

School Immersion Programme:

A question and answer guide for schools

1. About the programme

1.1 What is the School Immersion Programme?

The School Immersion Programme (SIP) provides DfE staff with an opportunity to arrange a visit to a school and immerse themselves into everyday school life.

1.2 What are the aims and benefits of a SIP visit?

A SIP visit provides DfE staff with opportunities to gain a real sense of the school from various perspectives and assist their overall understanding of education policy 'in the real world'. The programme objectives for DfE participants are:

- to enhance their understanding of how schools operate
- an appreciation of the issues faced by headteachers and teachers
- gain insight into innovation in schools
- assess the impact of a new DfE policy or initiative

DfE staff are encouraged to pass on their experiences and share their learning to their teams on their return.

The benefits of the programme for schools include the opportunity to:

- reflect on their own practices from a new perspective
- showcase innovation and best practice
- feedback and demonstrate to a civil servant the impact of policy on the ground
- help ensure the Department for Education (DfE) understands and is engaged in the challenges schools face on a day to day basis

1.3 Who runs the programme?

The Education Standards Directorate Support Team (DST) partners with NAHT and ASCL to provide DfE staff with a list of participating schools for each term. DfE staff then match themselves to an available school and make contact with the school to arrange a visit.

2. DfE application process and visiting your school

2.1 Who can apply?

The programme is open to all DfE staff at all grades. Past participants have ranged from administrative officers to the permanent secretary.

2.2 When does the programme run?

There are three application rounds per year, running January to April, May to July and September to December. Applicants may register and match themselves to a

school any time up to a month before the end of the term. Applicants should arrange their visit to take place before the end of the term in which they apply as another applicant may be matched to the same school for the following term. Please note, by chance, a school may be contacted by two different DfE staff members in fairly close succession (at the end of one term and beginning of the next). However, participating schools are agreeing to one visit per term and the dates are to be mutually agreed. If a school is no longer able to accommodate a visit before the end of the current term, they should inform the applicant who may either be matched to another school or reapply in a forthcoming term.

2.3 Arranging the school visit

Once participants are matched to a school they must contact the school themselves to make the appropriate arrangements. The date of the visit should be before the end of the current term.

2.4 What is the participant's commitment to the school?

All schools involved volunteer for the programme and the support provided by ASCL and NAHT is also free. To maintain good relations with all partners, DfE participants are requested to honour their commitment once they have been matched with a school.

2.5 What is expected of schools on the programme?

It is requested that heads do not lay on a special programme or activities for participants, but it would be helpful to brief school staff on the purpose of the visit to avoid any confusion or disruption to lessons.

Schools should include participants in any after-school meetings or functions which would normally involve the head or teachers, along with use of the staff room and other staff facilities.

Participants may contact your school for local information, such as split sites and parking arrangements, and have been requested to inform schools should they have any special needs or medical conditions. Participants should familiarise themselves with the school's fire and safety procedures.

Headteachers and principals should use their professional judgement about the need to escort or supervise visitors.

2.6 Do participants need to be DBS checked? No, DBS checks are no longer required.

Schools and colleges do not have the power to request DBS checks or barred list checks for visitors (for example, children's relatives or other visitors attending a sports day). Headteachers and principals should use their professional judgement about the need to escort or supervise visitors. This is clarified in paragraph 89 of the updated statutory safeguarding guidance for schools and colleges 'Keeping children safe in education':

3. Visiting your school

3.1 What happens on the visit?

Participants ordinarily spend a total of three days in the school. A suggested itinerary

is below, however, all arrangements can be varied to suit the needs of the school and your matched participant:

- Introductory meeting between participant and headteacher.
- One day accompanying a pupil or group of pupils.
- One day accompanying a teacher.
- One day accompanying the head (or other appropriate staff member such as deputy headteacher, assistant headteachers, business managers and bursars, and subject to availability; it may not always be possible to work-shadow the headteacher).
- Final day: a joint evaluation following the visit between the head and participant. A typical evaluation discussion might include:
 - a review on what particular insights the participant has gained from the experience and any insights for the school
 - agree any joint recommendations for improvements to the immersion programme
 - identify any areas where the participant and the head see benefits in staying in touch

Schools may wish to alter the itinerary to suit their or the participant's needs. Variations could include shadowing non-teaching staff instead of a pupil (particularly in the case of primary school children), shadowing lessons rather than a teacher, and spending time with admin or finance staff.

3.2 What can schools expect from DfE participants?

Participants are not expected to know and answer questions on DfE policies, although they should have an understanding of current policy issues.

They have not been asked to interview teaching staff on policy issues or undertake any research; they may be asked to make an observation and record it, but this will be outlined to participants by the DfE before their visit.

3.3 Making the most of the visit

The content of the three days should be discussed and agreed with the school in advance and can be amended as appropriate (as 3.1 above).

To obtain the full benefit from the visit, participants are expected to be at the school for the full school day. This includes any before or after-school activities or meetings attended by staff. They should be fully immersed into the life of the school from Day 1 to Day 3.

Participants need to fully involve themselves in school life in an open and non-judgemental manner, display a professional and courteous attitude at all times, whilst also observing the school's rules and guidelines.

Participants will be reminded that sensitive information concerning the school and pupils which they may encounter must be treated in the strictest confidence, and an assurance provided if necessary that such information will not be reported to or used by the department in relation to any official dealings with the school.

4. After the visit

4.1 What will happen after the visit?

Participants will give feedback on their visit and the whole programme via the DfE's online form.

This may include:

- producing a short report and circulating it to team members
- a presentation on the lessons learnt at a team meeting
- circulating any relevant feedback to the appropriate DfE team/division/directorate

4.2 Can representatives from the schools visit the DfE in return? This may be possible. Please ask the DfE staff visiting your school if you could visit their team in return.