

Kent Health Needs Management Committee

Member Visits Policy & Procedure

Protocol and Procedures for a Circle Based Governance Model 2020-21

(Circle Model – Whole Committee)

Approved and adopted by the Management Committee:

Date Approved by Committee

12 October 2020

Review Date

Term 1 2021/22

References to ‘School’ in this document also refer to Kent Health Needs Education Service and to its Hubs

Policy Context

The Committee 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.

The governance handbook states on the role of Governor school visits

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(s), 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 school is implementing their policies and improvement plans 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.

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. Both 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.

It also says

Boards needs clear processes for overseeing and monitoring school improvement and financial health, providing constructive challenge to executive leaders.

And in relation to compliance with statutory and contractual requirements, through

Plans to ensure that key duties are undertaken effectively across the organisation such as safeguarding, inclusion, special education needs and disability (SEND), and monitoring and oversight of the impact of pupil premium and other targeted funding streams.

Understanding of the role of Members in the circle model governance structure

For the circle model, the Member monitoring visits, performed by the skillset appointed Department for Education (DfE) identified and delegated Member roles (including monitoring pairs), are replacing the committee agenda items, challenge and support which would otherwise have taken place within the committee meetings. Therefore, for the Committee, collectively, to be able to fulfil its core functions, it will need to ensure a robust policy, procedure and practice for Member delegated monitoring is in place to enable constructive challenge to the leadership of the school. These visits will hold the school to account for its functions and areas of strengths and weaknesses and the reporting back of the findings will thereby increasing the Committee’s collective first-hand challenge and knowledge, informing self-evaluation, holding to account and any necessary collective strategic decision making. Members will need to ensure they are asking the questions a committee would have asked during their visits, as well as seeing the school policies and procedures in action. It is a statutory duty in legislation for any delegated function to be written up and reported back to the next Committee meeting after the visit has taken place. Member written reports will need to contain the questions asked and answers received to enable the Committee to ensure the challenge and accountability has taken place and to enable follow up questions for evidence of deeper questioning and collective impact at Committee meetings. It is recognised that the amount of time that a Member can commit to a

visit will vary but in general Members, in their delegated and monitoring pair roles, should undertake **three** visits a year, aligned with the Committee approved monitoring visits schedule and Committee agendas, unless the school circumstances necessitate differently i.e. school category of requires improvement (RI) or inadequate. If Members cannot undertake this commitment, they should question whether they can make a realistic and valuable contribution as a Member in line with the Committee Code of Conduct. Whole Committee days in school alongside delegated monitoring may also be an additional valuable tool in knowing your school with a planned focus and feedback.

The National Governance Association (NGA) and Governance Handbook both note references to not interfering in the day-to-day operational running of the school and the impact too many Member visits may have on the operational school day.

This policy sets out the protocol and procedures for a Member visit which have been shared with staff. It sets out how Member visits should be conducted to allow both Members and staff to gain the most from the visit and enable evidence of impact.

Member delegated monitoring roles (as opposed to the DfE identified roles) should align to the priorities determined on the School Improvement Plan, with an agreed monitoring visit schedule that is timely to the school and Committee meetings and reported back, with Committee minutes evidencing documented questions and discussion. This enables the impact of the visit and ensures collective understanding in replacement of a committee at the Committee meeting. The monitoring schedule should also offer provision for the DfE identified Member monitoring roles of safeguarding; SEND; career guidance (secondary); and the Kent County Council (KCC) maintained schools identified health and safety and finance roles. Each monitoring visit should have an agreed clear purpose. Role descriptors would aid Members in their understanding and expectations in carrying out their monitoring visits.

Members **must** arrange their planned visits in advance with the headteacher who has the responsibility of the day-to-day management of the school. The Committee should review their school visits policy, protocols and procedure annually to ensure its effectiveness with the approved policy circulated to all staff.

The Committee must recognise the role of the delegated Member functions in bringing back the information to the Committee at its meetings to enable any collective strategic decision making. Whilst delegated Members/monitoring pairs have an assigned function they have **no** authority for any decision making. **In the circle model, every decision must be made at a Committee meeting.**

To enable understanding for collective decision making, it is vital the Committee ensures all Members have a broad understanding of all areas of the governance core functions.

Circle Model Monitoring Visits Policy

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

Introduction

This policy applies to school visits made for the purpose of governance, where committees have been replaced by Committee meetings or any other Member visit. It does not apply 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.

(Delegated Members/monitoring pairs in a circle model statutorily do not have any decision-making powers. All decisions in a circle model must take place at a Committee meeting.)

Purpose

All school visits will:

- Have a clear focus, linked to strategic priorities and delegated Member roles, be timely and planned against the Committee approved monitoring schedule and Committee meetings.
- Be arranged with adequate notice through the headteacher who will agree it 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 Committee
- Be of value to the Committee in ensuring it effectively fulfils its core functions; collectively holds the school to account in replacement of committees, which can be demonstrably evidenced to outside agencies e.g. Ofsted, the Local Authority (LA), diocese; DfE and enables collective understanding for any strategic Committee decision making.

It is not the role of those governing to form judgements about the performance of school staff during visits and individuals should make every effort to avoid this impression.

Member Conduct

Members undertaking visits will comply with the School and Committee Codes of Conduct, any DfE guidance and the standards of presentation expected of staff. They will be mindful that they are representing the whole Committee through their words and actions and will understand their strategic role by not becoming operational. The Committee Code of Conduct will contain reference to the Committee monitoring visits policy and subsequent steps for any breach.

Training

Members should ensure they understand their delegated monitoring remit, undertaking relevant training to keep up to date with best practice and latest statutory and legislative requirements. Role descriptors may aid Members in their understanding, expectations and preparation for carrying out their monitoring visits.

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

Member reports following visit

It is a statutory responsibility (for maintained schools) for any delegated function to be reported back to the Committee.

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

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

The attached 'Delegated Member Visit Report' will be completed after each visit, containing the questions and answers as would be expected of a committee agenda item as well as questions to be raised at the Committee meeting. A draft will be shared with the headteacher for any comments concerning factual accuracy; any concerns will be discussed with the chair and Member concerned before a final version will be sent to the clerk to be included in the agenda and as a supporting paper for collective discussion and further questioning in the next Committee meeting.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality should be adhered to regarding visits. Comments should be limited to the headteacher with whom 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 reports. Staff roles should be used within reports.

Frequency of Visits

Members will undertake visits as agreed in their approved monitoring schedule with no more than three visits per academic year unless the school circumstance necessitates.

Review

This policy, protocol and procedure should be reviewed by the Committee every academic year alongside the Code of Conduct.

This Policy will be circulated to all new Members upon appointment

Purposes of a circle model Member visit

The benefits to Members within their individual delegated monitoring roles:

- To assist the governing body, including the DfE identified delegated Member roles of safeguarding; SEND; careers guidance (secondary); For KCC maintained schools, health and safety; finance to hold leaders to account within their delegated area of responsibility.
- To assist the Committee in fulfilling its statutory duties by written reports demonstrating accountability and constructive challenge in their delegated role, in replacement of committees. The reports are used by the Committee for collective evaluation, further scrutiny and deeper challenge at their meetings and may aid any Committee strategic decision making.
- 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, questioning and learning about the impact of the adopted strategy and how this translates through to classroom practice and children's learning.
- To challenge, support and improve knowledge of the school, its staff, needs, priorities, strengths and weaknesses within the Member delegated area of responsibility and collectively prevent overreliance of headteacher information.

- To hold the school leaders to account for the impact of specialist funding i.e. pupil premium; sports premium (primary), COVID-19 catch up premium; (no year 7 catch up literacy and numeracy for 2020/21 (secondary)) within the relevant delegated Member role.
- 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 collective strategic decision making.
- To observe and monitor the impact of policies in action e.g. safeguarding, behaviour, health and safety, SEND, careers guidance, finance.

The benefits to Members within general monitoring e.g. focussed or whole GB days:

- Gaining 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 Committees approved ethos, vision and values in action.
- To show themselves as part of the school and to gain stakeholder engagement with pupil, parents, staff or the wider community e.g. Pupil voice, school council, parent forum, parent evenings.

The potential benefits to staff:

- To ensure Members understand how school priority strategies are embedded in practice, understanding the reality of the classroom and environment.
- To enhance the continuous professional development of middle and subject leads.
- To get to know and build positive relationships with Members.
- To understand better the Members' 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 resources

The potential benefits to students:

- To ensure Members understand the reality of the classroom environment, broad curriculum, and school life
- To have mechanisms for enabling the Committee to listen, understand and respond to the voices of pupils, particularly to ensure transparency of decision-making.
- To get to know Members
- To understand better Member roles and responsibilities
- To give feedback about the school and their views of the impact of policies to the Members

The potential benefits to parents:

- To ensure Members understand the issues that parents may face

- To have mechanisms for enabling the Committee to listen, understand and respond to the voices of parents/carers, particularly to ensure transparency of decision-making.
- To get to know Members
- To understand better Member roles and responsibilities
- To give feedback about the school to the Members

What a visit is not about

- Visiting classrooms to observe a lesson, unless as part of an accompanied learning walk against a specific focussed school improvement priority. This prevents any confusion on a class visit being confused 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 checks as the health and safety Member, 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 delegated role

Protocols or ground rules for visits

- Ensure the visit has a clear focus linked to the school improvement plan and/or area of Member responsibility.
- Members individually understand their delegated area of responsibility, enabling preparation to ensure they provide the constructive challenge required.
- Members to remember that during any visit their role is strategic not operational.
- Members to ensure in preparation for their visit they have undertaken relevant training and read any relevant policy or supporting documentation.
- The headteacher will liaise with the member of staff responsible for the school/priority/policy objective to arrange the date and schedule of the meeting.
- Staff should have the opportunity to explain the context of any lesson on the rare occasion that a Member visits a classroom
- Members will not interrupt lessons by asking teachers questions on the rare occasion that they may visit the classroom.
- Members may talk to students during learning walk visits to lessons, about their understanding and learning journeys, but must not ask questions about the teacher's conduct of the lesson.
- Members will ensure that they are familiar with the school's code of conduct as well as that of the Committee, with expectation that they follow the same behaviours to understand how they will be addressed and how to address others as well as appropriate dress code as outlined within both code of conducts.
- Members will have a clear understanding that a breach of the Member monitoring visit policy will be dealt with as a breach of the Committee's code of conduct.
- Members will formally write reports, to fulfil the required statutory duty, on their delegated monitoring using the approved templates; ensuring that draft reports are sent to the headteacher for factual accuracy comments prior to the final report being produced.
- Delegated Member monitoring reports will be circulated in advance, via the clerk, for the Committee meeting to enable discussion; evaluation; triangulation and to enable key and further questions to be raised; with minute evidence documented to show the impact of the monitoring in replacement of the challenge at a committee.

Annual programme of visits

A programme of visits (monitoring schedule) should be planned, using the school improvement plan, Committee meeting timetable and subsequent allocation of delegated roles by school priority and skillset as well as the DfE identified delegated monitoring Member roles. This programme should be spread evenly across the school year in consultation with the headteacher. Regular analysis of this schedule enables Members to ensure they are monitoring, evaluating and triangulating against the current school priorities and statutory areas and reporting back to the Committee in replacement of a committee. This enables the Committee to fulfil its collective core roles and functions by evidencing constructive challenge and impact and enabling strategic decision making; and know the school in terms of being able to describe to Ofsted or other outside agencies. The number of visits required to be undertaken by each delegated Member role is three in one academic a year, unless the school situation necessitates otherwise.

Examples of delegated Member monitoring visits in which key questions are asked to the headteacher or relevant staff lead can also for example include:

- Learning walks with members of staff
- Pupil voice in the class or interviews in groups
- Looking at pupils' work against the marking or curriculum policy's
- Monitoring implementation of a policy e.g. behaviour, equality, safeguarding, finance
- Gaining an understanding of the broad curriculum, or particular area
- Gaining an understanding of the impact of spend of funding, including specialist funding, with spending leads
- Ensuring financial compliance, monitoring and processes are in place
- Seeing in action 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 resources of the school

Whole Management Committee days or general monitoring in school can for example include:

- Visiting break and lunchtimes with staff and pupils
- Pupil voice and their understanding of how they are receiving a quality education
- School council
- Parent forum
- Seeing extra-curricular provision in action
- Evidencing collectively the safeguarding culture
- Monitoring the culture, ethos and values and for church schools, ensuring the distinctive Christian character is maintained against agreed expectations.
- Parental engagement at the start; end or during parental events in school.
- Monitoring British values
- Monitoring preparation for the next stage of education

Monitoring and review of the school visit policy

The policy should be monitored and reviewed annually alongside the Committee Code of Conduct.

Areas we should consider when reviewing are:

- Are our visits achieving the potential benefits we identified? Are we fulfilling our core functions?
- Are we receiving the individual reports containing the challenge and answers appropriate to committee item minutes?
- Do our discussions at meetings from the reports enable the collectiveness in holding to account achieved by committees and is evidenced in minutes?
- Are our visits timely against the school improvement plan and Committee meetings?
- Do we have the right Member monitoring roles against the current school priorities?
- Are our delegated Members aware of their responsibilities in replacement of committees? Do they understand their role? Do we have role descriptors?
- Are Members appointed to their delegated roles due to skillset? Are they keeping up to date with best practice and latest statutory/legislative requirements?
- Are we better informed and can evidence the accuracy of headteacher and SLT reports?
- Have we engaged with stakeholders to understand their views to use as part of informed strategic decision making?
- Have there been any unexpected benefits?
- Do all Members have a broad understanding of all areas of governance to ensure further scrutiny and effectiveness of those undertaking the delegated roles?
- How can we make our practice even better? Is there anything we need to change in how visits are conducted from feedback from stakeholders?

Member Visits - Good Practice

Preparing for a visit

- Check the agreed policy and schedule for Members' monitoring visits and any DfE relevant governance guidance.
- Arrange a mutually convenient time to visit, within the monitoring schedule and Committee meeting window, with the headteacher.
- Discuss the visit and agreed timetable with the headteacher to ensure that any member of staff who will be involved in the visit, understands the arrangements.
- Clarify the purpose of the visit as outlined within the monitoring schedule and undertake any background preparation reading required. Understand your strategic delegated 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? 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 improvement plan, note of visit, staff lead report, performance data.
- Ensure that you are familiar with safeguarding and health and safety procedures
- Read the Committee Code of Conduct 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 Committee; it is not appropriate to make judgements or promises on behalf of the Committee.
- Be punctual, reporting to reception and signing in as a Member. Wear a badge to identify yourself as a Member. Keep to the agreed timetable but be flexible to the school needs.

- Decide 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 you are there to learn, fact find, ask the questions in replacement of a committee and gain answers, it is a monitoring visit not an inspection.
- Keep to the role/focus agreed; 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.
- Remember why you are there. Don't lose sight of the purpose of your visit.
- 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 of the visit. Consider together whether it has been achieved.
- Ensure that you have signed out

After

- Share any concerns with the headteacher and chair, however trivial. Use the opportunity to clarify any issue you are unclear about.
- 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 Member. Be open, honest, and positive.
- Make more notes as soon as possible after your meeting and any observations while it is still fresh in your mind.
- 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.
- Send the draft to the headteacher and once you have taken their comments into account send the final written report to the clerk for circulation at the next Committee meeting.
- Ensure that your visit is included as an agenda item at the next Committee meeting.
- Complete the agreed visit template proforma in time for the headteacher to comment on and sending to the clerk for sending out 7 days in advance of the 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 Committee 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 Committee collectively fulfil its duties by ensuring challenge and collective understanding of my delegated area? Are there actions the Committee 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 Committee meeting?

Informal or outside of delegated role visits

Outside of delegated monitoring, visits may also take place to gain stakeholder view or focussed whole day visits on a specialised area or to monitor the Committees ethos, vision and values. These can be documented using the approved formal visits template (appendix A) or as a Committee day with specific documented feedback. 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 Members should ensure that they follow the Member visits protocols as appropriate and consider how they will feedback to the Committee having completed the report using the informal template (Appendix B)

There will also be times when a Member visits the school and a report is not required. For example,

- The chair making a regular planned visit to see the Headteacher
- To get information from the office relating to a meeting
- New Member tour of the school
- Attending working groups or Committee meetings
- Invited to attend prize giving or celebration events

Areas not considered as a Member 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 Member undertakes as an individual / professional an advisory or operational role within the school, **the role / function must be declared on the register of business interests and at Committee meetings**; and they **must not be appointed** as the delegated Member / part of the monitoring pair for this area / function.

For example, times when Members may be visiting the school **not** as a Member.

- 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 your own child
- Attending a school function as a parent/relative/invitee
- Visit 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

Record of a delegated Member's visit to the school - Formal

Name: Delegated Member Role	Date:
Focus of visit, links with the School Improvement Plan or DfE identified Member role: <i>(How does the visit relate to a priority in the School Improvement Plan or is it in a DfE identified Member delegated role?)</i>	
Areas and summary of planned activities. Including departments or areas of school visited, staff and pupils that the Member met during the visit: <i>(Previously agreed by the Committee with the headteacher) (how long the visit lasted?) (Members should refer to staff by their role or job title and not by name)</i>	
Observations, comments, questions asked, and answers reported to the Member: <i>(e.g. what you saw; questions asked with answers given; what you learned relating to the focus of the visit)</i> ensure this section contains the constructive challenge and accountability against the required governance statutory responsibilities and functions. See Governance handbook.	
Comments on safeguarding culture observed during visit <i>(e.g. in relation to KCSIE part 2 and Child Protection policy)</i>	
Three key questions I would like to raise at the Committee meeting: 1. 2. 3.	
Actions for the Committee to consider or clarifications needed: <i>(e.g. the way resources are allocated; the way the school communicates; progress in implementing a key policy)</i>	
Impact of the visit and follow up next visit planned focus:	
Signed: Member Meeting to be considered at:	

Record of a Member's visit to the school - Informal

Name:	Date:
Focus of visit <i>(event, celebration, parents evening, function)</i>	
Observations and comments by the Member <i>(e.g. what you saw; what you learned, behaviour, stakeholder interaction/engagement, safeguarding)</i>	
How will this report be considered at the Committee meeting? <i>(Verbal feedback, raised as a question, raised as part of triangulation)</i>	
Signed: Member	