

# Governance visits to schools:

## Interview transcript

<b>Interviewer</b>	You've joined us today to give an insight into why school visits are central to your role and to the schools you support. Could you begin by explaining why visits are essential?
<b>Governor</b>	<p>There are a few very good reasons. We all know how difficult it can be to really understand how a school works from meetings and paperwork – it's essential for members of the governing board to get into their schools on a regular basis to see what's going on in a planned and focused way.</p> <p>Visits are helpful in giving a clearer understanding of how the school operates, as well as an opportunity to monitor school improvement strategy and get a better understanding of school's strengths and weaknesses.</p> <p>If you're prepared, you should be able to see first-hand, if agreed policies and procedures are working in practice, and how resources are being used.</p> <p>But it's also important that staff and pupils see that you are interested in the life, work and achievements of the school. Your support will be noticed and valued.</p>
<b>Interviewer</b>	Is there a specific focus to a visit?
<b>Governor</b>	<p>There certainly should be! Even if you're familiar with the school, as a parent or staff member, a school visit will help to develop your knowledge from a governance perspective.</p> <p>But if you don't go with a clear plan of what you want to achieve, the visit will probably turn out to be far less productive than it could be. Having a prearranged focus will obviously help school staff just as much as it will help you to manage your time.</p> <p>In most cases, a visit should link to priorities in the school strategy and it could focus on whether the school is living its stated values, if the school vision is known and understood by the school community and how aims statements affect the school and the local community.</p>
<b>Interviewer</b>	Can you give us any specific examples, because in most cases a visit should link to objectives and targets outlined in the board's vision and strategy, shouldn't it?
<b>Governor</b>	<p>A visit could focus things such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Monitoring implementation of a policy. For example, homework, safeguarding and behaviour.</li><li>• Getting an understanding of how an issue is dealt with, such as boys' achievement.</li></ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Or monitoring progress towards specific targets. For example, meeting a subject lead of an area for improvement, to see how a strategy translates into classroom practice and children's learning.</li></ul>
<b>Interviewer</b>	Okay, so how about the practicalities before the visit?
<b>Governor</b>	<p>Well, first check whether your school has a policy for visits. Many do, and if so, it will outline dos and don'ts for what should happen before, during and after the visit. This will make it a positive and effective experience.</p> <p>In terms of pre-visit planning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Agree the visit in advance with the school.</li><li>• Set and communicate clear start and end times, including timings for each area visited.</li><li>• Ensure you know the names of people you are visiting.</li><li>• Ask in advance if those you are meeting have any expectations from you.</li><li>• Agree protocol for how you will be introduced to pupils, where you will sit, and whether the teacher is happy for you to join in.</li></ul> <p>Basically, everyone needs to be in the loop, so they know what to expect.</p>
<b>Interviewer</b>	What should be considered during the visit?
<b>Governor</b>	<p>On the day of a visit, stick to the format you have agreed in advance. It's important to be flexible. For example, something unexpected could occur, which makes it impossible for you to carry out agreed tasks. This may be frustrating but remember, the education of pupils is the primary concern.</p> <p>It goes without saying, you are a representative of the governing board, so be professional, act appropriately and dress accordingly.</p> <p>During your visit and as it comes to an end, make sure to thank school staff and any pupils you have met.</p>
<b>Interviewer</b>	That all sounds great. What do you think are some of the reasons governors and trustees find it hard to visit?
<b>Governor</b>	<p>I think many of the reasons can be very easily overcome. Some governors and trustees say that finding the time to visit is definitely a challenge, but if properly planned a visit doesn't need to last longer than an hour or so.</p> <p>One visit per term is a sensible rule of thumb. I think that some governors and trustees simply do not know what visits are for, or how to arrange them or who to talk to, and so this puts them off.</p>

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Having a schedule of visits focusing on key areas can support with this. Those new to governance, or even those who have been governing for some time, might not know what they should or shouldn't do on a visit. Having a protocol or policy to follow is extremely useful to help governors understand what they should or shouldn't do on a visit, as is training. You may well find that you're not alone in having some doubts – some of your fellow board members may also be very grateful for a reminder as to how to plan and complete a successful visit.

<b>Interviewer</b>	What are the expectations of the governing board regarding the visit?
<b>Governor</b>	Your governing board will want to know the outcome of your visit, so agree in advance what reporting protocols will apply. All too often visits take place and useful information isn't used. Keep a record of what happened during the visit then summarise the important elements in a report. Most importantly, the report should summarise the visit, detail any actions for the board to consider and things to focus on in any future visits.
<b>Interviewer</b>	Do you have any final words of wisdom for us?
<b>Governor</b>	Governing is incredibly rewarding, but you do need to know your school well and this means visiting. We are advocates for our pupils, ensuring that schools are the very best they can be for everyone and so we need to see what is happening in school for all of the reasons I've mentioned.
<b>Interviewer</b>	Thank you very much for your time.
<b>Governor</b>	You're welcome!