

THE ESSENTIAL SCHOOL TRIP GUIDE

Travel Tips

Who would take a school trip? Embarking further than the school gates in loco parentis of groups of young people is an increasingly awesome prospect given the alarm caused by highly publicised disasters and the explosion of paperwork that accompanies such ventures. Despite this, every year, thousands upon thousands of trips (modest and ambitious) take place and return with all concerned fit and well and with a new enthusiasm for one another. "There is no doubt," said one teacher, "that trips are entirely worthwhile - they can have the effect of transforming one's relationship with children. You have a chance to experience each other with the defences down and make contact on a human level that school often precludes."

Recently, the government has been at pains to set out guidelines for such trips in enormous detail and these are often supplemented by additional regulations and directions devised by local authorities and individual schools.

And then there is the invaluable experience of teachers themselves - the tips that can make all the difference - saving you time and grief. What follows are travel tips and advice devised by teaching professionals, experienced in taking students out on school visits.

Experience counts

It is unlikely that a teacher is going to embark on more than one or two journeys a year of any length. Inevitably, this can lead to having to re-invent the wheel - re-discovering forgotten shortcuts and exploring the new regulation panorama that may have developed in the meantime. In some schools the appointment of a staff member with specific responsibilities for overseeing trips and disseminating the latest official advice is proving an ideal means of ensuring all those taking out students have access to up-to-date information. If such a person is not available - then it is a good idea to get the support of a more experienced trip-taker. Sound them out about possible pitfalls and the idiosyncrasies attaching to trips from that particular school.

Do not run before you can walk. It may be policy in your school that you cannot take out a trip without having participated in one organised by another member of staff before hand. If it isn't it should be. Having an apprenticeship in school trips by taking responsibility for a small part of one is clearly a good idea, giving you a true sense of the sometimes awesome amounts of work involved and responsibilities entailed.

Background Information

Take advantage of previews offered by tour operators. As well as being a welcome opportunity for a freebee - such trips can make all the difference in terms of trouble-shooting and ensuring your risk assessments are accurate. In some instances, smaller tour operators (e.g. some WW1 Battlefield tour organisers) will visit schools in order to provide students and parents with a briefing and help you with risk assessments.

Risk assessments are helpful but you cannot cover every contingency." Do not go in the water on your own" may seem a watertight instruction but there is bound to be a student who will feel that does not apply if their hat blows into the waves or down stream.

Value for money

You get what you pay for. If a trip is cheap then it will lack frills and could land you in trouble. Many coach companies are happy to jump on the bandwagon of offering packages to popular

destinations - but the more established specialist providers, while being potentially more costly, will have a wealth of experience and local knowledge to draw on. The educational benefits of cheaper tours in which the driver doubles up as guide may be limited.

Tickets with coach travel included. These can be fine but beware if the coach company does not know your part of the world and you are not in a position to guide them if they get lost. Possibly one of the worst day of this writer's life was negotiating the traffic on a Year 7 theatre outing during Christmas rush hour with a driver from outside London with a coach suffering from with break problems. The play was pretty awful too.

Planning

Always leave yourself a generous allocation of time by setting students deadlines well in advance of the actual ones you must meet.

Do not take money from students encountering you in the corridor or in lesson time. It is always the cheque thrown at you, not in an envelope and with none of the paperwork attached that goes missing - costing you hours of heartache and fruitless searching. If you have specific set times to accept cash or cheques then you administer things better and ensure the procedures are fair.

Number deposit envelopes according to when they are received so that there can be no question of favoritism when it comes to allocating places.

Alternatively, take all the pain away from this process by suggesting your school uses a product like IdentiTrip from Pinecone Associates Ltd. Workforce remodeling says you as a teacher should no longer perform this task. The IdentiTrip system will still give you the control you need, reports are available at the touch of a button to show you all the information related to who has paid and who hasn't. Even who has provided the correct documents.

Give yourself a bit of room for maneuver - if a student has forgotten some part of the paper work explain that they have been allocated a number and will not lose their place in the queue as long as the missing material is submitted before a further deadline.

With media-conscious heads, think about the press coverage that might arise from any journey you are planning. It may seem cynical- but you may well have "to hard sell" your trip to senior management in order to get their initial approval and a generous allocation of staff. The possibility of publicity may swing it for you.

Finance

The handling of trip payments is fraught with danger. Using a package such as IdentiTrip from Pinecone Associates Ltd will solve the many issues related to trip payments. It will also provide an audit trail, protecting all parties from mistakes and future checks.

Leave yourself a slush fund. It may sound unethical but it can be extremely useful if you round up some of the sums you expect from students. You will not be talking huge sums of money - but a small fund upon which to draw in an emergency could be invaluable. And if there's no need for it, you can use it to buy a treat for everyone on the boat home. O course - you will still need receipts.

Think about tips. Drivers will need tipping and there may be others you need to reward. Take this into account when planning your trip's budget.

Emergencies

Always give students meeting places in case they become detached from the main group. It is a good idea to ask students to wear something bright so that they are easily spotted in crowded places.

Avoid making students wear anything that might put them at risk such as name badges - though giving them something with the name and telephone number of their school or hotel can be a good idea.

Think about taking a first aid course. It could be invaluable.

Takes stocks of all the things you might assume students will bring such as sun block and insect repellent.

Check that the school mobile phone (or your phone) is charged. Also double check that the First Aid Kit is equipped.

If going abroad, find out where the nearest British Embassy or consulate is and how to contact them in an emergency.

Find out if the school or council has a form of words that you are to use in an emergency. This may seem alarmist but should there be an accident you may need a statement for the press that will put things on "hold" before the situation clarifies. And if you have had a shock the legal implications of anything you say is not something you will want to be thinking about.

Discipline

Try to ban mobile telephones from trips if at all possible. Constant ringing home is bound to stop some members of longer trips getting used to being away from home. And remember it is very easy for a situation to get out of hand if a parent or guardian receives a garbled message from an unhappy child who might otherwise have sorted things out for themselves. Ration calls home generally and ensure that if someone is feeling sad that they can call home in the company of a friend who can cheer them up afterwards.

Responsibility

Be absolutely clear where your responsibilities began and where it ends. If you are relying on specialist staff at a sports centre or outdoor activity centre - then the instructors will be insured to take on your students for the duration of any official training, but after that it's back to you. A teacher being offered the chance of having water sports instructors walk students back to the camp site would be wise not to take up the offer in case anything goes wrong.

Introduce a Leisure and Tourism GNVQ at your school. The current course requires students to organise a trip and that might be a great way of relieving yourself of some of the burden and fulfilling a student's course obligations at the same time.

Think interdisciplinary. Are there ways in which students' interest and commitment can be maintained by linking with any other faculties? For example are there any historical, geographic or linguistic tie-ins that can be highlighted by your colleagues and which might enrich members enjoyment of where they are going or increase their self-reliance?

Other Schools

Do not rely on other teachers from other schools to be responsible for your students. On one Russian trip to the Urals, a teacher explained how a local teacher agreed to follow up the rear so as to catch stragglers taking part in cross-country skiing. This she singularly failed to do - prompting a frantic search and the pathetic sight of several bedraggled figures emerging from the forest some time after the rest of the group had returned. Happily they took the right direction. It was 100s of kilometres in every other direction to the nearest centres of population.

Hell can be other children from other schools. Be prepared to have to chase up other teachers not supervising their students or expecting standards of behaviour that you demand. This is a tough one - but a respectful approach to the staff in question will produce results (one hopes).

Post-visit

Make time for a debrief and an occasion for a reunion both for parents and siblings. A slide show in an assembly is a great way of building numbers for next time - that is, if you want a next time.

Weblinks

Managing Your Trips Payments

www.pineconeonline.com

A package to make everyone's life easier with regards to trip payments from pupils and trip expenditure

Risk Assessment

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg218.pdf>

A guide to risk assessment requirements

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.pdf>

Five steps to risk assessment

<http://www.aala.org.uk>

Information about adventure activity providers covered by the Adventure Activities Licensing Scheme

www.baha.org.uk

The British Activity Holiday Association

www.asa-awards.co.uk

Get Safe for Summer - Amateur Swimming Association

<http://www.rospa.com/CMS/>

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents

http://www.rospa.com/roadsafety/info/minibus_code.pdf

Minibus Safety: A Code of Practice - RoSPA and others 2002

<http://www.rgs.org/templ.php?page=5expe>

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)'s Expedition Advisory Centre provides advice, information and training to anyone planning an overseas expedition

www.malcol.org/isaaa/

The Independent Schools' Adventure Activities Association (ISAAA) offers help, support and technical advice to any Independent School

<http://www.theaward.org/>

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award has its own clear structure, procedures and guidelines

http://www.wow4water.net/admin/uploaded/visitor_planning_sheet.pdf

British Waterways canal visit checklist

<http://www.suzylampugh.org/home/index.shtml>

The Suzy Lampugh Trust has produced a range of guidance on personal safety, including booklets, videos and training courses

<http://www.local-transport.dft.gov.uk/schooltravel/>

Government guidelines for travelling with school groups

Health and safety

http://www.dfes.gov.uk/h_s_ev/index.shtml

Good practice guide

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/safetveducationguidance>

Government safety education guidance leaflet

New legislation

http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/Management/guidance_and_legislation/visits/

First aid and life saving

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/firstaid>

<http://www.lifesavers.org.uk/>

Students with special needs

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/medical>

Travel information

www.tfl.gov.uk/schoolparty

Transport for London provides free transport for school groups on the underground, buses, Thameslink and the Docklands Light Railway.

<http://www.gobycoach.com/>

<http://www.thetrainline.com/>

<http://www.scotrail.co.uk/>

<http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/>

<http://www.infotransport.co.uk/>

The weather

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/>

<http://www.met-office.gov.uk/>