



PLANNING AN OFFSITE VISIT (Guidance Notes for Staff)

1. Introduction

It cannot be over emphasised how critical it is to carry out detailed planning for offsite visits in good time before the event. Both safety and enjoyment are more assured when careful groundwork has been undertaken. Even where an external provider is being engaged to deliver a particular activity, the care with which that organisation has been selected, and the precision with which programmes have been specified in advance, will have a great bearing on the quality of the experience. Organising a safe and successful visit starts with good planning.

2. Aims & Objectives

Aims and educational objectives of the visit should be clearly identified at an early stage. These should be relevant to pupils and the broad curriculum, taking account of age, ability, previous experience and resources available. Clear, appropriate objectives will contribute significantly to the safety and educational outcomes of the visit.

They will ensure:

- Appropriate contribution to the overall aims of the school
- An appropriate structure and discipline for the visit
- The maximum number of pupils
- Choice of environment and activity appropriate to pupils maturity and experience
- Consideration of appropriate training, staffing and resources

Even if the visit has a limited or indirect educational purpose, the leader still has the responsibility to organise the activity to the best of their professional ability. There can be no lowering of standards because it is a 'fun trip'.

3. Preliminary Visit & Research

For all but regular activities visit leaders should consider a preliminary visit. There is no substitute for firsthand, up-to-date information.

A preliminary visit, by the visit leader is highly desirable on both educational and safety grounds for all visits, but in particular for those:

- Visits to be led by less experienced staff
- Visits to unfamiliar terrain or location where the activity is to be staff led
- Visits to involving very young pupils or those with special needs
- Visits to locations where there may be special hazards.

A preliminary visit should seek to:

- Check the appropriateness of the venue to pupils' needs and to the objectives of the visit
- Identify potential hazards
- Check timings (local transport, lengths of walks, tides etc.)
- Establish local contacts and availability of communication (i.e. is there a reliable mobile phone signal)
- Check accommodation, fire-hazard and evacuation (for residential trips)
- Agree in advance the division of supervisory responsibility with Activity Provider

- Ensure appropriate licensing and insurance cover is in place for Activity Provider
- Obtain information on local services (doctor, hospital, telephone, toilets)
- Establish an appropriate emergency action plan
- Provide the basis for the completion of all Risk Assessments

In situations where an advance visit is not possible, every effort should be made to research the relevant information beforehand and on arrival to check that prior assumptions about the area are accurate. Depending on location this check may need programming and staffing.

4. Risk Assessments

In all cases a comprehensive Risk Assessment must be written by the visit leader and ratified by the Headteacher. No visit must take place without the completion of a Risk Assessment.

5. Contingency Planning

It is good practice to have a contingency plan for any activity that could be cancelled or curtailed. This may simply be returning the pupils to base or may involve alternative activities. These should also be risk assessed during the initial planning stage for the visit and staffed appropriately.

Pressure on staff by pupils to stick to the original plan despite unduly hazardous conditions has led to serious incidents in the past and must be resisted. If the group is aware of contingency plans, disappointment (and therefore pressure on staff) will be minimised.

6. Costing & Finance

The financial implications of a visit need to be considered. Visit leaders need to ensure that trips are not prohibitively expensive. Where parents/carers are required to make a financial contribution to a visit, the visit leader should ensure that parents have written information about the costs of the visit and how much they will be charged or asked to contribute. Parents should be given enough time to prepare financially for the visit.

All expenditure must be approved by the Headteacher in writing, and ratified with the Finance Dept. The school should ensure that banking arrangements are in place. Where external providers are involved an agreement/contract must be in place prior to the visit.

7. Insurance & Licensing

Visit leaders should clarify, what insurance cover already exists in order to identify any additional cover that might need to be provided. It is the responsibility of the Directors to ensure that adequate insurance cover exists for activities (this should be arranged between the Headteacher and the Finance Dept).

All external Activity Providers must be appropriately licensed (e.g. licensed by the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority), have completed risk assessments available for inspection and copying, and have adequate insurance cover in place.

8. Staffing

Educational visits involve considerable responsibility on the part of staff and, in the case of residential experiences, impose a duty of care for pupils for 24-hours every day.

The selection of staff and supervision ratio requires careful consideration, taking into account many factors. Visit leaders must ensure that pupils are supervised effectively, requiring them to take account of:

- The nature of the activity (including its duration)
- The location and environment in which the activity is to take place
- The age and gender (including developmental age) of the pupils to be supervised
- The ability of the pupils (including their behavioural, medical, emotional and educational needs)
- Staff competence

9. Selection of Pupils

Visits and residential stays offer valuable educational experiences and should, wherever possible, be made available to all pupils.

It may be necessary for the school to refuse to accept on the visit a pupil whose behaviour is considered a potential danger to themselves or others. However, alternative means of fulfilling the curricular aims of the visit should be sought for such pupils where possible. It is important that we adopt a sensitive and reasoned approach to parents/carers in this eventuality.

10. Special, Medical, Dietary, Support Needs

The school has information regarding any special educational, medical and dietary needs of pupils (visit leaders can ensure parents provide up to date information by asking for a return slip to be completed). Additional safety measures may be needed to support pupils during visits. Arrangements for taking medication and ensuring sufficient supplies for residential visits must be established. Staff must be briefed regarding those with needs, and trained to treat and respond accordingly.

11. First Aid

The extent of first aid arrangements will depend on the visit, and the availability of external first aid or medical assistance. Visit Leaders must ensure first aid cover for all visits. An appropriate first aid kit should be carried. One of the staff should hold an appropriate first aid qualification when required.

12. Clothing & Equipment

Appropriate Clothing, footwear and equipment is needed. A detailed kit list should be sent to parents/carers well before departure when required. For adventure activities, operation in remote areas or in adverse weather conditions these items must be checked for suitability before departure.

In remote locations spare clothing and group emergency equipment appropriate to the nature of the environment must be carried. Protection from excessive exposure to sun is essential (high factor sun creams, hats and long sleeves).

13. Emergency Procedures

Please see the separate emergency procedure guidance.

14. Policy Review

These Guidance Notes were last reviewed October 2022. Next review is September 2024.