



Alameda Middle School

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Governor Visits Guidance

Introduction

Making visits to school is an important part of the governors' role. The DfE Governance Handbook says:

“(Governing) 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, particularly during the day, is a helpful way to find out more about the school.

Through pre-arranged visits that have a clear focus, the board can see for themselves whether the school is implementing the policies and improvement plans they have signed off and how they are working in practice.

Visits also provide an opportunity to talk with pupils, staff and parents to gather their views, though are unlikely to be sufficient for these purposes.”

Formal governor visits should have a clear focus, explicitly linked to priorities in the School Development Plan. Both governors and staff have limited time, therefore, time spent on governors' visits should 'add value' both to the school and to the effectiveness of the whole governing body.

Lay People

Governors visit schools 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 in school. 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 headteacher, appropriate member of staff or relevant school leader.

Governors' school visits should not be confined to the classroom

Ideally governors should consider a series of different types of visits, some of which are focused on the classroom but others might include, for example, the playground, the school environment, health and safety, parents'/carers' consultation evenings, meetings with senior staff; shadowing staff and/or pupils; looking at a sample of pupils' work (more able, average, less able) in a particular subject area; attending a school assembly; reporting on the school's extra-curricular activities, joining departmental scrutiny of pupils' workbooks, meeting senior staff to discuss homework setting and marking.

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

Teaching and learning

Governors do not undertake formal visits to judge the quality of teaching and learning in the school. This is a specialist skill which non-specialists are not equipped to undertake. The headteacher is responsible for ensuring the quality of teaching. Headteachers have a duty under the School Teacher Appraisal Regulations to ensure governors receive appropriate information on this key issue.

They should provide governors with:

- o details of systems used to monitor the quality of teaching;
- o the professional support available to teachers to help them teach more effectively;
- o the timescale and likely outcome/s of this support;
- o the headteacher's overall assessment of the quality of teaching in the school.

Governors are entitled to have a clear view about the quality of teaching in their school, including the measures and timescales to address weaknesses.

If the governing body includes people from educational backgrounds i.e. teachers/retired headteachers/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 headteacher on classroom observations – this is for the headteacher 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 school development plan. Planned and focused governors' visits contribute significantly to more informed decision-making by the governing body.

Written reports

Governors' visit reports should be quite simple, giving a layperson's account of what was seen and learnt by the governor conducting the visit and whether there are issues for the governing body to consider. Draft reports by governors should be read/agreed first by the headteacher/school leader and then sent to the clerk to upload onto Governor Hub. They will then be a standing item on the relevant committee and any issues for the FGB raised in that meeting.

Written reports, like all other documents for the governing body, should be available for public scrutiny after the governing body has seen them. They should not name individuals e.g. Jennifer Jones/John Smith but they will identify post holders by title. Reports should not contain any criticisms but they may raise important strategic issues, which the governing body needs to consider.

Informal visits

Governors on informal visits attend in a more personal capacity, much as a parent might do, but always with the knowledge and approval of the headteacher. Such visits add to individual governors' knowledge and understanding of the school and can strengthen relationships and foster trust and respect between governors and staff.

Informal visits can take many forms, for example, attending a play, concert or sports day; helping on school trips; listening to pupils reading aloud or simply running a stall at the school fair. On the whole informal visits are generally easier and less daunting than formal visits.

They should be seen as a valuable complement to formal visits – not an alternative.

Governor Roles

At Alameda, each governor is assigned to one or more governor roles. Roles report into the relevant committee (or to FGB) and are aligned to the school development plan. All formal governor visits should be tightly focussed on the current school development plan.

Governor roles for 2018-19 are as follows:

Role /responsibility	Development Plan Objective(s)	Reports to Committee	Governor	School leader link
Safeguarding		FGB	Simon Ratcliffe	Diana Fickling
Governor development		FGB	Sarah Hall	Louise Fox (M Warner)
Statutory compliance		FGB	Amy Smith Emma Eames	Diana Fickling, Maxine Warner
Standards, Teaching & Learning Team:		CSC		Maxine Warner
Maths (inc Catchup 7)	1, 2	CSC	Carl Field	Donna Leonard, Katy Piazza
English (inc Catchup 7)	1, 2	CSC	Julia Rooney	Amy McKinnon
Science	7	CSC	Richard Pillinger	Paul Henry
Other subjects	6	CSC	Sarah Warrington	Maxine Warner, Louise Fox, Julie Barrows, Paul Henry
Overview of Teaching & Learning	6	CSC	Sarah Warrington	Louise Fox
SEND	1d, 4	CSC/Resources*	Richard Pillinger	Claire Cannon
Pupil premium/Looked after children	1d, 2b, 4	CSC/Resources*	Carl Field, Kat Smith	Louise Fox
More Able & Talented	1d, 2a, 4	CSC	TBC	TBC
Boys	1d, 2c, 4	CSC	TBC	TBC
Sport Premium		CSC/Resources*	Matt Hague	Mhairi Armstrong
Data	1a, 1b	CSC	Julia Rooney	
Behaviour & Pupil Engagement	4, 5	CSC	TBC	TBC
Link to lower schools (informal role)	1e	CSC	Carl Field	Maxine Warner
Financial viability, metrics and tracking	9	Resources	Simon Ratcliffe Kelly Silk	Diana Fickling
Health and Safety/Premises	8	Resources	Amy Smith Mhairi Armstrong	Diana Fickling
Staff engagement, wellbeing & development	3, 6	Resources, P&P	Sarah Hall	Cameron Parks, Louise Fox
Reports, communication & parental engagement	10	Resources	Matt Hague Sarah Warrington Emma Eames	Julie Barrows, Maxine Warner

* Reports from these visits go primarily to CSC but the Resources committee must be made aware of any financial or staffing implications.

Visit schedule

Governors are asked to follow the governor visits schedule to ensure that visits are both prompt and regular and that information can flow efficiently into the cycle of governor meetings.

This year's schedule is as follows:

Role /responsibility	Frequency of visits	Dates when visits are to be completed
Safeguarding	Half termly	Tbc
Governor development	As required	
Statutory compliance	Termly	Autumn: 1-12 Oct 2018; Spring: 28 Feb – 8 Mar 2019; Summer tbc
Standards, Teaching & Learning Team:		
Maths (inc Catchup 7)	Autumn and Spring	Autumn: 1-12 Oct 2018; Spring: 28 Feb – 8 Mar 2019
English (inc Catchup 7)	Autumn and Spring	Autumn: 1-12 Oct 2018; Spring: 28 Feb – 8 Mar 2019
Science	Autumn and Spring	Autumn: 1-12 Oct 2018; Spring: 28 Feb – 8 Mar 2019
Other subjects	Termly	Autumn: 1-12 Oct 2018; Spring: 28 Feb – 8 Mar 2019; Summer tbc
Overview of Teaching & Learning	Autumn and Spring	Autumn: 1-12 Oct 2018; Spring: 28 Feb – 8 Mar 2019
SEND	Autumn and Spring	Autumn: 1-12 Oct 2018; Spring: 28 Feb – 8 Mar 2019
Pupil premium/Looked after children	Autumn and Spring	Autumn: 1-12 Oct 2018; Spring: 28 Feb – 8 Mar 2019
More Able & Talented	Autumn and Spring	Autumn: 1-12 Oct 2018; Spring: 28 Feb – 8 Mar 2019
Sport Premium	Autumn and Spring	Autumn: 1-12 Oct 2018; Spring: 28 Feb – 8 Mar 2019
Link to lower schools (informal role)	As required	
Financial viability, metrics and tracking	Autumn and Spring	Autumn: 1-12 Oct 2018; Spring: 28 Feb – 8 Mar 2019
Health and Safety/Premises	Termly	Autumn: 1-12 Oct 2018; Spring: 28 Feb – 8 Mar 2019; Summer tbc
Staff engagement, wellbeing & development	Autumn and Spring	Autumn: 1-12 Oct 2018; Spring: 28 Feb – 8 Mar 2019
Reports, communication & parental engagement	Autumn and Spring	Autumn: 1-12 Oct 2018; Spring: 28 Feb – 8 Mar 2019

All visits should be completed within the agreed windows wherever possible. If there is a genuine problem with this, please discuss with the Committee Chair or Chair of Governors.

How to Conduct your Governor Visit

This section contains practical guidance on how to conduct your governor visit.

Before your governor visit

1. Arrange a mutually convenient time with the relevant member of staff. Governors must always make an appointment when they want to come into school, not just drop in. Members of staff are always free to say that it is not convenient for a governor to come in at any particular time. Staff governors may request cover if needed.
2. Check the relevant sections of the School Development plan (see the table of roles above) and think about what you want to cover in your visit. Where possible, visits should include more than just a meeting with a member of staff. Where appropriate they should include one or more of the following:
 1. A tour of the school with a school leader
 2. A learning walk with a school leader
 3. An observation of break, lunch, start/end of school
 4. Discussions with pupils along with a member of staff
 5. Discussions with members of staff (teaching and non-teaching)
 6. Safeguarding visits – checking of the Single Central Record
3. Write a short agenda and share it with the member of staff you are meeting in plenty of time before the visit. Think about the questions you want to ask and whether you need any supporting documentation or data – agree these in advance.

Some key questions that apply to most visits are:

Autumn term

What were the outcomes of last year's development plan? Were the KPIs met?

What worked well last year? What are the key issues? How do you plan to resolve them?

How will we measure the impact of these actions? How do you know this plan is achievable? How will you monitor your progress?

Spring term

What progress has been made against the School Development Plan?

Are we achieving the desired impact? How do you know? What is working well? Are changes required now to ensure on track for the end of year?

Remember: in everything we do, we want to remain strategic and understand the impact of actions taken.

More details of what governors should be monitoring and questions governors should ask can be found in Appendix A. Role specific guidance and example questions can be found in Appendix B.

During your governor visit

1. On the day of your visit, be punctual and keep the meeting focussed and strategic. Stick to the agreed schedule and agenda but be flexible if plans need to change. Where possible, corroborate what staff tell you by observing for yourself.

2. Bear in mind the following points:

- Governors are there to observe and inform themselves. They should intrude as little as possible on the teachers' time.
- Governors can go into classes when invited to do so by the teacher.
- Governors can talk to pupils in class when invited to do so by the teacher – try not to interrupt the learning, especially when the teacher is talking.
- Members of staff invite governors into the staff room if they wish.
- Governors will not go into the staff room unless they are invited.
- These informal contacts should not be used to raise individual problems that should properly be resolved by the Senior Leadership Team.

3. Alameda Middle School is a Values school and governors should ask about/comment on values at every visit. A full list of the school values can be found in Appendix B.

4. Staff morale and wellbeing is a key focus area for this year. If appropriate, ask the members of staff you meet on your visit about their wellbeing.

If the visit raises any safeguarding concerns then these should be reported immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

After your governor visit

1. Write up your visit report asap while things are fresh in your mind – ideally the same day. Use the blank governor visit proforma. Visit reports do not need to be lengthy documents - often a single side of A4 is sufficient. Avoid mentioning pupils by name. Remember you are not an inspector so avoid writing like one – and definitely no judgements on teaching and learning.
2. See Appendix C for the blank proforma (also available as a separate document) and Appendix D for an example governor visit record.
3. Share your draft report with the member(s) of staff you met and their line manager(s) and agree any required changes.
4. Once you are in agreement that the report is an accurate reflection of the visit, share it with the Clerk, the Chair of the relevant committee and the Chair of Governors. The Clerk will add the report to Governor Hub.
5. If your meeting has raised significant concerns or possible action points then discuss these privately with the Chair of Governors and Headteacher and agree how to proceed.
6. Be ready to give a brief verbal report at the next committee meeting or FGB – think about what issues need to be brought to the governors' attention. It is not necessary to read out the whole report, a brief summary is fine.
7. Reflect on your visit and consider both what went well and how you might improve your next visit.

Appendices

The appendices contain additional information that you may find helpful in conducting your governor visit. The list of appendices is as follows:

Appendix A Monitoring guidance for governors and questions to ask

Appendix B Role specific guidance

Appendix C Alameda Middle School values

Appendix D Governor visit record blank proforma

Appendix E Example governor visit record

Governors may also find the following useful:

DfE Governance Handbook

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/582868/Governance_Handbook_-_January_2017.pdf

Advice on governor visits from The Key:

The Key has an extensive range of articles with advice on governor visits, with the advantage that they are regularly updated:

<https://schoolgovernors.thekeysupport.com/search?q=governor+visits>

Appendix A Monitoring guidance for governors and questions to ask

What should be monitored and evaluated?

Outcomes

Achievement and standards

- National Curriculum assessments and test results
- attainment and progress of specific groups of children e.g. boys/girls, children from ethnic minority groups, looked after children, children with learning difficulties and disabilities

Personal development and well-being

- pupil attendance
- pupils' behaviour, attitudes, independence and self-esteem
- pupil exclusions
- pupil involvement in extra-curricular activities

Provision

- quality of teaching and learning

- the school's curriculum

Impact of leadership and management

- staffing and budget
- number of applications for admission
- school ethos/culture
- staff morale, attendance and commitment
- partnership with parents, agencies, and the wider community
- views of parents, pupils, staff and the community
- the learning environment.

Questions Governors should ask (not specifically visit related):

Standards	Quality of Teaching	Leadership and Management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is our school currently performing? • Are our children making better than expected rates of progress? • How do standards in year groups, classes, and / or subjects compare with national standards? • How does the school’s performance compare with LA averages? • How does the school’s performance compare with that of similar schools? • How does the school’s current performance compare with its previous performance? What is the trend in results over the last three years? • Have some subjects / year groups shown a marked improvement this year? If so, why? • Are some groups of pupils doing better than others? If so, why? (e.g. looked after children, gender, ethnicity, SEN) • What are the attitudes of pupils towards their learning? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do teachers plan for their lessons? • How do teachers ensure that all pupils are appropriately challenged? • How do teachers explain to pupils what they are going to teach? • How do teachers keep track of progress? • What do teachers do when they see pupils under-achieving? • To what extent do teachers seek the views of their pupils about learning? • Does the school know what teaching styles work and why? • Can these styles be applied in those parts of the school where results need to improve? • What professional support do teachers get to help them teach more effectively? • How do support staff contribute to teaching and learning? • How do support staff support pupils to ensure they have equal access to opportunities to learn and develop? • How do support staff support pupils to help them make their own decisions and take responsibility for their own actions? • What professional support do support staff get to help to maintain and improve their contribution to raising pupil achievement? 	<p>Does the governing body and the leadership team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide a clear vision and sense of common purpose among key stakeholders? • foster high aspirations? • maintain an explicit focus on pupil achievement? • plan strategically? • adopt a proactive stance to change • demonstrate a commitment to equality and inclusion? • promote the personal development and well-being of learners • ensure that rigorous self-evaluation keeps the Self Evaluation Form current and informs plans? • make effective use of performance data • ensure sound financial and resource management? • practise distributed leadership? • ensure that all judgements about performance are based on sound evidence.

Appendix B Role specific visit guidance

Tba

Appendix C Alameda Middle School Values

Month	Value	Month	Value
September 2018	Quality	September 2019	Respect
October 2018	Consideration	October 2019	Responsibility
November 2018	Peace	November 2019	Empathy
December 2018	Caring	December 2019	Appreciation
January 2019	Commitment	January 2020	Hope
February 2019	Love	February 2020	Friendship
March 2019	Humour	March 2020	Co-operation
April 2019	Fairness	April 2020	Honesty
May 2019	Trust	May 2020	Courage
June 2019	Tolerance	June 2020	Understanding
July 2019	Happiness	July 2020	Freedom

Appendix D Governor Visit Record blank proforma

This proforma is also available as a standalone document.

Governor Visit Record	
Governor name:	Date:
Name and role in school of those involved in the visit: <ul style="list-style-type: none">•	
Purpose of visit: <ul style="list-style-type: none">•	
Agenda Items: <ul style="list-style-type: none">•	
Links with School Development Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none">•	
Governor observations and comments: Link to agenda items <i>Please comment in <u>ALL</u> cases of evidence of all AMS values observed– see list above</i> Agenda item 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Point 1 Agenda item 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Point 1	
Key issues for governing body: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Issue 1•	
Action following Governing body meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none">•	

Appendix E Example Governor Visit Record

Governor Visit Record – An Example	
Governor name: J Smith	Date: 10.10.15
Name and role in school of those involved in the visit: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• S Davies, Deputy Headteacher• 8 pupils (2 from each year group)	
Purpose of visit: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teaching and learning – Spring term visit	
Agenda Items: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) SEF – Teaching and learning2) Development plan update3) Learning walk4) Meet a group of pupils to discuss their learning experiences.	
Links with School Development Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whole school objective 2 – teaching and learning	
Governor observations and comments (based on each agenda item): <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Teaching and learning is graded as good. The vast majority of teaching is good and a third is judged to be outstanding. This is based on teaching over time as judged by lesson observations, learning walks, book scrutinies and informal walk abouts done by SLT and subject leaders. This is also backed up by external input from other headteachers and a consultant as part of a self evaluation day. Any teachers causing concern (there are 3) whose teaching has been judged to be less than good (requires improvement) have a clear support plan. This is managed by a subject leader or member of SLT. Clear targets are in pace. If these are not met, this will cross over to capability procedures.2) The development plan objective for teaching and learning is linked to (1) sharing good practice (2) outside CPD for identified teachers	

and (3) a whole school focus on assessment for learning. Progress on the DDP was discussed. In most cases, actions are up to date. The deputy Headteacher would like to look at possibilities for increasing the budget spend on CPD. This is something that will be discussed by SLT before potentially coming to the governors finance committee.

- 3) The learning walk lasted for 1 hour. We visited 5 lessons. The deputy Headteacher was able to point out elements of good and outstanding practice. These related to behaviour, where pupils were keenly involved in their learning and the way the teacher asked questions. Pupils were targeted for some of this. Displays in the classrooms were bright and informative. There were some super examples of work done by children from all year groups on display too. The atmosphere around school was calm.

- 4) The pupils I spoke to (8 in total, 2 from each year group) were all positive about their lessons. One pupil (in year 8) said the lessons had been less fun while they had a supply teacher for a few weeks in science, but they are happy with their lessons now their teacher is back. One pupil commented that the work can be hard but the teacher always helps. Another pupil (in year 6) said that some of the text books were a bit old. When we discussed this further, the general consensus was that this was just one set in history which wasn't used that often.

Values: The value of respect was evident in communication between teachers and pupils (from all), values are clearly evident in displays around school.

Key issues for governing body:

- Look at the CPD budget
- Are the SLT holding the teachers to account where standards of teaching are less than good?
- Is there a continuing CPD strategy?

Action following Governing body meeting:

- CPD budget update