

# School Trips: Making Them Work Well for Everyone

## Why inclusion?

The purpose of this guidance is to consider how teachers can make school trips a beneficial experience for all pupils. This is not a guide to equality legislation, but because that legislation stands behind good practice, a discussion of salient points is helpful.

‘Inclusion is an ongoing process to enhance the participation of all children in the life and learning of the school, while also acknowledging and addressing issues that may create barriers to participation’<sup>1</sup>. The kinds of adjustments teachers make in order to respond to the needs of individual young people will often benefit other pupils<sup>2</sup>. For example, the things you can do to help a child who is looked after be less anxious about a trip will probably benefit many others. By providing learning opportunities that are available to everybody, we demonstrate our commitment to promoting equality and social justice.

## Equality legislation

Equality legislation upholds the rights of young people with protected characteristics including: disability, race, religion etc. Young people who have conditions such as ADHD or autism, for example, have protected characteristics. There is, however, no need for a young person to have a medically diagnosed cause for his or her impairment<sup>3</sup>.

The legal principle is that: ‘It is unlawful for a school to discriminate against a pupil in relation to access to any benefit, facility or service’<sup>3</sup>. This legislation covers all school activities, including school trips. Schools may also be acting unlawfully if they discriminate based on something arising from a child’s disability. For example, if they refuse a young person access to a school trip based on behaviour arising from their disability. Schools should make reasonable adjustments to overcome barriers to participation. Discrimination, even if it is an indirect consequence of the application of a policy or procedure, may be unlawful. For example, having a behaviour policy that results in a higher proportion of children with a protected characteristic not accessing school trips could be interpreted as unlawful discrimination. Teachers should therefore think very carefully about using trips as a reward for good behaviour, when some children, because of their protected characteristic, find it more difficult to sustain good behaviour.

‘Forward planning will help schools in arranging trips in which all pupils are able to participate. Offering a range of different trips and activities may also help the school to ensure that no pupils are excluded from taking part’<sup>3</sup>.

## Planning for success: key principles

- Relationships with adults will help children get the most out of trips.
- Prepare for the trip: build knowledge and skills that will encourage young people to interact with their environment.
- Think about the young person and evaluate where and when they might be anxious or uncomfortable and need our support.
- Anticipate times when young people could be more vulnerable and increase adult presence.

## Case study

David was in P7 and living in a children's house. He has ADHD. His teacher was concerned that David's behaviour would disrupt the class' week-long trip to a residential activity centre. The head teacher made arrangements so that David could attend for three days only.

As the children waited for the bus, many with their parents, David stood alone, wondering who would sit next to him.

The first activity at the centre was a scavenger hunt. David ran around trying to solve the clues, but about half way through he tore up his piece of paper and wandered away from the group. Similarly, during free time, David wandered between groups of children. The adults intervened only when he threw a stone at another child.

David was assigned a room with two 'sensible' boys from his class, but when night came he struggled to go to sleep. One of the classroom assistants read to David until he was more settled.

The next morning, David's group were first to go gorge walking. The instructor quickly established a rapport with the children. They didn't have to wait around long before they were in the water. David seemed to thrive in being able to participate in an activity that was physically challenging. The activity was also structured in such a way that he listened and followed the instructions.

When the head teacher arrived on day three to drive him home, David was disappointed but also eager to tell his key worker in the children's house about the gorge walking. The trip was a success, but it could have worked better.

## Lessons from the case study

Reasonable adjustments: The head teacher's decision to allow one of the classroom assistants to attend was an example of a reasonable adjustment. It minimized the disadvantage he faced due to his disability, without significantly diminishing the benefit of the residential experience for his classmates. Limiting his stay to three days out of the week was a compromise, but would probably not meet the criteria for a reasonable adjustment.

Importance of relationships: The classroom assistant used her relationship to help David at a time when he was more vulnerable. Adults need to think of a trip as an opportunity to build relationships with young people. Eating at the same table, playing games during free time, looking out for young people who are on their own are some of the ways that all children can benefit from adults who are intentional about building relationships. Children like David may benefit even more from the watchful presence and help of an adult leader.

Putting yourself in their shoes: David's teacher failed to anticipate how anxious he and probably some of the other pupils would be about the travel arrangements to the activity centre. Simple adjustments, like having assigned seating in the bus, can go a long way to relieving some of the anxiety young people have about trips.

Activities and structure: David responded well to the way the gorge walking was led. He listened, followed instructions and didn't engage in risk-taking behaviours. Good leadership helps children learn quickly what they need in order to be safe and gets them engaged without expecting them to wait too long. When there are less-structured times, adults needed to be more aware of him and ready to help him engage in an activity.

Corporate parents have a duty to provide young people who are looked after with opportunities to participate in activities designed to promote their wellbeing<sup>4</sup>. David returned to the children's house eager to tell his key worker about the things he had enjoyed. Success wasn't just about the thrill of jumping into a gorge full of water, or trying things that were new, it was about people making sure that David was included: thinking about what he needed, taking the time to listen to him, and showing him that difficulties and challenges can be overcome. The value of a trip is in the way it shows how much we value all our pupils and include those who are more vulnerable.

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