



Groby Community College

Achieving Excellence Together

GOVERNOR VISITS POLICY 2012 - 2015

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Next review: Summer 2015

Signed:.....
Chair of Governors **Date**

Introduction

The governing body has a duty to oversee the direction and policies of the college, to monitor its standards and be held to account for its conduct and performance. Visiting the college is the best way to learn how it functions, and to keep under review how it operates so that you can increase the governing body's firsthand knowledge and inform strategic decision making.

Visits should generally relate to the priorities determined by the College Improvement Plan (CIP). The governing body should plan visits to cover a wide range of college work and each visit should be agreed and have a clear purpose. Governors should arrange their visits with the Principal who has the responsibility of the day-to-day management of the college.

In a large college, such as Groby Community College, it is acceptable for members of the Senior and Middle Leadership Team to organise visits directly with their link Governors.

Purposes of visit

Firsthand knowledge can only be gained by governors visiting the college. Regular planned visits give governors an insight and understanding about the college, as well as help to strengthen the governing body's strategic and monitoring role.

Purpose of governors' visits

Potential benefits to governors:

- to fulfil the governing body's legal and moral duty to promote the highest educational standards;
- to develop governors' understanding of the college's strengths and weaknesses;
- to support the college's work and celebrate success
- to contribute to the governing body's monitoring role (visits are only one of the ways in which governors fulfil this role);
- to enable individual governors to ask informed and challenging questions at governing body meetings;
- to help governors understand the teaching and learning process;
- to see policies in action;
- to demonstrate to staff and students that governors are interested in what goes on in college;
- to give governors an enhanced sense of identity with the college and the people who work in it;
- To inform decision making;
- To find out what resources are needed and prioritise them;

Potential benefits 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.

The nature of a visit

Governors have the right to make a formal visit to the college provided they do so in connection with their responsibilities as governors, and the visit is on behalf of the governing body.

- Formal visits will have a clear focus, ideally linked to priorities in the CIP.
- Governors have limited time, therefore visits should 'add value' both to the college and to the effectiveness of the whole governing body.
- Governors visit the college as lay people, not as inspectors, even where they have personal professional expertise in the particular subject area.
- A visit will only ever provide a snapshot of what goes on. It may not always give a full and balanced picture of the real state of affairs. That is why it is always important that the information and impressions gained by individual governors during a visit are checked and, if necessary, revised in consultation with the Principal, appropriate member of staff or relevant Head of Faculty.

Governor visits should not be confined to the classroom.

Ideally governors will consider a series of different types of visits, some of which are focused on the classroom but others will include:

- safeguarding;
- meetings with members of the Middle Leadership Team;
- the college environment and health and safety;
- parents'/carers' consultation evenings and open evenings;
- meetings with senior staff to discuss their areas of responsibility;
- attending an assembly;
- reporting on extra-curricular activities;
- focused discussions with students.

Whatever focus is agreed, it is important that governors' visits link with issues in the CIP.

Teaching and learning

- Governors do not undertake formal visits to judge the quality of teaching and learning.
- The Principal is responsible for ensuring the quality of teaching. Governors are entitled to have a clear view about the quality of teaching in the college, including the measures and timescales to address weaknesses. The Principal has a duty to ensure governors receive appropriate information on this key issue.
- If the governing body includes people from educational backgrounds i.e. retired principals/ advisers/inspectors a decision needs to be made about how best to employ such people on visits, especially to the classroom. It may be felt appropriate for them to accompany the Principal on classroom observations – this is for the Principal to decide. However, despite the expertise that such governors bring, they should not engage with staff about professional matters.
- Governors should use their visits as occasions on which to collect information to report back to the governing body/ relevant committee on the progress of key priorities or initiatives in the CIP. Planned and focused governors' visits will contribute significantly to more informed decision-making by the governing body.

Informal Visits

Visits may also take place in an informal capacity. It is vital that everyone is clear about the capacity in which they are visiting and not to confuse the role.

- The Chair making a regular visit to see the Principal
- To lend a helping hand with a college event
- To get information from the office relating to a committee meeting
- To speak to a teacher in relation to your own child
- Attend a college function or educational visit
- To contribute to a college event as a leading professional in a particular field.

Visit Focus'

Although not an exhaustive list visits may focus on:-

- See the '10 Things...' checklist (Appendix B)
- Particular subjects, key stages or classes
- The use made of the buildings or the site
- The condition and maintenance of the premises
- Special educational needs
- Literacy and numeracy
- The use of ICT equipment
- The impact on the college of any changes e.g. reduced classes in a key stage
- Whole college Teaching and Learning focus e.g. literacy / active engagement

What a visit is not about

- A form of inspection to make judgments about professional expertise of the teacher
- Checking on progress of own children
- Pursuing personal agenda
- Monopolising college/teacher time

Protocols or ground rules for visits / preparing the visit

- It is expected that a Link Governor will make at least one visit per year.
- Check the agreed policy for governors' visits - governors should at all times observe protocol and be sensitive to the surroundings.
- Consider what should happen and what should not.

- Negotiate a mutually convenient time; ensure that visits are no longer than 1 hour
- Agree level of participation by governor(s) during college visits; especially visits to classrooms; involvement with students
- Ensure governor(s) receives any relevant supporting information.
- Clarify the purpose of the visit. Is it linked to the CIP? What are the relevant college policies? How does this determine the activities I am interested in?
- Discuss an agenda with the Principal and/or Head of Faculty well in advance. Make sure that the date chosen is suitable.
- Send the proposed agenda to the staff involved. Ask how they want governors to integrate into the learning walk. It might be possible for you to see a copy of any documents beforehand. Discuss with the Senior Leader or Head of Faculty if any supporting information is available – Ofsted report, faculty improvement plan, performance data.
- Be clear beforehand exactly what you are looking for.
- Try to prepare questions and submit to staff in advance.

During the Visit

- Be punctual. Keep to the agreed timetable but be flexible.
- Remember you are making the visit on behalf of the governing body, **it is not appropriate to make judgements or promises on behalf of the governing body.**
- Don't lose sight of the purpose of the visit
- Decide with the teacher how you will be introduced and what your role in the classroom will be
- Be courteous and friendly, not critical
- Listen; don't talk too much, observe discreetly, take minimal notes only
- Ask questions, but sparingly, so as not to distract teachers or students
- Get involved with activities if you are invited but otherwise don't intervene, don't interrupt
- If in lessons **never** comment to the teacher concerned on the conduct of the lesson or on individual students
- Get involved with the children
- Remember it is a visit not an inspection
- Thank staff and students at the end of the visit

After

- Discuss what you have observed with the teacher. Use the opportunity to clarify any issue you are unclear about. For example, did your presence have any impact on the atmosphere in the classroom? If so, how?
- Refer to the purpose of the visit. Consider together whether it has been achieved.
- Thank the teacher for supporting you in your role as a governor. Be open, honest, positive.
- Make notes as soon as possible after your observation while it is still fresh in your mind
- Reflect: how did that go? Has the visit enhanced relationships? Have I learned more about the college? Have I helped the governing body fulfil its duties?

How to feed back after the visit (Reporting your visit)

Consider:

- Governors should feed back to the Principal in the first instance and then also to the member of staff in writing.
- Where possible all governors should use the agreed proforma which is available from the Principal.
- 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.
- You must circulate a draft to the Principal 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.
- Positive comments, areas of concern, questions and suggestions should all be reported.
- A written report for the Governing Body must be available for the next full meeting.
- **Individual staff should not be named in the report.**

Monitoring and review of college visit policy

- This policy should be monitored and reviewed annually.
- Feedback from governor reports
- Feedback from Heads of Faculty
- The Governing Body should ask the following:

- *Are our visits achieving the potential benefits we identified?*
- *Have there been any unexpected benefits?*
- *How can we make our practice even better?*

Appendix A: Annual Considerations

The governing body will:

- Agree a governors' visits policy and review this annually.
- Ensure the visits policy is discussed and agreed with staff.
- Link visits to College/Faculty Improvement Plan/Ofsted Action Plan priorities.
- Consider different **types** of visits.
- Plan a timetable of visits for the year that dovetails with the governing body's schedule of meetings. Agree a realistic target for the number of formal visits. A limited number, for example, two visits a term, involving governors working in pairs, may be more effective and less disruptive, than a whole series of visits by individual governors.
- Agree the **purpose** of visits for the academic year.
- Agree the timescale for each visit.
- Name the governors who will undertake the visits. This allows all governors, particularly those in work or with childcare responsibilities, to make adequate arrangements well in advance. Consider pairs of governors, for example an experienced governor with a newly appointed governor; a member of the Finance Committee with a member of the Teaching, Learning and Achievement Committee.
- Agree de-briefing arrangements with the Principal and reporting back arrangements to the governing body. Governors should aim to produce brief written reports. They should not identify individual teachers or students by name. Reports should be cleared with the Principal before being circulated to other governors. Reports should give an honest account of what was **seen and learned** and **what issues**, if any, need to be considered by the governing body. Written visit reports provide useful evidence for Ofsted inspections of how governors have fulfilled their monitoring role, as well as a helpful reference for the induction of new governors.
- Consider how the teacher governor(s) will be involved in helping ensure the visits policy works well. Some governing bodies arrange for their teacher governors to feed back staff comments on governors' visits at the meeting where the visits report is discussed. Teacher governors are asked to comment on what staff felt worked well and what could be improved.

Evaluation - Annual Review

Review how the visits policy is working at the start of each academic year.

The key questions to consider will be:

1. Have the governors' visits made a difference to
 - a. The Governing Body?
 - b. Staff?
 - c. Students?
2. What does the governing body need to do to make the policy and practice even better?

Appendix B:**10 questions you may want to ask during a formal visit**

1. What is the current attainment in the faculty at both KS4 and 5? How does this compare to last year?
2. How does this prediction compare to the targets? Are you above or below target?
3. Are there any groups of students you are targeting particularly to raise attainment / progress? What is your intervention strategy and how do you track students?
4. Can we look through current SEF? What does this tell you about the progress the faculty is making?
5. Can we look through the Faculty Improvement Plan (FIP)? Has it been reviewed lately to judge progress?
6. What are the strengths of teaching and learning in the faculty? How do you share this good practice?
7. What are you doing to develop teaching and learning?
8. What are your views about the standards and expectations across the faculty (behaviour / classroom standards)?
9. Can we look at some books? What are the standards of assessment?
10. How does the faculty enrich the teaching and learning through extra-curricular activity?

Appendix C: The Form

Groby Community College Governor Visit Record

Name of governor	
Date and time of visit	
Purpose of visit	
Links with the College Improvement Plan: How does the visit relate to a priority in the College Improvement Plan?	
Governor observations and comments E.g. How long did the visit last? What did you observe? What did you learn? What good practice was seen? What would you like clarified?	
Any key issues arising for the governing body e.g. The way resources are allocated, the way the college communicates, progress in implementing a key policy	
Forward to: Firstly to Principal for checking as draft. When agreed send to Clerk of Governors: pdungworth@hotmail.co.uk for circulation to governors	
Follow up action Record any action agreed by the governing body with regard to this visit.	