

Educational Tours and Out of School Group Activities

Policy and Guidelines

Rationale

The organisation of out of school group activities has long been an integral part of school life. Such activities may include attendance at sporting events, visits to appropriate exhibitions, conferences, festivals etc., longer-term educational tours either in Ireland or abroad. These events serve to significantly enrich both the academic curriculum as taught in school and the social and personal development of those students participating in them. The organisation, particularly of school tours, requires a significant investment of staff time and energy. There are considerable implications in relation to the health and safety of pupils, the application of the school's Code of Behaviour in an out-of-school context, and the loss of normal teaching time both for the participating pupils and those pupils whose teaching is disrupted due to the absence of the participating teachers.

In circular letter M20/04 the Department of Education and Science has devolved to Boards of Management the authorisation to grant approval for educational tours by school groups both inside and outside the State subject to a number of criteria which are set out in this circular letter. It is recommended that all Boards of Management should ensure that a clear policy statement on these activities is prepared for the guidance of staff, pupils and parents.

In preparing such a policy statement it is recommended that the following issues be addressed:

1. Proposals for the operation of school tours.

A clear mechanism should be agreed by which teaching staff can put forward proposals for the operation of school tours. There should be an agreed length of time between the submission of a proposal and the starting date of the proposed tour. In this latter regard it is preferable that, insofar as possible, a full schedule of the event is submitted at the start of the school year or within a reasonable timeframe to facilitate consultation and approval, and where approval is given adequate preparation and communication with relevant parties (School Management, Parents, Students, Board).

2. The approval of proposals.

The approval of proposals is a matter for the Board of Management subject to the recommendation of the Principal and appropriate senior management staff. In granting approval consideration should be given to:

- Conformity with the criteria in circular letter M20/04.
- The number of other proposed events to take place during the course of the year.
- The timing of the event and its effect on other school activities.
- It's implications for the normal teaching routine of the school.
- The suitability of travel and accommodation arrangements.

3. The Tour Leader.

It is recommended that one teacher be nominated as the leader of the tour who will be expected to ensure that it is conducted in accordance with agreed standards.

4. Pupil/Teacher ratio.

The ratio of pupils to teachers should be in accordance with criteria agreed by the Board of Management in advance and as advised by the relevant guidelines issued through the DES and the Managerial Body for this school, JMB.

This pupil/teacher ratio might be expected to vary in certain circumstances:

- The age and the maturity of the pupil involved.
- The availability of alternative adult supervision e.g. parents, Special Needs Assistants.
- The length of the tour.
- The activities to be engaged in.

5. Costs and accountability for Finances.

The overall cost of a school tour should be agreed in advance and should be such as to take into account the ability of pupils and their parents to pay. The income and expenditure of funds associated with the tour should conform fully to the accounting practices of the school. A full account of income and expenditure should be reported to the Principal and to the school Accountant. **All payments must be made directly to the Tour Operator.**

6. Rules of Behaviour during the School Tour.

The code of behaviour to be observed by pupils during the course of the school tour is that which applies in school and should be agreed and made known to pupils, parents and teachers in advance. Every effort should be made to ensure that the rules of behaviour are positive and consistent with the school's Code of Behaviour, the educational objectives of the school tour and with the age and level of maturity of the participating students.

They should deal explicitly with a number of issues:

- The use or abuse of tobacco, alcohol, drugs or other substances covered in the *House rules* and or the Code of Behaviour.
- The use of Mobile Devices
- The full participation by pupils in the activities of the tour.
- Behaviour during leisure time if and when pupils are not under the direct supervision of teachers.
- Travelling on private or on public transport.
- Respect for and compliance with local customs and laws, particularly when travelling abroad.
- Behaviour of pupils in hotels and other overnight accommodation.

7. Contact Information.

The Tour Leader must ensure that complete contact information is left available in the school during the tour for use in the event of an emergency. This should include:

- A listing of all of those taking part together with home contact details.
- The itinerary to be followed and contact details.
- A contact telephone number for the Tour Leader.

8. Professional Responsibilities of Staff

A statement of the professional responsibilities and duties of staff for the duration of the tour should be agreed. All staff are required to be cognisant of their obligations under the Professional Code of Conduct for Teachers as set out by the Teaching Council of Ireland.

9. Insurance and Indemnity.

The tour leader must ensure that all pupils are adequately insured and that the tour operator provides a copy of their insurance cover to the school.

Where, however, the tour is involved in an activity of a specialist nature, such as an outdoor Education Centre that requires supervision by trained professionals, the Board of Management may not rely entirely on the State Indemnity for insurance purposes.

In considering applications/requests from teachers to bring students on an outdoor activities type tour e.g. Transition Year Group for orienteering, canoeing, hill walking etc. activities the Board should ensure:

1. Written applications giving full details of the proposed tour are submitted to School Management.
2. The school receives a copy of the Outdoor Activity/Pursuits Centre Public Liability insurance certificate and notes any limitations stated in the policy.
3. The school receives details of the professional qualifications/training of the Outdoor Activity/Pursuits Centre staff who will be leading/guiding the students in the specialist outdoor activities.
4. Parents/guardians should be encouraged to effect Personal Accident Insurance cover for their students. The school insurance company should also be contacted to ensure the students are covered for these specialist outdoor activities under the Personal Accident policy.
5. The State Indemnity still applies to the teachers who accompany the students to the Outdoor Activity/Pursuits Centre in the performance of their normal supervisory and pastoral role.
6. Where doubts remain then the Board of Management/School Management should seek and acquire appropriate insurance protection for the Board of Management, teachers and for students.
7. Boards of Management/School Management should not approve the release of teachers to supervise and or the attendance of students on these specialist tours to Outdoor Activity/Pursuits Centres unless all aspects of supervision, training and insurance are clarified with all interests and noted.

In the case of school tours outside the island of Ireland the Board of Management should not rely on the State Indemnity for insurance purposes. Appropriate travel insurance should be taken out to cover those embarking on the tour.

10. Reporting back to Principal and Board of Management.

Arrangements should be made for a summary report from the Director of a school tour to the Principal and the Board of Management outlining:

- The achievements of the tour.
- A financial statement.
- Any difficulties or problems which arose during the course of the tour.

11. Notice to Parents.

Provision should be made to ensure that parents of pupils who might participate in a tour are given adequate notice outlining:

- The objectives of the tour.
- The itinerary and duration of the tour.
- The costs involved and method of payment.
- The rules of behaviour to be observed.
- Information regarding insurance and indemnity.

Parents should be made aware of their duty to inform the school of any relevant Health or Safety issues which might affect their children.

- The signed permission of parents is an essential pre-requisite for the participation of their children in any school tour.
- The signed agreement of parents to the school's Code of Behaviour in all its facets and the school Rules is a prerequisite for the participation of their children on any school tour or outing.

12. Meeting deadlines.

Parents should be informed of the deadlines in place regarding return of permission slips and payment. The onus falls on students and parents to return the necessary forms and documentation and process payment by the stated deadlines to guarantee participation on the tour/exchange.

This policy should be brought to the attention of all parents

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