

OUT OF THIS WORLD

Lost consent forms, undeclared travel sickness, and a waste of precious teaching time – if that broadly sums up your view of school trips, then you're depriving yourself of an incredibly powerful teaching tool, argues **Amy Nathan...**

How many times have you or a colleague talked yourself out of delivering an educational visit because there was too much paperwork; there were health and safety concerns; the cost of transport was too high; you were worried about poor behaviour; there were too many curriculum pressures; or you lacked the confidence to lead the visit?

These are common concerns cited by teachers as preventing them from doing more learning outside the classroom (LOtC). Yet, in a survey commissioned by the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom through Teacher Voice, 87% of teachers said LOtC made lessons memorable and 77% agreed that it motivated and enthused young people with regards to their learning. As adults, many of us can remember a school visit; perhaps a geography lesson up to our waist in cold water, measuring river beds and erosion; sitting contemplatively in an art gallery; or building a raft on an adventure residential. As we look back on these experiences with a warm glow, perhaps we should be asking ourselves, how can we ensure the next generation has the same opportunities and more?

Seize the moment!

LOtC can add depth to any lesson and improve understanding of any subject. Something as simple as a 'bridge building' exercise in the school grounds to teach geometry and structural engineering, or a visit to parliament to fully appreciate the hierarchy of our political system without doubt engages young people – especially those who do not thrive within the classroom environment – in their learning, bolsters the teacher-student relationship, and can often evoke visible changes in behaviour. Countless anecdotes from teachers describe pupils on educational visits unexpectedly coming out of their shell and proving to be extremely creative, a leader, a team player, or a practical problem solver.

It is the application of a theory to a real life situation that can be the final piece of a jigsaw, a visual cue that helps pupils make sense of a topic, which until that point was just another concept that had to be learnt. This deeper understanding can affect a young person's attainment and willingness to explore a subject in more detail. At the same time the lesson becomes memorable, aiding recall in an exam situation.

The change in Government has seen a drive towards ensuring schools have more freedom to decide how they teach. In addition, new Health and Safety guidelines for schools aim



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to reduce the bureaucracy, paperwork and fear of prosecution under H&S law. So, now is the time to look closely at your curriculum and identify ways of integrating frequent, continuous and progressive LOfC. Activities should not, and need not, be left to the summer months or be cancelled just because of inclement weather or an Ofsted inspection! They should build on the lessons taught in class and become progressively more challenging throughout a pupil's school career.

Making it happen

With the right input and careful planning, anyone can deliver successful expeditions, visits abroad or activities in the local area – here are a few points to bear in mind:

- > LOfC doesn't always need to be formal and shouldn't be restricted to a one off visit at the end of term or a reward for good behaviour. Well-planned activities in the school grounds or local community can create a bubble of excitement and will add value to your lessons.
- > It's tempting to use the same provider and plan the same tried-and-tested trip year after year – but conducting a review of your annual activities may prove useful. Be open to new ideas and opportunities!
- > During your planning, establish what you want to achieve from the activities and set your objectives. Consider how the activity will build on what you have been teaching in class.
- > Carrying out a risk - benefit assessment needn't be a chore or bureaucratic. The LOfC Quality Badge (lotcqualitybadge.org.uk) is a national kitemark that was introduced to provide teachers with an assurance that venues

INFO BAR

+ THE HSE HAS PRODUCED A DOCUMENT CALLED SCHOOL TRIPS AND OUTDOOR LEARNING ACTIVITIES: TACKLING HEALTH AND SAFETY MYTHS, VIEW THIS AT HSE.GOV.UK

+ THE LOfC MARK WAS DEvised TO RECOGNISE EXISTING EXEMPLARy PROVISION AND TO ASSIST AND SUPPORT SCHOOLS IN DEVELOPING THEIR LOfC OFFERING, ENABLING ALL CHILDREN TO HAVE ACCESS TO MEANINGFUL LOfC EXPERIENCES. FIND OUT MORE AT LOT.C.ORG.UK

have met a national standard in terms of the quality of provision and their management of risk.

- > Where you have chosen to use an external provider, don't be afraid to ask them to tailor their provision to your needs. Good communication is essential, and most providers are willing to offer suggestions that can enhance your visit.
- > Preparation for a visit is also a good learning opportunity for students. Engaging them in the process with key tasks such as budget management, sourcing transport, etc. will help them to understand the purpose of the activity and allow for an element of ownership and personalisation.
- > Where cost is a concern, be creative and work with students to establish a



ABOUT THE EXPERT

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fundraising event. This can be challenging but it may also offer a range of learning opportunities for maths, business enterprise, and so on.

- > At the end of the visit consider how you will use the experience to extend the lessons back in the classroom. Allow time for reflection and a chance for students to review what they have learnt. This is also an opportunity for you to establish what went well and what could be improved.

In summary, don't be afraid to get creative; there are opportunities for taking lessons outside the classroom across the curriculum and regardless of the age or ability of your students. If you're inexperienced, start small and build your confidence – draw on the experience of other teachers and education practitioners. Tackle the barriers head on and look for practical solutions and ways to maximise resources. Where it is not possible to travel long distances, take the time to review the opportunities on your doorstep. Finally, remember that learning outside the classroom can be rewarding for both teacher and pupil, providing positive experiences that broaden horizons, open doors and create lasting memories that will remain well into adult life.