



# School Excursions

## Information for Parents & Carers

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## **Introduction from the Head Teacher**

School trips enrich learning and expand our young people's experiences, increasing their self-confidence, self-esteem, and resilience, whilst broadening their knowledge base and developing interpersonal skills.

Much of this booklet focuses on residential trips to UK and overseas destinations, but some of the content will apply equally to field trips and day visits.

Over the past few years there have been several unexpected factors in planning for and going on school trips for example: threat of terrorist activity, natural disasters and pandemics. We are committed to continuing to offer trips to pupils during these times of increased threat levels. This means that we spend more time evaluating and managing risk. Despite that, there will always be a chance that a trip has to be cancelled, sometimes at short notice, because of such factors.

While the chances of future trips having to cancel remains small, it is important that parents and carers are aware of the risks involved.

Trips are provided by organisations who have completed the approved provider application and been approved as providers. These organisations have Terms and Conditions for the booking of a trip and Aberdeenshire Council schools facilitate the payment of the trip only.

## **Insurance**

### **Aberdeenshire Council**

Aberdeenshire Council have in place a contingent School Excursion Insurance Policy, whereby both pupils and teachers are covered for offsite activities / trips both within the UK and abroad (offsite meaning off the school premises). The policy covers medical expenses, loss of baggage, cancellation (by the provider, not attendees), curtailment and change of itinerary (along with other sundry benefits) etc. for worldwide trips and adventurous activities (including winter sports but excluding ski racing), subject to the policy terms and conditions.

The policy covers Medical expenses and Personal Accident cover, along with other items, a copy of the School Journey Insurance Summary is available from the Trip Leader or the School on request. If personal items such as jewellery, phones/tablets, watches etc. are taken on a school trip then these are taken at an individual's own risk and are not covered under the policy, unless damage or loss is caused by an Aberdeenshire Council employee. Should a parent or carer want such items to be covered then this would need to be arranged by parents/carers independently of the school.

In addition to this policy, Aberdeenshire Council also holds Public Liability insurance cover for any injury or loss incurred by individuals due to the negligence of the Council or its employees (including volunteers).

### **Personal Insurance**

It is for parents and carers to decide whether to purchase insurance which covers their child's personal items whilst on a school trip and/or insurance or which provides cancellation cover.

Aberdeenshire Council, under Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) guidelines, cannot provide advice to parents or pupils on the types of insurance to purchase.

Please note that if the cost of a trip exceeds the sum insured under Aberdeenshire Council's policy, the risk of any loss(es) will sit with parents and carers.

Aberdeenshire Council insurance limit is £50,000 if a trip is cancelled, curtailed, re-arranged or replaced. Therefore, as an example, if the cost of a trip for the total party is £100,000 then only £50,000 is covered by the Council's insurance.

Please note that Aberdeenshire Council's insurance policy does not cover the cancellation of a school trip due to a pre-existing circumstance (transport failure, strike, natural catastrophe) or due to disinclination to travel (where the parent/carers or school pupil decides to cancel). The risk of any loss(es) in these circumstances will lie with parents and carers.

## **Planning for a Trip**

Most school trips have reasonably long lead-in times during which the Trip Leader and accompanying staff get to know the pupils attending and involve the pupils in planning and deciding how to get the most out of the trip. Parents/carers should encourage their child(ren) to get involved in any planning meetings/activities.

### **Consent**

Parents/carers will receive a letter outlining the trip arrangements, along with a Consent Form asking for consent and details of medical conditions/ medication etc. Parents/carers should note that pupils for whom a signed consent form has not been received will not be able to travel.

### **Importance of declaring medical conditions**

It is essential that all known physical and / or mental health medical conditions are declared to the school when a trip is being booked, as it may invalidate any insurance held if a pupil is known to have a condition prior to travel that gives rise to a loss.

This impacts on the safety of everyone on the trip (both staff and pupils) as emergency plans may need to be put in place in the event of an incident. Where an incident takes place on an international trip, any cover for medical expenses may not extend to any medical physical and mental health conditions that have not been disclosed.

### **Information Sharing**

For residential trips, the trip leader will normally organise at least one information event whether in-person or virtually, where parents/carers can be briefed on the trip, advised about any particular equipment/clothing required and be given opportunities to ask questions. The number of information events will depend on the trip destination and the activities involved.

### **Paying for a Trip**

To allow budgeting for trips, those including overnight stays can usually be paid for in instalments in the run up to the trip. Normal practice is for a deposit to be paid, followed by several instalments, or full payment if this is preferred. Where a pupil attending a trip would result in hardship, application can be made for financial assistance towards the cost of the trip. Enquiries regarding this can be made through the school.

At the end of a trip, any remaining funds over £5 will be refunded back to parents/carers, using the payee identified on the Consent Form. Sums under £5 will be transferred to the School Fund to be used for the benefit of the whole school.

## **Risk Assessment**

All excursions are organised in line with Aberdeenshire Council's '*Procedures for all Off Site Excursions*', which is underpinned by the Scottish Government's framework '*Going Out There*'. This guidance embraces the principles of sensible risk management.

A written risk assessment covering all aspects of the trip, including the response to unexpected events, is carried out by the trip leader in consultation with the other staff and pupils involved. Specialist advice is sought as required for higher risk destinations and activities. The risk assessment is proportionate to the activities and as comprehensive as is necessary for the excursion activities and participants. Parents/carers should ensure that they give up-to-date medical information on the consent form to ensure that the risk assessment is properly informed. The written risk assessment is augmented by Dynamic Risk Assessment, which is continuous throughout the excursion.

Ratios of staff to pupils on excursions is in line with Guidance within '*Procedures for All Off Site Excursions*' with at least 50% of staff being school employees and ratio levels being commensurate with the age of the pupils and the type of excursion and activities.

## **Cancellation**

### **Change of Personal Circumstances**

Should a situation arise which raises a need to cancel a trip, contact should be made with the school immediately to discuss the impact of the decision.

Any request from a parent/carer for a refund will be considered in line with the provider's terms and conditions. Refunds may not be permitted at all. If a refund is permitted under the T&Cs, parents/carers should note that it may be less than has been paid to the provider as there are likely to be cancellation charges (dependent upon the number of days / weeks / months prior to departure).

Parents / carers should satisfy themselves that they have sufficient insurance coverage should circumstances change and their pupil is no longer able to attend a trip.

## **Guidance for parents and carers: In summary**

Schools are committed to working in partnership with parents and carers. This summary outlines some of the key responsibilities of the local authority, school staff who are planning the trip and parents and carers.

### **Parent/Carer Responsibilities:**

- From the onset of any booking, parents/carers are encouraged to ensure appropriate insurance cover is in place to meet the needs of their children. This is particularly important for trips outside the UK. Aberdeenshire Council is unable to provide insurance advice.
- School-led excursions will only be permitted to go ahead if a risk assessment indicates the trip to be a low risk. However, it is not possible to remove all risk from a trip. Parents and carers need to be aware of this when agreeing for pupils to take part in the trip.
- Many providers have amended cancellation policies in light of Covid-19 which may make recovery of paid-for activities more difficult. Parents and carers should pay careful attention to terms and conditions at the time of booking.

### **School Responsibilities:**

- School leadership teams will ensure a risk assessment is carried out as part of planning any offsite excursion. The risk level is kept under review both before and during the excursion.
- If the risk level rises above low, the trip may have to be rearranged, to reduce the risk level back to low , or be cancelled.
- There are many reasons why excursions may have to be cancelled, such as Covid-19, weather, terrorist threat, political instability, natural disaster or ill-health within the group. The Head Teacher will make the decision on whether an excursion can go ahead.
- When any trip is cancelled, it cannot be guaranteed that the cost of the trip will be refunded.
- Schools will ensure parents and carers are provided with a clear outline of what trips involve.

### **Local Authority Support:**

- Schools will be guided by Aberdeenshire Council's legal and financial specialists, as required.
- The local authority cannot assume responsibility for the risks attached to any booking and will not provide any guarantee that the cost of the trip will be refunded in the event of cancellation.
- Aberdeenshire Council has contingent insurance in place for offsite excursions but disinclination to travel is not covered. Please refer to the Policy details, which are available from your child's school, for full information.

Fig.1

## Decision Making Process – Incident or Threat of Incident Affecting School Trip

