

Guidelines for Schools Hosting Virtual International Visits

Full, Mid-Cycle, Pre-Initial Visit, Initial (Probationary and Substantive Changes, Upon Approval)

Introduction

Due to the COVID – 19 Pandemic and the challenging times, the Accrediting Commission for Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACS WASC), will be conducting virtual visits during the fall months (September – December); this may need to be extended. These include full, mid-cycle, probationary, pre-initial visit and initial visits, and potentially substantive changes and probationary changes upon WASC approval. The expectations for all virtual visits are the following:

- Every care must be taken to ensure that the process and result will be as rigorous and thorough as an on-site visit.
- Based on the WASC research-based criteria/indicators, the virtual visit focuses on the school’s continuous improvement and progress related to high quality learning and well-being for all students, preparing them to be globally competent.
- Video, audio and connectivity quality must be sufficient to allow for good communication – both recorded and live.

WASC international staff members will be available to work closely with the schools and the visiting committee chair/members of these visits. WASC is providing guidelines for the schools and chairs through personal communication, webinars and regularly scheduled “virtual office hours” to answer any questions. The visits will follow the expectations for an in-person visit; these include:

- previsit work of the chair with the school, including establishing the virtual
- schedule;
- previsit work with the visiting committee member(s); and
- the requirements for the type of visit such as meeting daily with the leadership team, all focus groups, parents, students, other staff members, and governing board/ownership; observing a stratified sample of classes, and dialogue with corporate leadership, if applicable.

School Expectations for Visits

Although the postponed schools were not required to update their reports, the school will be expected to share what has been done since the report was completed with supporting

information; this would include the impact of online learning for the students and other issues as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The school should ensure the self-study and all supporting evidence and documentation is available for the visiting committee prior to the visit. After review of the school's student/community profile and supporting documentation, the visiting committee chair may request additional information related to student wellness and safety standards due to the virtual visit.

In addition, the school will be expected to ensure all stakeholders understand that the WASC visit is occurring and ensure the visiting committee chair understands the parameters for any contractual requirements as the schedule is established. The expectation is that all staff members serving on the various committees will participate in the meetings; this may mean key leadership would meet at one meeting and other committee members meet at another time. The school should arrange for a staff member to join any meeting with students and the chair will ensure there are two visiting committee members at these.

Structure of the Visiting Committee, Schedule for the Visit, Visiting Committee Report

The size of the team will follow the normal WASC guidelines but be adjusted as needed.

Initially, the school and visiting committee chair will use the suggested in-person schedule as a reference but this will be adapted based on the context of the school. Some meetings may occur prior to the actual visit dates or during the visit potentially be combined. The required meetings and observations will still occur based on the type of visit with the emphasis upon transparency. These include:

- daily communication with the head of school;
- daily dialogue between the Leadership Team and the Visiting Committee;
- meetings with all members of the Focus Groups and/ or committees; and
- separate meetings with students, parents, support staff, teachers, counselors, governing authority/ownership, etc.

The Visiting Committee will share the report with the Leadership Team on the final day orally but provide electronically the final list of schoolwide strengths and critical areas for follow-up. The complete report will be sent to the school within ten working days; the goal is that any visiting committee report will not be more than 30 pages. *(NOTE: See the Visiting Committee Chair Expectations with inserts related to virtual visits and the sample in-person schedule from the Focus on Learning International 2017 manual for full visits.)*

Important Technological Requirements

The school will need to ensure the following technological capabilities:

- online conferencing facilities to allow small groups to participate in meetings (e.g. Zoom, Google Meetings, WebEx, Microsoft Teams, Skype or similar); individual stations (laptops) tend to work better than large groups in a room;
- reliable Internet access to support the above platforms and to support the use of individual cameras, audio and video during meetings that last a minimum of 45 minutes; some meetings may require between 60-90 minutes;
- video recording, camera. Tablet/iPAD/SMARTphone devices for recording devices to record video and images of the school prior to the virtual team evaluation visit; and
- video recording devices and the wireless support necessary to stream live video of the school in action if it is in session during the virtual team evaluation visit or the ability to observe virtual classes in session.

NOTE: The visiting committee will conduct a test of the technological requirements with the school before the virtual accreditation visit.

Suggested Videos provided Prior to the Visit (*NOTE: The need for certain videos may vary with the type of visit, e.g., full visit versus a mid-cycle visit, especially if the team has already visited the school.*)

The school is asked to provide the following videos:

➤ **General introduction to the school and learning environment**

The purpose is to demonstrate how facilities, learning spaces and equipment are age appropriate, well-maintained and adequately support the school's purpose and sustain the well-being and learning for the students. This video should replicate the normal tour of a school and be accompanied by narration and a plan/map.

➤ **Health and Safety, Child Protection and Safeguarding**

All building and outdoor areas should be filmed. The following areas should be included:

- Science laboratories, including preparation rooms and safety equipment
(*Note: Please include where appropriate shower, eye wash stations, ventilation process in storage room, actual storage of acids and reactive chemicals*);
- art/music/drama facilities, including practice rooms;
- maker spaces or design technology workshops with regard to safety measures;
- sports facilities – including playing surfaces, and changing areas;
- emergency and security features; the perimeter fence, entrance and exit gates, location of

security cameras, location of camera monitors/ screens and how these are monitored and used, electronic entry to buildings and rooms as appropriate; clear signage for emergency procedures, e.g., fire exits, lockdowns, earthquakes;

- ways in which the school meets the health and safety codes and regulations of local authorities;
- appropriate child protection and safeguarding features of all the facilities with regard to clear line of sight;
- social-emotional and career counseling rooms with regard to child protection and safeguarding;
- special needs facilities and any one-to-one spaces;
- health care facilities, noting storage of medication and health records;
- toilet facilities and their designation as adult areas;
- kitchen and dining areas with regard to all food and safety measures;
- air quality, heating and cooling, shade, shelter, lighting and acoustics and how these support safety, health and an environment conducive to learning and well-being for all;
- other areas based on the school context.

➤ **Learning Videos**

A sampling of some recorded lessons should be provided to the visiting committee prior to the visit. Samples where possible should include:

- a range of different grade levels; and
- different curricular areas including those that use specialist learning areas and facilities.

Observation of the school in action, *during* the virtual team accreditation visit

As in any visit, please provide the master schedule of classes (virtual and/or on-site). Based on the school program and courses, the visiting committee chair and the school will establish a schedule for visiting committee members to observe live teaching and learning. The visiting committee chair will select a stratified group of classes based on grade levels, subject areas, types of courses, student groups and other important issues.

Normally, all classes are visited during a full visit and a stratified random sample in other visits; in small schools this may still be feasible. However, visiting chairs and the members will make decisions on the best number to ensure a quality stratified sample from important groups or divisions has been observed beyond the videos. A suggested time frame has been 15-20 minutes per class but this may vary with the type of class and school. The school and the visiting committee chair will work together on what video device will be used and how it is positioned to permit observation of students engaged in the learning along with the teacher.