

Insight - a closer look at

Field trips and excursions





Education

Field trips and excursions contents

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Field trips and excursions

School trips cover a wide variety of activities and form an important part of the educational process. Whilst high profile incidents are associated with field trips, the vast majority are undertaken successfully. The school is responsible for the health, safety and welfare of staff and pupils, even when they are off site on an excursion.

School trips will vary greatly in the element of risk involved and the steps taken by the school to manage the trip should be tailored depending on the pupils, duration and risks involved in the trip. The following information has been developed as a guide to help develop a management framework for trips and excursions.

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Responsibilities

A formal procedure should be followed in terms of seeking approval from the school and all relevant stakeholders when a school trip is being planned.

Head teachers have a range of responsibilities in relation to school excursions including:

- The preparation of adequate risk assessments and planning of the trip.
- The need to ensure that the teacher that is taking the group on the trip has adequate experience.
- The provision of adequate adult to student ratios and provision of adequate child protection procedures.
- An emergency and contingency plan are needed to ensure that changes to plan and incidents can be dealt with effectively.
- First aid provision needs to be considered along with any training needs for the trip organiser.
- Consent forms need to be signed and a list of people on the trip needs to be compiled.

It is recommended that each school appoints and trains a coordinator for school trips. The function of the coordinator includes:

- Ensure that risk assessment findings are followed.
- To support the head teacher and the school governors in relation to approving and organising the trip.
- Develop emergency procedures.
- To ensure that child protection checks are carried out.
- To help obtain consent form from pupils' parents/guardians.
- Help determine who will supervise on the excursion.
- To maintain accident records relating to school excursions.
- To check the Foreign Office website for information on the location of overseas trips.

The teachers taking the group on the excursion have responsibility for the pupils when they are on the trip. The group leaders need to ensure that:

- They have obtained full approval and consents for the trip to take place. Medical consents should also be obtained.
- They are aware of the risk assessment findings, the contingency and emergency plan.
- Decide on supervisory and training needs.
- An exploratory visit is undertaken if possible and that transport arrangements are assessed.
- During the trip the group leader should review the risk assessments, ensure everyone knows the emergency plan, carry out regular head counts and ensures that adequate levels of supervision are provided.

It is the coordinators' responsibility to check the Foreign Office website for information on the location of overseas trips.





Risk Assessment

A risk assessment for the excursion needs to be undertaken by a competent person. The risk assessment should consider such issues as the type of activity, potential weather conditions, modes of travel, the age of students, particular medical needs, the training and competence of the adults who are attending, ratios of students to adults and emergency procedures. The risk assessment process should also cover the contingency plan for the trip. Ideally, an initial reconnaissance visit should help inform the risk assessment process. Be prepared to re assess if the weather changes or an incident occurs.

Excursions and activities near water have historically been linked to fatal accidents. Again, risk assessment is key and should consider the competence of the group leader, supervisory ratios, the risk of pupils falling into the water, underwater hazards, tidal changes, weather forecasts etc.

Centres that provide outdoor activities should be licenced and regularly inspected by the Adventure Activities Licencing Service. This inspection process checks staff competence and emergency procedures amongst other factors. If farm visits are organised the group leader needs to follow procedures to prevent children picking up E Coli infections.



Parental Consent

It's obvious that full details of the trip need to be given to parents and guardians before their consent is requested. However, information about the risks attached to the trip and the steps being taken to mitigate the risks should be provided to parents. Parents should also sign a code of conduct form. Authorisation for emergency medical treatment should be signed by parents before the trip so medical treatment can be given to children if necessary. A pupil should not be allowed to travel without this authorisation being in place. Full details of a pupils health, prescribed medicines, allergies and dietary needs should also be obtained. Medical opinion should be obtained if the group leader has a concern over whether a pupil should be involved in the trip due to their poor health.



Supervisory Arrangements

There is no specific guide as to how many adults are needed on a trip but the adult to pupil ratio has to be reasonable for the type of trip and the number and age of pupil. It is recommended that at least two adults accompany a group of up to 20 pupils. The ratio should be smaller if hazardous activities are planned. One of the adults should be a trained first aider and if the pupil group is mixed gender both a male and female supervisor should be present. Volunteers should be given clear instructions as to their responsibilities and they should be subject to a check by the Disclosure and Barring Service.





School Transport

Many schools have a minibus and if this mode of transport is to be used and driven by a teacher, a specific risk assessment is required. The vehicle must have forward facing seats with a fitted lap belt. Diagonal seat belts are also recommended. Points to consider include:

- Those who wish to drive the minibus need to pass an additional driving test and should have an eyesight test.
- The school should also carry out a driving licence check against the DVLA database.
- Drivers should also receive training on minibus driving.
- Driving times should be managed carefully to avoid fatigue.
- It is recommended that at least one other adult in the vehicle is trained and licenced to drive the minibus.
- It is the drivers responsibility to ensure that children under the height of 135cm or under 12 years old, whichever they reach first, are sitting in the correct type of seat.
- If a school bus is late and a teacher is supervising waiting children outside the school gate, this is an out of school activity and formal procedures to cover these eventualities should be developed.



If an accident does occur...

The school should ensure that group leaders are aware of what steps to take in the event of an accident during the school trip. A formal procedure is recommended and some of the issues to cover include:

- Quickly establish who is injured and arrange for medical treatment and ensure all other pupils are safe.
- Have the pupils medical details to hand so they can be provided to the medical response team.
- Ensure that a teacher on the trip accompanies the pupil to hospital.
- Contact the school, there should be a 24-hour contact number during the trip and notify the police if necessary. Provide the school with as much information as possible including the nature of the injury and what actions are planned. If the trip is overseas, contact the British Embassy is necessary.
- The school will need to notify the parents and their insurance brokers as soon as possible.
- Make a written record of as much information as possible, a template investigation form is recommended. Take photographs of the accident scene and record the contact details of any witnesses. An accident report form may also need to be sent to the Health and Safety Executive.



Summary

School trips are an important part of the educational process and should not be put off through risk management concerns. However, they need to be well planned and schools need to be well organised if trips are to be executed successfully. There needs to be a proportionate focus on the risks involved in the trip and the team involved in organising the trip need to comply with health and safety management requirements in the same way as any other activity carried out in school. The vast majority of school trips run well and in the 5 years up to 2010 the Health and Safety Executive statistics only list two prosecutions of schools regarding accidents on school trips. Avoiding any significant health and safety management lapses will come through good planning, teamwork and organisation, if that approach can be demonstrated, then a school trip has every chance of running successfully without harm to individuals and without causing undue liability exposure.

Resources

<http://www.rospa.com/roadsafety/info/schooltransport.pdf>

<http://www.rospa.com/roadsafety/adviceandinformation/minibussafety/pre-drive-safety-check.aspx>

<http://www.goingoutthere.co.uk/toolkits>

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5097GC/EDUCATION/FIELDTRIPSADEXCURSIONS/JUN2015

