professionals, in particular, should be mindful not to stray into these roles.</li> <li>☒ Express personal opinions if pressed on a controversial issue – individuals should keep in mind that they are representing the governing board as a whole.</li> <li>☒ Make assumptions – always ask for explanations of anything not understood at an appropriate time when it will not interrupt pupils' learning (this may be in conversation with the class teacher after the lesson or with a headteacher at the end of the visit).</li> <li>☒ Check on the progress of individual children, including your own.</li> <li>☒ Walk around the school unaccompanied or put yourself in situations where you are likely to be unaccompanied with pupils.</li> </ul>
<b>After</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Share any concerns, however trivial, with the chair and a headteacher.</li> <li>✓ Complete a short visit report on an agreed form; a draft should be shared with any relevant members of staff and the headteachers, then taking their comments into account a final written report should be prepared and given to the governing board / committee before the next meeting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☒ Make comments regarding a teacher's conduct of the lesson or individual students.</li> <li>☒ Identify individual pupils in your report, even in a positive light.</li> <li>☒ Gossip about your visit – what you have seen should be treated with the same level of confidentiality as any other governor business.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Ensure that school visits is an agenda item at the governing board meeting and that any findings are discussed</li><li>✓ Send a thank you email to those that contributed to the success of the visit.</li></ul>	
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**Source: National Governors' Association** <http://www.nga.org.uk/Guidance/Holding-your-school-to-account/Monitoring-Performance/Knowing-Your-School.aspx>

## **Annex 1            Protocol for Leominster School Governor Visits**

(adapted from National Governors Association – knowing your school)

### **Introduction**

Governing boards have three core functions:

- Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;
- Holding the headteachers to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils, and the performance management of the staff;
- **?**Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent. Governors, draw on a range of evidence in order to carry out these functions and one source of information is their own visits to their school.

This protocol applies to school visits made for the purpose of governance and not to visits to the school site that individuals may make in other capacities e.g. as parents or members of staff.

### **Purpose**

All school visits will:

- **?**Have a clear focus, linked to strategic priorities, which is agreed by the full governing board
- **?**Be arranged with adequate notice through the headteachers and agreed with the relevant members of staff
- **?**Be of value to the governing board which is demonstrable to outside agencies e.g. Ofsted or the LA. It is not the role of those governing to form judgements about the performance of school staff during visits and individuals will make every effort to avoid this impression.

### **Conduct**

Those governing will comply with the school and governing board's codes of conduct and the standards of presentation expected of staff. They will be mindful that they are representing the whole governing board through their words and actions.

### **Follow up**

Those governing will have the opportunity to discuss the visit, including any concerns, with one of the headteachers immediately or soon after the visit.

The attached 'Governor Visit Report' will be completed after each visit. A draft will be shared with the headteachers 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.



**Confidentiality**

Confidentiality should be adhered to regarding visits. Comments should be limited to the headteachers or senior or middle leader with who the visit was arranged but not with other staff or with parents. Individual children or staff members (other than the member of staff involved with the visit) should not be identified in school visit feedback reports.

**Frequency**

Governors will undertake a minimum of one visit to the school per academic year but no more than once a term.

**Review**

This protocol should be reviewed by the governing board annually.

## Annex 2



### Link Governor's Visit Feedback

<b>Governors Name:</b>	<b>Date of visit:</b> <b>Time of visit:</b>
<b>Aim / focus of visit</b> (previously agreed with Headteacher)	
<b>Classes / staff visited:</b>	
<b>Sources of information:</b> eg: headteacher, class teacher, display work, children's workbooks, talking to children, looking at resources etc	
<b>What have I learned as a result of my visit?</b> (relate this back to focus of visit)	
<b>Positive comments about the focus:</b>	

**Actions for the governing board to consider:**

**Any other comments/ideas for future visits:**

**Signed** \_\_\_\_\_

(Governor) (Headteacher / Coordinator)

**Received by Governing Board** \_\_\_\_\_

## Notes To Help Complete Visit Feedback Form

<b>Do:</b>	<b>Don't</b>
<p><b>Step 1</b> Prepare the report in draft as soon after the visit as possible.</p>	Be lengthy – no more than 2 sides of A4
<p><b>Step 2</b> Have the report typed if possible</p>	Be over familiar or make written observations about the quality of teaching and learning. If there are any concerns, raise them with one of the headteachers verbally.
<p><b>Step 3</b> Discuss the draft with one of the headteachers to ensure any mistakes or misunderstandings can be clarified.</p>	Name staff or pupils.
<p><b>Step 4</b> Share the form with the member of staff.</p>	Hand around the report at the meeting: governors will have had no opportunity to read it and give it proper attention.
<p><b>Step 5</b> Send a copy of the report to the clerk of governors for distribution prior to the next meeting.</p>	Go through your report in detail or read it verbatim. This lengthens meetings unnecessarily.
<p><b>Step 6</b> Come to the meeting prepared to give a short verbal introduction and answer any questions.</p>	
<p><b>Step 7</b> Think to yourself: what can I do to make future visits more effective?</p>	