

Having a great trip

Teacher and education advice guide author *Hazel Bennett* presents the case for school trips as an invaluable aid to learning



ILLUSTRATION: PHE WRIGGLESWORTH

“I’m not doing any more school trips! The paperwork puts me right off.” Or “I’m not doing any more school trips. My union has advised against it.” Both of these comments fill me with dismay.

For many years I was a teacher in Inner London schools and found the theatres, cathedrals, museums and places of historical interest to be wonderful venues for school trips and bases for exciting and interesting projects.

Some of the best pieces of report writing that pupils have ever given me were written after a great day out. Walking around the Tower of London and hearing about the people who lived and died there stimulated my pupils to go to the history section of the school library for weeks after the trip.

Watching a theatre production of *A Christmas carol* had my pupils reading abridged versions of the novel, and photographs of the view from the top of The Monument and St Paul’s Cathedral resulted in delightful collages made by the whole class.

Books and films can never give pupils an insight into the ways of life like the hands-on activities at historical sites such as the Chiltern Open Air Museum, Butser Ancient Farm and Blists Hill Victorian Town.



Hazel Bennett

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Combined cadet forces offer teenagers opportunities to experience healthy activities like camping, canoeing and skiing. This provides them with goals that give them a buzz and prevent them from looking for excitement in socially unacceptable ways.

I have never doubted that the best learning environments are outside of the school. The quality of writing always shoots up after an enjoyable visit.

I rarely found behaviour to be a problem on trips because the pupils enjoyed the experience so much that they behaved better and it built up a positive relationship. One teacher I know spent many years regularly taking pupils hiking in the mountains for their Duke of Edinburgh Award and reaped the benefit through their increased enthusiasm for school.

It would be sad if school trips stopped because the accompanying risk-assessment paperwork deters teachers. Unfortunately, paperwork is unavoidable and, although it irritates me because I don’t feel it reduces accidents, it has to be done to protect teachers in case the worst happens. You can reduce the work by keeping photocopies of risk assessments to make it easier to fill them out the next time a trip is planned.

Some unions advise teachers against school trips because they can be sued if a pupil has an accident, due to negligence. There have been a few well-publicised cases where children have died on trips and, although nobody would dispute the tragedy of the situation, it must be remembered that of the vast number of pupils who benefit from trips each year, the instances of death are a minute fraction of 1%.

Naturally, teachers need to go through the process of assessing each risk carefully, to show that they are taking all steps to keep the pupils safe. This concentrates the mind on safety and has the added advantage that teachers have a strong defence should they need it.

Taking extra adults is one way to reduce the chance of accidents. Some schools keep registers of reliable parents who have been cleared by the Criminal Records Bureau.

If everyone takes the attitude that we must not do anything which has the potential to end in an accident, then we end up with a situation where no one does anything beyond class lessons, and education becomes bland and passive.

Teachers are usually confident people, enthusiastic about their work and eager to enhance the quality of their lessons. Let’s not be deterred by the doom and gloom mob. Let’s make education an interesting and stimulating experience. ■

ATL is a strong advocate of school trips and offers guidance in the publication *Taking students off site*, available from www.atl.org.uk/publications-and-resources/education-publications/taking-students-off-site.asp.