

Guidance and Arrangements Beatrix Potter School Trips and Journeys

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Introduction.

Following events that have occurred on school trips the DFES and the health and Safety Executive issued new guidance on School Trips. The circumstances surrounding recent tragedies have been well documented and on the whole have occurred on trips involving extended stays away from schools, rather than day trips. However it was felt appropriate that new guidance was necessary and this school document highlights the essential areas for teachers to consider. In reading them teachers may feel apprehensive, indeed it has made some schools consider ceasing trips altogether. This course of action whilst understandable is perhaps an over reaction. Teachers have always carried out the safety principles in these guidance notes as a matter of course, what is being recommended is that these are formalised to safeguard both teachers and pupils. It will add to the paperwork teachers are required to complete, one cannot say it will not. It will add to the costs in many cases and will deter some teachers from taking trips. However we are now faced with implementing this guidance and will do so as appropriate within our capabilities.

To assist staff all the required documentation is included as masters at the end of this policy. It includes all relevant forms and accounting procedures. For each planned trip it will provide a complete record and can be used again on any subsequent visits to the same venue.

PLANNING VISITS

Whether the visit is to a local park, museum or swimming pool, or includes a residential stay in the UK or abroad, it is essential that formal planning takes place before setting off. This involves considering the dangers and difficulties which may arise and making plans to reduce them. In practice, the head teacher - who is responsible for planning visits - will often delegate the detailed planning to the organiser of the visit or the group leader. Head teachers must satisfy themselves that the person planning the visit is competent to do so and has the necessary relevant experience.

For residential visits at home or abroad, or for potentially hazardous activities the LEA is consulted and will advise the school. The governing body should satisfy itself that visits have been planned effectively and that risks are minimised. In most cases this will relate to journeys over more than one day. Educational visits to museums and historical sites should be properly planned and risks assessed but the governing body will have the responsibility to monitor how these are organised, reviewing how guidance on trips is applied and as necessary amending guidance to take account of changes and developments.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Before any trip is undertaken a risk assessment must be undertaken.

In practice, risk assessments, which employers are legally required to do, are usually carried out by the group leader. An assessment should be completed well before the visit, and should be approved by the head teacher.

A risk assessment for a visit need not be complex but it should be comprehensive. It does not generally require technical formulae or professional health and safety expertise. But specialised information for some visits may be necessary and head teachers should ensure that the person assessing the risks is competent to do so.

A formal assessment of the risks that might be met on a visit should have the aim of preventing the risks or reducing them. Pupils must not be placed in situations which expose them to an unacceptable level of risk. Safety must always be the prime consideration. If the risks cannot be contained then the visit must not take place.

The risk assessment should be based on the following considerations:

- What are the hazards?
- Who might be affected by them?
- What safety measures need to be in place to reduce risks to an acceptable level?
- Can the group leader put the safety measures in place?
- What steps will be taken in an emergency?

The person carrying out the risk assessment should record it and give copies to all teachers/supervisors on the visit, with details of the measures they should take to avoid or reduce the risks. LEAS, head teachers and governing bodies should also be given a copy so that approval, as necessary, can be given with a clear understanding that effective planning has taken place.

Frequent visits to local venues such as swimming pools may not need a risk assessment every time. Nevertheless, it is essential not to become complacent. A generic assessment of the risks of such visits should be made at regular intervals, and careful monitoring should take place.

The group leader and other supervisors should monitor the risks throughout the visit and take appropriate action as necessary.

Before booking a visit the group leader should obtain a written or documentary assurance that providers such as tour operators have themselves assessed the risks and have appropriate safety measures in place.

The group leader should take the following factors into account when assessing the risks:

- the type of visit/activity and the level at which it is being undertaken;
- the location, routes and modes of transport;
- the competence, experience and qualifications of supervisory staff;
- the ratios of teachers and supervisory staff to pupils;
- the group members' age, competence, fitness and temperament and the suitability of the activity;
- the special educational or medical needs of pupils;
- the quality and suitability of available equipment;
- seasonal conditions, weather and timing;
- emergency procedures;
- how to cope when a pupil becomes unable or unwilling to continue;
- the need to monitor the risks throughout the visit.

EXPLORATORY VISITS

An exploratory visit should be made by any teacher who is to lead a group abroad or on a residential visit or who is to instruct or lead the group in an outdoor activity such as trekking in a location that is not familiar to them.

In other cases the group leader should undertake an exploratory visit, wherever that is possible, to:

- ensure at first hand that the venue is suitable to meet the aims and objectives of the school visit;
- obtain names and addresses of other schools who have used the venue;
- obtain advice from the manager;
- assess potential areas and levels of risk;
- ensure that the venue can cater for the needs of the staff and pupils in the group;
- become familiar with the area before taking a group of young people there.

If in the last resort an exploratory visit is not feasible then the group leader will need to consider how to complete an adequate assessment of the risks. A minimum measure would be to obtain specific information by letter from the venue, from other schools who have recently visited it, and from local organisations such as tourist boards.

Many schools will take new groups of pupils to the same location each year. As some factors will change from year to year, it is prudent to re-assess the risks each time - even when the group leader stays the same. It may be useful to evaluate each completed visit and keep a record.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Other factors which should form part of the planning stage include:

the facilities/equipment the group will need to take on the visit;

the facilities/equipment to be provided at the venue;

staff training needs;

the designation of someone to record the details of the visit and to carry accident forms etc;

transport arrangements;

insurance arrangements;

information to the provider;

communication arrangements;

supervision ratios;

contingency measures for enforced change of plan or late return;

information to parents;

preparing pupils;

emergency arrangements;

arrangements for sending pupils home early.

FINANCIAL PLANNING

The group leader should ensure that parents have early written information about the costs of the visit, how much will come from school funds if this is agreed or possible, and how much each parent will be charged or asked to contribute. Parents should be given enough time to prepare financially for the visit. It may be useful to break the costs down.

The head teacher should ensure that banking arrangements are in place to separate the visit's receipts from other school funds and from private accounts.

The head teacher/group leader should reach a pre-agreement with parents on whether any funds left surplus after the visit will be returned to parents or retained for another visit.

CHARGING FOR VISITS

In schools other than independent schools the education provided wholly or mainly during school hours is free. This means that head teachers may not impose a charge on parents for any visit that occurs during school hours. The head teacher may, however, ask for a voluntary contribution.

Parents should be made aware that the contribution is not compulsory, and the children of parents who do not contribute may not be discriminated against. It is permissible to ask parents to contribute more than the minimum amount in order to subsidise those pupils whose parents have not contributed. In the last resort, the visit may have to be cancelled if there are not enough voluntary contributions and the shortfall cannot be made up.

In the forms section of this paper are the required documentation to ensure the finances associated with any trip is suitably accounted for.

FIRST AID

First aid should form part of the risk assessment.

Before undertaking any off-site activities the head teacher or the group leader should assess what level of first aid might be needed. On any kind of visit the group leader should have a working knowledge of first aid and ensure that an adequate first-aid box is taken. For adventurous activities, visits abroad or residential visits it is sensible for at least one of the group's teachers to be a fully-trained first-aider. All adults in the group should know how to contact the emergency services.

The minimum first-aid provision for a visit is:

- suitably stocked first-aid box;
- person appointed to be in charge of first-aid arrangements.

Other considerations when considering first-aid needs should include:

- the numbers in the group and the nature of the activity;
- the likely injuries and how effective first aid would be;
- the distance of the nearest hospital.

SUPERVISION

Staffing ratios for visits are difficult to prescribe as they will vary according to the activity, age, group, location

A general guide for visits to local historical sites and museums or for local walks

1 adult for every 6 pupils under 5

1 adult for every 8 pupils under 8

Above 8 Teacher plus adult per 20 pupils.

For a class of 30 this would suggest Teacher plus 2/3 adults.

Where a high adult pupil ratio is required, it is not always feasible to use school staff alone. Parents/volunteers may be used to supplement the supervision ratio. They should be carefully selected and ideally they should be well known to the school. They should also be police vetted if they will have unsupervised access to children. Quite likely if they toilet children.

It is important to have a high enough ratio of adult supervisors to pupils for any visit.

Group leaders should assess the risks and consider an appropriate safe supervision level for their particular group. There should be one teacher in charge. In addition to the teacher in charge there should be enough supervisors to cope effectively with an emergency. When visits are to remote areas or involve hazardous activities, the risks may be greater and supervision levels should be set accordingly.

Pupils with special educational or medical needs will require particular supervision and this must be catered for. It is not acceptable to prohibit a pupil. However on longer school journeys consideration of what is practicable must be considered.

All adult supervisors, including teachers and parent/volunteer helpers, must understand their roles and responsibilities at all times. It may be helpful to put this in writing. In particular, all supervisors should be aware of any pupils who may require closer supervision, such as those with special needs or those likely to cause trouble. Teachers retain responsibility for the group at all times,

HEAD COUNTS

Whatever the length and nature of the visit, regular head counting of pupils should take place, particularly before leaving any venue. All supervisors should carry a list of all pupils and adults involved in the visit at all times. Pupils, particularly in school years 1 to 3, should be easily identifiable, especially if the visit is to a densely populated area. Brightly coloured caps, T shirts or a school uniform can help identify group members more easily. Pupils should not wear name badges. But some schools find it useful to provide pupils with badges displaying the name of the school and its emergency contact number. The group leader should establish rendezvous points and tell pupils what to do if they become separated from the group.

PLANNING TRANSPORT

The group leader must give careful thought to planning transport.

The main factors to consider include:

- passenger safety;
- the competence and training of the driver to drive the proposed vehicle and whether the driver holds the appropriate valid licence;
- number of driving hours required for the journey and length of the driver's day (including non driving hours);
- capacity and experience of driver to maintain concentration - whether more than one driver is needed to avoid driver fatigue;
- type of journey - will the visit take place locally or will it include long distance driving ie motorways?
- traffic conditions;
- contingency funds and arrangements in case of breakdown/emergency;
- appropriate insurance cover;
- weather;
- journey time and distance;
- stopping points on long journeys for toilet and refreshments;
- supervision.

The employer, usually the LEA or governing body in schools, should satisfy themselves that all travel arrangements, including the hire of private coaches or buses, are suitable for the nature of the visit. In practice head teachers will normally carry out these checks.

The driver is responsible for the vehicle during the visit.

Seat belts: All minibuses and coaches which carry groups of three or more children aged between 3 and 15 years inclusive must be fitted with a seat belt for each child. The seats must face forward and seat restraints must comply with legal requirements. For further information contact the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR).

SUPERVISION ON TRANSPORT

The level of supervision necessary should be considered as part of the risk assessment for the journey. The group leader is responsible for the party at all times including maintaining good discipline.

The driver should not normally be responsible for supervision. Driver supervision may be sufficient if a small number of older children are being taken on a short journey. All group members should be made aware of the position of the emergency door and first aid and anti-fire equipment on transport. The group leader should also be aware of alternative routes or means of travel in the event of delay or cancellation.

Factors that the group leader should consider when planning supervision on transport include: level of supervision that will be necessary on:

double decker buses/coaches - one supervisor on each deck should be appropriate in normal circumstances.

Safety when crossing roads as part of the journey - the group leader should ensure that pupils know how to observe the safety rules set out in the Highway Code and the Green Cross Code. Pedestrian crossings and traffic lights or footbridges should be used to cross roads, whenever possible.

Safety on buses, trains, ferries and boats - the group leader should make clear to pupils how much or little freedom they have to 'roam'. Misbehaviour is a main cause of accidents to children on such means of transport. Appropriate supervision and discipline should be maintained at all times. Pupils should also be made aware of what to do in an emergency and where emergency procedures are displayed.

Safety of pupils whilst waiting at pick-up and drop-off points and when getting on or off transport, particularly when using UK vehicles abroad. Pupils should be made aware of safety rules and expected standards of behaviour,

Safety while on stops or rests during the journey group leaders should plan with the driver sufficient stops at suitable areas to ensure the safety of all group members including the driver. Drivers of buses and coaches must comply with legislation covering maximum periods of driving and minimum rest periods.

Safety of the group in the event of an accident or breakdown - the group should remain under the direct supervision of the group leader or other teachers wherever possible.

Head counts, by the group leader or another delegated teacher or supervisor, should always be carried out when the group is getting off or onto transport.

Responsibility for checking that seat belts are fastened.

Consider whether a visible and easily recognisable article of clothing should be worn in common by pupils.

Pupils should be made aware that they are not allowed access to the driving area at any time.

Group members should be made aware that travel sickness tablets should only be administered to a pupil with previous authorisation from the parents.

HIRING COACHES

The group leader is responsible for ensuring that coaches and buses are hired from a reputable company. Professional operators of buses and coaches are legally required to be licensed. Schools using operators to transport pupils should ensure that the operators have the appropriate public service vehicle (PSVA operators' licence. When booking transport, the group leader should ensure that seat belts are available for pupils. Whilst seat belts must be fitted on coaches which carry groups of children, they are not legally required on buses, Buses where seat belts are not fitted are not normally appropriate for visits involving long journeys.

If any of the group use a wheelchair, the group leader should ensure that transport used has appropriate access and securing facilities. It may be appropriate to use portable ramps.

PRIVATE CARS

Teachers and others who drive pupils in their own car must ensure their passengers' safety, that the vehicle is roadworthy, and that they have appropriate licence and insurance cover for carrying the pupils. Volunteers should be carefully vetted by the school before they are permitted to drive pupils in their car. If necessary, assurances should be requested by the head teacher.

The driver is responsible for making sure that pupils have a seat belt and use it at all times. Vehicles without seat belts should not be used.

Head teachers or group leaders who wish to use parents, volunteers or other pupils to help transport pupils in their own cars, must ensure that they are aware of their legal responsibility for the safety of the pupils in their cars. Parents' agreement should be sought (on the consent form) for their children to be carried in other parents' cars. It is advisable that parents driving pupils are not put in a position where they are alone with a pupil. The group leader should arrange a central dropping point for all pupils rather than individual home drops.

Detailed guidance is available from the Department of Education, this policy is based on this guidance.