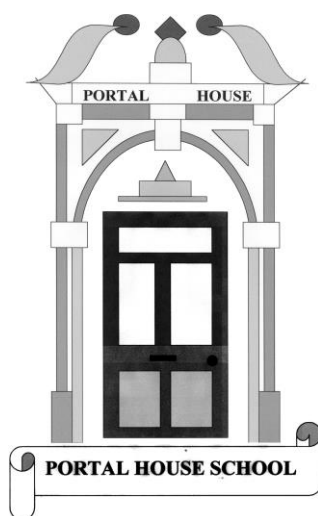


October 2024

# Governor Visits Policy

Portal House School





## Policy Context

The board has a statutory duty to oversee the policies and direction of the school, to monitor its standards and be held to account for its conduct and performance.

**Boards need to know their school** if accountability is going to be robust and their vision for the school is to be achieved. 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, governors can see for themselves whether the school is implementing their agreed policies and improvement plan, and how these are working in practice. Visits also provide an opportunity to talk with pupils and staff to gather their views, though are unlikely to be sufficient for these purposes.

**Boards are not inspectors** and it is not their role to assess the quality or method of teaching or extent of learning; they are also not school managers and should make sure they do not interfere in the day-to-day running of the school - these are the role of executive leaders. If boards wish to spend time within a classroom, they need to be very clear why they are doing so.

**Boards need clear processes** for overseeing and monitoring school improvement and financial health, providing constructive challenge to the headteachers and SLT Team.

### Compliance with statutory and contractual requirements

Boards need to ensure that other key duties such as safeguarding, inclusion, special education needs and disability (SEND), careers, employment, health and safety and finance are undertaken effectively across the organisation, including monitoring and oversight of the impact of pupil premium and other targeted funding streams.

Visiting the school is not a statutory requirement, though visits play an extremely important role in order to know and learn how the school functions and to prevent any over reliance on headteacher information.

Seeing the board agreed vision, ethos, culture and values in action as well as knowing the school's strengths and weaknesses, increases the board's first-hand knowledge, informing the board's self-evaluation and strategic decision making against its core functions.

**Governance functions should not** interfere with or impact negatively on the day-to-day operational running of the school e.g. too many governor visits.

### Purpose of the Visit

The purpose of the visits may differ for the model of governance adopted; for statutory and delegated/link roles these will depend on the information and scrutiny of the areas assigned at board focus group meetings.

**Circle Model** - holding leaders to account by questioning and recording responses as these visits are in lieu of committee minutes

*The information will be shared with the board for further consideration*

- **Statutory and Delegated/Link Roles** - holding leaders to account by questioning and recording responses and ensuring compliance.

*The information will be shared with the board for further consideration*

## Time Commitment

It is recognised that the amount of time that a governor can commit to a visit will vary but in general governors should expect to make visits in accordance with their governance structure and agreed terms of reference.

An explanation for each area is included in the policy - see Frequency of Visits/Annual Programme of Visits section

## Monitoring Schedule/Planning

The board should develop a schedule of planned visits to be spread across the academic year, this could include visits resulting from, allocated roles, School Improvement Plan monitoring, statutory and compliance visits. Governors should be assigned with reference to their skillset, and to cover the school improvement priorities and areas of compliance (see Governance Guide for maintained schools

Governors should arrange their planned visits in advance with the headteacher who has the responsibility for the day-to-day management of the school. The board should:

- Review their school visits policy, protocols and procedure annually to ensure its effectiveness.
- Ensure the approved policy is circulated to all staff via the headteacher.

## Reporting Back to the Board

Reporting should be documented and submitted in good time, aligning with the legal and/or board meeting schedule, so that strategies, interventions, and impact can be seen in action. Written reports should be on the agreed template (Appendix A), and circulated to all governors in advance of the meeting to enable further discussion. The model of governance adopted will reflect the content and context of the submitted report:

- **Circle Model** - *monitoring visits reports will document and evidence questions and discussion undertaken during the visit in lieu of committee minutes; this enables the impact of the visit to be evidenced and ensures collective understanding and further holding to account at board meetings. Visits may also confirm that actions reported at meetings have been seen and any impact recorded.*
- **Statutory/Delegated Roles** - *monitoring visits reports will document and evidence questions and discussion undertaken during the visit to confirm compliance and support the board with holding leaders to account.*

For either model of governance:

- Each monitoring visit should have an agreed clear purpose
- Role descriptors should be set up, agreed and reviewed regularly by the board to aid governors in their understanding and expectations in carrying out monitoring visits.
- Whole governing board days in school can also be a valuable tool in knowing the school, with a planned focus and feedback.

## Virtual vs Face to Face Monitoring

At times it may be appropriate and more convenient to carry out a virtual visit which for example, can involve meeting with a member of staff and/or pupil groups using video

conferencing. Some areas of focus may be suited to virtual visits; however, it is important that governors experience school life, culture and ethos during a face-to-face visit.

Boards should be mindful of the workload and wellbeing of staff when agreeing the monitoring schedule, including timing, number of visits and practicalities of setting up and undertaking both virtual and face to face meetings

**To enable understanding and despite the delegation of responsibilities to monitoring pairs, for collective decision making it is vital the board ensures that all governors have a broad understanding of all areas of the governance core functions.**

**If governors cannot undertake this commitment, they should question whether they can make a realistic and valuable contribution as a governor in line with the board's agreed Code of Conduct**

**A breach of this policy is a breach of the Code of Conduct**

## Policy Guidance

This policy applies to school visits made for the purpose of governance and not to visits to the school site that any individual may make in another capacity e.g., as parents, priests, professional advisers, volunteers or members of staff.

### All school visits will:

- Have a clear focus, linked to strategic priorities, and delegated statutory governor roles, be timely and planned against the board approved monitoring schedule and board meetings
- Be arranged with adequate notice through the headteacher who will agree the visit with the relevant members of staff
- Have a written report to evidence the visit and effective delegated function as well as enable further scrutiny, challenge and strategic decision making by the board
- Be of value to the board in holding the school to account and provide evidence to outside agencies e.g., Ofsted, the Local Authority, diocese, DfE

### Governor Conduct

Governors undertaking visits will:

- comply with the school and board's codes of conduct, any DfE guidance, and the standards of presentation expected of staff
- be mindful that they are representing the whole board through their words and actions and will understand their strategic role by not becoming operational

**The board's code of conduct will contain reference to the governor board monitoring visits policy and subsequent steps for any breach.**

### Training

Governors should ensure they understand their monitoring remit, undertaking relevant training (including refreshers) to keep up to date with best practice and latest statutory and legislative requirements.

Role descriptors may aid governors in their understanding and expectations in carrying out their monitoring and statutory visits.

**All governors need to ensure they have a broad understanding of all areas of delegated governance and undertake training where necessary.**

### Governor Reports - following a visit

It is a statutory responsibility (for maintained schools) for any delegated function to be reported back to the Board. The [Roles Procedures and Allowances 2013 regulations \(20.2\)](#) state:

*'Any individual or committee to whom a function of the governing body has been delegated or that has otherwise exercised a function of the governing body, must report to the governing body in respect of any action taken or decision made with respect to the exercise of that function.'*

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

The Governor Visit Report Template (see appendix A and B) will be completed after each visit, containing the visit findings and questions to be raised at the board or committee meeting. A draft will be shared with the headteacher and any other members of staff involved in the visit for any comments concerning factual accuracy; a final version will be sent to the governance clerk to be included in the agenda and as a supporting paper for collective discussion and further constructive strategic questioning, at the next board meeting.

### **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality should be adhered to during and regarding visits. Comments should be limited to the headteacher with whom the visit was arranged and 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 the governor visit reports. Staff roles should be used within reports, not names.

### **Frequency of Visits/Annual Programme of Visits - Monitoring Visits Schedule**

A programme of governor visits spread evenly across the school year in consultation with the headteacher, should be planned and agreed using the school priorities, school improvement plan, board link requirements, needs of statutory compliance e.g. safeguarding, SEND, finance, health and safety, taking into account scheduled full board and committee meetings – the Monitoring Visits Schedule

Regular analysis of the agreed schedule enables governors to ensure they are allocating time to monitor, evaluate and triangulate against the current school priorities and statutory areas, and report back to the committees or full board as appropriate. This enables the board to know the school, being able to evidence this to Ofsted or other outside agencies and demonstrate constructive challenge and impact.

The number of visits by each governor should be linked to the governance model adopted by the board and allocated statutory roles; each governor/trustee/local board/academy committee/advisory member will undertake visits as agreed in their approved terms of reference, monitoring schedule or scheme of delegation.

- **Circle Model** - *should expect to make at least **three** visits per year unless the school circumstances necessitate otherwise e.g., if the school is in the Ofsted category of requires improvement (RI) or inadequate. Monitoring pairs within the circle model replace the monitoring function of a committee, therefore more governor monitoring visits are required in this model of governance for the board to be able to fully hold leaders to account at governing board meetings.*
- **Statutory Role** - *There is an expectation that the **statutory delegated governors** for safeguarding, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), careers guidance (secondary), and health and safety and finance\* (LA maintained schools) **will visit the school three times a year.***
- **Delegated/Link Roles- Visits as per statutory role or as agreed by the board** *Boards may consider it important from a best practice perspective although not statutory, the addition of delegated/link governors for pupil premium, whole school wellbeing culture, attendance and any other areas identified by the board.*

\*For finance, there is the additional expectation that the board and finance governors receives:

- clear and concise monitoring reports of the school's budget position at least six times a year

**Receiving operational lead financial reports (e.g. School Business Manager) does not replace the need for the board to monitor and scrutinise the school finances, and evidence that it has done so.**

### **Benefits to Governors**

To enable the fulfilment and evidence of delegated statutory governor roles of safeguarding; health and safety; SEND; careers guidance ; finance.

*As a point of best practice Governor Services recommend that boards also allocate monitoring roles for pupil premium and other target funding, attendance, whole school wellbeing culture, and cyber security as signposted by the DfE.*

- To hold leaders to account and the board to collectively fulfill its statutory duties by demonstrating accountability and constructive challenge
- To see the strategies in action as outlined in the school improvement plan e.g., meeting with the subject lead of an area for improvement, seeing first-hand and learning about the impact of the adopted strategy (how this translates through to classroom practice and children's learning)
- To improve knowledge of the school and its needs - its staff, improvement priorities, strengths and weaknesses, preventing overreliance of headteacher-only information.
- To see in action the impact of specialist funding e.g. pupil premium.
- To ensure financial probity by providing robust and effective governance to ensure the viability and efficiency of the organisation through effective business and financial planning and processes
- To develop an understanding of issues facing the school and how they are dealt with on a day-to-day basis to inform strategic decision making
- To observe the impact of policies in action including monitoring the implementation of policies e.g., safeguarding, behaviour, health and safety, SEND, attendance, careers guidance, finance
- To gain an understanding of the broad full curriculum or a curriculum subject area as relevant
- To see the use of resources and how the premises are utilised, understanding the environment for teachers and pupils
- To recognise and celebrate success
- To evidence the governing board's agreed vision, ethos, and values in action
- To show governors and governance as part of the school
- To gain stakeholder engagement - pupil, parents, staff an the wider community e.g., pupil voice, school council, parent/open evenings



### **Benefits to Staff**

- To ensure governors understand how school priority strategies are working in practice, understanding the reality of the classroom and environment
- To enhance the continuous professional development (CPD) including middle and subject leads
- To get to know and build positive professional relationships with governors
- To improve the understanding of the governors' roles and responsibilities including the responsibility to work with executive leaders to address unnecessary teacher workload
- To feel valued
- To have an opportunity to reflect on the impact of policies and procedures through discussion
- To highlight the need for/impact of particular resources
- To have mechanisms for enabling the board to listen, understand and respond to the voices of staff

### **Benefits to Students**

- To ensure governors understand the reality of the classroom environment, broad curriculum and school life
- To get to know and better understand governor roles and responsibilities
- To give feedback about the school and their views of the impact of policies to the governors
- To have mechanisms for enabling the board to listen, understand and respond to the voices of students

### **Benefits to Parents**

- To ensure governors understand the issues that parents may face
- To engage meaningfully with governors
- To have an understanding of governor roles and responsibilities
- To have mechanisms for enabling the board to listen, understand and respond to the voices of parents

### **What a visit is not about:**

- Visiting classrooms to observe a lesson (this is an operational task), unless as part of an accompanied learning walk against a specific school improvement priority. This prevents any potential misunderstanding of a class visit being regarded as a form of inspection to make judgements about professional expertise of a teacher
- Undertaking a staff operational role e.g. touring the school undertaking health and safety audits/checks, even if professionally qualified in this area
- Checking on progress or receiving information of individual children
- Pursuing a personal agenda
- An opportunity to tackle staff about specific issues not related to the monitoring focus or the statutory/delegated governor roles
- An opportunity to take on individual parental issues not related to the strategic governor roles

## **Protocols or Ground Rules for Visits - Governors should:**

- Ensure the visit has a clear focus linked to the school improvement plan, area of compliance and/or area of governor responsibility
- Individually understand the board and their delegated area of responsibility, enabling preparation to ensure they provide the constructive challenge required
- Remember that during any visit their role is strategic not operational
- Ensure, in preparation for their visit, they have undertaken relevant training and read any relevant policy, statutory guidance or supporting documentation
- Ensure arrangements have been made e.g. the headteacher to liaise with the member of staff responsible, to arrange the date and time of the visit
- Enable staff to have the opportunity to explain the context of any lesson when visiting a classroom
- Not interrupt lessons by asking teachers questions when visiting the classroom
- Arrange to talk to students during learning walks/visits to lessons, about their understanding and learning journeys - but must not ask questions about the teacher's conduct of the lesson
- Ensure that they abide by the board agreed **school's code of conduct** as well as the **board's own code of conduct** with the expectation to follow the same behaviours, to understand how they will be addressed and how to address others, to adhere to the appropriate dress code
- Have a clear understanding that a breach of the governor monitoring visit policy will be dealt with as a breach of the board's code of conduct
- Formally write reports on their visits using the board approved template, ensuring draft reports are sent to the Headteacher for factual accuracy checks prior to the final report being produced
- Ensure monitoring visit reports are circulated within timescales and in advance of meetings, via the governance clerk, for board meeting; this will enable discussion, triangulation and any further questions to be raised
- Ensure monitoring visits reports are included on meeting agendas
- Ensure evidence is recorded in the minutes to show the impact of the visit
- Ensure that consideration has been given to the suitability of delegated link/monitoring roles allocated to governors who are also members of staff

## **Example of governor monitoring visits/days may include**

- Learning walks with members of staff
- Pupil voice in the class or interviews in groups e.g. their understanding of how they are receiving a quality inclusive education
- Looking at pupils' work against oversight of the curriculum and policies e.g. marking policy
- Monitoring implementation of a policy e.g., behaviour, equality, safeguarding, finance, attendance
- Gaining an understanding of the broad curriculum, or a particular area/topic
- Seeing in action the impact of specialist funding
- Ensuring finance processes are in place

- Seeing in action the deployment of staff and impact of any change e.g. reduced class sizes/split classes
- Reviewing the environment, the condition and maintenance, use made of the buildings or the site and impact of the resources of the school
- Ensuring that governor monitoring visits fulfill the requirements of the statutory link governor roles
- Confirming information/actions reported at board meetings
- Visiting break and lunchtimes with staff and pupils
- School council
- Parent forum
- Gaining an understanding of the impact of spending/funding with operational leads
- Monitoring the boards culture, ethos, and values against agreed expectations
- Parental engagement during parental events in school
- Monitoring British values
- Monitoring the preparation for the next stage of education

### **Monitoring and Review of School Visit Policy**

The policy should:

- be monitored and **reviewed annually** alongside the code of conduct and terms of reference/scheme of delegation
- be circulated to all new governors upon joining the board

### **Areas to consider when reviewing**

- Are our visits achieving the potential benefits we identified?
- Are we fulfilling our core functions?
- Are our individual reports having impact within the board meetings?
- Do our board discussions building on from the governor reports, show further collective constructive challenge and holding to account which is evidenced in the minutes?
- Are our visits timely against the school improvement plan?
- Are visits reports received in time for relevant board meetings?
- Do we have the right governor monitoring roles against the current school priorities and areas of compliance?
- Are all governors aware of their responsibilities? Do they understand their role? Do we have role descriptors?
- Are statutory/delegated/link governors appointed to their roles relevant to skillset and/or training and development?
- Are all governors keeping up to date with best practice and latest statutory/ legislative requirements?
- Are we better informed and can evidence the accuracy of headteacher and senior leadership team reports?
- Have we engaged meaningfully with all parents and carers?
- Have we engaged with stakeholders to understand their views, enabling us to use this to inform strategic decision making?

- Is there anything we need to change in how visits are conducted from feedback from stakeholders?
- Have there been any unexpected benefits?
- How can we make our practice even better?

## Good Practice

### Preparing for a Visit

- Check the agreed policy and schedule for governors' monitoring visits and any DfE relevant governance and/or statutory guidance
- Discuss the visit and agreed timetable with the headteacher and ensure that any member of staff who will be involved in the visit, understands the arrangements
- Arrange a mutually convenient time to visit, within the monitoring schedule and board meeting windows, with the headteacher
- Clarify the purpose of the visit as outlined within the monitoring schedule and undertake any background preparation reading required
- Understand your strategic monitoring role and responsibility including completing relevant training. Do you have a role descriptor explaining your responsibilities?
- Review the milestones and action points in the School Improvement Plan. What are the relevant school policies associated to this area? How does this determine the activities I am interested in seeing in action? What questions do I want to ask?
- Discuss with the headteacher/staff lead if any new supporting information is available, e.g., Ofsted report, updated school improvement plan, note of visit, performance data, subject lead report, policies
- Ensure that you are familiar with safeguarding and health and safety procedures
- Read both the board and staff code of conduct to ensure understanding of the professional behaviours required

### During the Visit

- Remember you are making the visit on behalf of the governing board; it is not appropriate to make judgements or promises on behalf of the governing board
- Be punctual, reporting to reception and signing in as a governor. Wear a badge to identify yourself as a governor. Keep to the agreed timetable but be flexible to the school needs
- Decide in advance with the headteacher how you will be introduced and how you will address staff and pupils
- Be courteous and professional throughout the visit, friendly not critical, including thanking members of staff before leaving
- Remember it is a monitoring visit and not an inspection. You are there to learn and:
  - **Circle Model** - *fact find, ask the questions, in lieu of a committee, and gain answers and see the information you have been told is happening with your own eyes.*
  - **Statutory Role** - *specific monitoring around the allocated area to report back to the board*

- **Delegated/Link Role** - monitoring around the allocated area to report back to the board

- Keep to the role/focus agreed - remember why you are there. Don't lose sight of the purpose/focus of your visit.
- Only talk to students if invited/agreed to do so
- Observe discretely. Depending on the context of the visit, excessive note taking can be disconcerting and may make your visit look like an inspection though recording needs to be balanced with being able to capture the questions and answers.
- Interact, don't interrupt and remain strategic
- Respect confidentiality
- Meet the headteacher at the end of the visit and discuss what you have seen, including any issues or concerns you may have. Refer to the purpose/focus of the visit. Consider together whether it has been achieved.
- Ensure you have signed out

### After

- Share any concerns with the headteacher and chair, however trivial. Use the opportunity to clarify any issue you remain unclear about
- Make more notes as soon as possible after your meeting and any observations while it is still fresh in your mind
- Thank the staff by email via the headteacher for contributing to the success of the visit and for supporting you in your role as a governor. Be open, honest, and positive
- When drafting the report ensure individual children or staff members (other than the member of staff involved with the visit) are not identified in school visit reports. Use role titles where possible
- Complete the agreed visit template proforma and send the draft to the headteacher for fact checking and comment, ensuring timescales are met in sending to the governance clerk for onward distribution at least seven days in advance of the board or committee meeting
- Ensure that all the questions and answers are captured, with key questions added following evaluation of the visit to be raised at the next board meeting. (see appendix A).
- Reflect: how did that go? Has the visit enhanced relationships? Have I learned more about the school? Have I helped the board collectively fulfil its duties with constructive challenge and holding to account?
- Are there actions the board will want the next visit to follow up/focus on following discussion? Do I need to undertake training to increase my skillset to fulfil the monitoring role effectively? How has this visit had impact at the board meeting?
- Ensure that your visit is included as an agenda item at the next board or committee meeting

### Informal Visits

Visits may also take place in an informal capacity for less formal occasions such as school events, plays, sports day, and celebration events. 'Discreet' information can be gathered on these visits which build on your knowledge of the school. Visiting governors should ensure that

they follow the governor visits protocols as appropriate and consider how they will feedback to the board having completed the report using the informal template (appendix B).

### **Areas not considered as a governor monitoring visit**

It is vital that everyone is clear about the capacity in which they are visiting and not to confuse their roles when they wear more than 'one hat' within the context of the school.

If a governor undertakes as an individual/professional, an advisory or operational role (member of staff) within the school:

- the role/function must be declared on the register of business interests and at board meetings;
- the governor must not be appointed as the statutory or delegated governor/part of the monitoring pair for this area/function

Times when governors may be visiting the school - but **not** as a governor

- To help in a class as a volunteer
- To lend a helping hand with a school event or educational visit as a volunteer
- To speak to a teacher/headteacher in relation to their own child
- Attending a school function or educational visit as a parent/relative/invitee
- Visiting in relation to your position as the local priest, councillor, member of staff or providing commissioned or uncommissioned support (which needs to be declared) in your professional capacity, e.g., advising on finance, amending/devising the school website etc

## Record of a Governor's Visit to the School – Formal

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Delegated Governor Role:</b>	
<b>Focus of visit, links with the School Improvement Plan.</b> <i>How does the visit relate to a School Improvement Plan priority or statutory/delegated governor role?</i>	
<b>Areas and summary of planned activities.</b> <b>Departments/areas of the school, staff/pupils met during the visit</b> <i>Previously agreed by the governing body with the headteacher; governors should refer to staff by their role or job title and not by name</i>	
<b>Observations and comments by the governor</b> <i>What you saw, questions asked with answers given, what you learned relating to the focus of the visit</i>  <b>Ensure this section contains constructive questioning and challenge to evidence accountability against responsibilities and functions. See Governance Guides</b>	
<b>Safeguarding culture observed</b> <i>e.g., in relation to KCSIE and Child Protection policy</i>	
<b>Equality, diversity, inclusion and SEND</b> <i>Where there is not a direct contextual link to SEND, reflect on how pupils with SEND might be affected by any issues observed/to be raised.</i> <i>The principle of thinking about SEND in all decisions, benefits everyone in the school. eg. inclusive practice seen within the school.</i>	
<b>Whole-school wellbeing</b> <i>Where there is not a direct contextual link to wellbeing, reflect on how the board's regard for wellbeing and mental health of the school staff and leadership team more broadly, has been observed</i>	
<b>Vision, Values, Ethos and Culture</b> – <i>having been agreed/reviewed by the board, reflect on if and how these have been seen or experienced during your visit</i>	
<b>Key questions to raise at the board meeting</b>  1. 2. 3.	
<b>Actions for the board to consider or clarifications needed:</b> <i>e.g., the way resources are allocated; the way the school communicates; progress in implementing a key policy</i>	
<b>Impact of the visit and follow up next visit planned focus:</b>	
<b>Signed: Governor</b> <b>Meeting to be considered at:</b>	

**Record of a Governor's Visit to the School – Informal**

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Focus of visit</b> <i>(event, celebration, parents evening, function)</i>	
<b>Observations and comments by the governor</b> <i>what you saw, what you learned, what you experienced – e.g. consider values/culture, behaviour, stakeholder interaction/engagement, safeguarding, inclusion, SEND, H&amp;S</i>	
<b>How will this report be considered at the board meeting</b> <i>Verbal feedback, raised as a question, raised as part of triangulation</i>	
<b>Signed: Governor</b>	