

there and **back** again



Planning a school trip but paralysed by the 'what ifs'?
With proper planning and confident leadership, says **John Trant**,
your away days can be the educational highlights your class deserves...

What makes a successful school trip? You can start by asking yourself some questions about your own schooling: do you remember anything about the daily classes you studied at school, or even your teachers' names? Maybe not – I certainly have trouble, but I can remember key details and events from nearly every school trip I attended. Why? Well they stand out from the crowd of everyday lessons; each one was a special 'event'.

The problem with school trips now, however, is that they attract so many unfounded scare stories: reports of disasters in the newspapers or staffroom naysayers' anecdotes of outrageously lengthy risk assessments and even litigation.

Depressing stuff! But it's really not all that bad. Risk assessments and planning procedures are really excellent opportunities to examine one's practice and work collaboratively with colleagues. It's all about providing successful and safe learning opportunities for your pupils beyond the confines of your classroom.

At Thorn Grove Primary School in Bishop's Stortford where I'm a local authority governor, they are developing a 'Creative Curriculum', where learning across the curriculum can develop from the same inspirational stimulus material in a project format. A carefully planned trip to a museum or gallery exhibit can act as the springboard to projects in all subjects depending

on how teachers use the visit and work with each other. A successful trip is used afterwards and never forgotten.

Breakdown recovery

Whilst many scare stories are unfounded, problems can, of course, arise. The following case study, adapted from *The Essential Guide to School Trips* (Pearson Education, 2010), demonstrates how staff can take control of challenging situations beyond the school gates.

Ingrid's story

"Our year 4 trip to the Tower of London had gone really well – until the coach broke down on

Making the right call

TAKING CONTROL IN CHALLENGING CIRCUMSTANCES IS DIFFICULT BUT NOT IMPOSSIBLE...

Knowing when to take over in a difficult situation is tricky. We assume that someone who does something for a living, like driving a coach or instructing on a climbing wall, knows their stuff. But what if you're not happy with their work? How do you step in and at what point?

It's difficult to judge, particularly if you don't have any expertise in what's going on. Could you rely on your instincts

and make a decision? The simplest way to think about any situation like Ingrid's is to ask the following questions:

- Is the current situation safe, acceptable and beneficial to the children?
- Could it be improved?
- Can I improve it by intervening?

If, after some thought, you can answer no, yes and yes, then go ahead and make a change. If you don't feel confident enough to do it alone, get together with a colleague and work as a team.

Never be afraid to politely ask someone to change what they're doing if you're not happy with the service your pupils are receiving.

the motorway on the way home. The driver pulled over and we stopped by a steep bank. The driver got out, phoned his depot and then told us we'd have to wait for a spare coach to come and pick us up. The best we could do was to sit tight until it turned up."

Is that the best he could do? It doesn't sound very helpful, and how has he taken the safety of his passengers into consideration? Is it the best idea to sit tight at the side of the motorway as heavy goods vehicles thunder past in the inside lane?

"We weren't happy and didn't know how long it might take to get a replacement bus. We weren't keen on sitting tight because we'd always been told to leave a car and climb the banking to get away from the vehicle in case it was hit. The driver didn't seem to know and was being difficult about the timings. It was difficult for him to be precise so we kind of understood, but it still wasn't good enough."

Ingrid doesn't feel confident about what to do, but she knows that the current arrangement isn't right. What are her options? Does she:

- Phone the school and tell someone to phone the parents to let them know they'll be late, accept that the driver knows best and sit down and wait?

- Assess the risks and form a plan that she thinks is better, phone the school to explain what she's going to do and then get them to phone parents?
- Or is there a third option?

"I felt unsure of what to do – we knew the replacement coach had a long way to go and we didn't fancy sitting in the coach. We couldn't decide whether it was safer to stay put or get the kids out and take control ourselves. When we did, the driver finally became useful and helped us marshal the kids off – we formed a staff tunnel up the bank, and they climbed over the fence into a farmer's field at the top."

Ingrid and her team show good command and control skills here after deciding to take charge. The tunnel idea is great thinking as it offers excellent control in a dangerous environment and reassurance to the children. Getting the safe side of the fence was a good idea too because it allows the teachers to feel more relaxed about their control of the group.

"Meanwhile Jennifer went to phone the police. We thought we should let them know that we had 29 kids at the side of the road! They arrived 20 minutes later and the two highway officers were great – they had blankets for the kids and made sure we were OK. Knowing that the kids were at a safe distance and seeing the flashing lights made me feel better."

Having established leadership of the situation, Ingrid's confidence has returned and she feels more in control – the children are all in one place and away from a hazard that she assessed and controlled in an appropriate manner. She followed her instinct, supporting it with knowledge and good judgement. Getting professional help was a master stroke – she could easily have waited while everyone got cold and miserable.

Ingrid's story ends well: the replacement coach turned up and everyone got home safe. While breaking down is a mere inconvenience for most motorists, as Ingrid's short story demonstrates it presents a much bigger challenge when you have lots of other people's children to care for.



Special offer!

Visit www.pearson-books.com/suboffer to get 20% off *The Essential Guide to Successful School Trips...*

Bridging the gap between legislation and good practice, *The Essential Guide to Successful School Trips* will support you in leading learning outside the classroom.

As well as discussing the ins-and-outs of how to run successful school trips, the book champions such outings as opportunities for teachers to learn too by picking-up important leadership skills that can boost their CPD profiles or by developing subject knowledge in partnership with the kids. Look no further for expert advice on making school trips a powerful learning and teaching experience.

