

# NEW HORIZONS

KATIE MASTERS HAS BEEN EXPLORING HOW EDUCATIONAL TRIPS CAN OPEN DOORS OF REAL OPPORTUNITY FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS ALIKE...

**W**ith finances tight, the demands of the curriculum pressing and league tables an ever-present menace, it can take an Herculean effort to organise out-of-the-classroom learning for students. Yet school excursions offer a wealth of benefits. In 2008, Ofsted reported, 'When planned and implemented well, learning outside the classroom contributed significantly to raising standards and improving pupils' personal, social and emotional development.'

"Getting outside the classroom has cognitive benefits," says psychologist Dr Linda Blair, author of *The Key to Calm* (Yellow Kite, £14.99). "Educational visits are a way of enriching the two-dimensional, class-based learning into something three-dimensional – something that has a place and a context within the real world. And research shows that the more ways we are given to experience and encode information, the better we're able to remember it." Of equal value is the fact that educational visits can have a huge impact in developing students socially.

"Simply being together on a bus is a forum



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



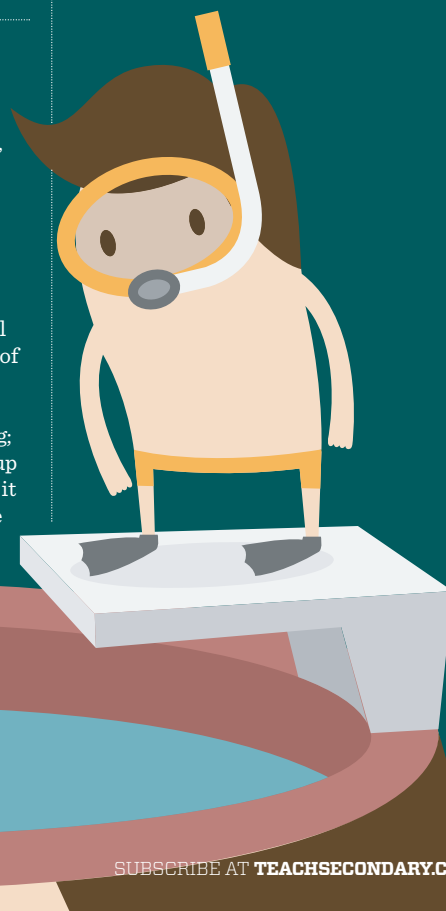
Katie Masters is a journalist whose most memorable educational visit involved a day trip to St Omer, a sweltering coach and two very pungent Camemberts...

in which teenagers learn about ways of interacting," says Dr Blair. "And putting themselves out there in a new setting – be that asking questions of a museum curator, or trying out new skills at an activity centre – builds confidence.'

### Out-of-the-classroom experiences can even change lives.

"A few years back I was teaching at a school in Bristol," says Rob Ford, the deputy head of Crickhowell High School in Powys. "One student was really struggling. There were problems at home and she wasn't achieving; she was receiving Es and Us. She'd signed up to come away with the school at half-term; it was a home-stay trip in America, and some

of her teachers felt she shouldn't go, she should stay at home and revise. I argued that she should come, both because she and her parents wanted her to, but also because I thought the trip might incentivise her. In actuality, it transformed her. She stayed with an Hispanic family; bonded with them, saw how different life could be and



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got back a sense of her own worth. Back at school she really came into her own, started working and ended up achieving As and Bs.”

The positives of learning outside the classroom are tangible. So how can schools make the most of the opportunities they offer?

### Be savvy about the finances

“Financial constraints on schools are very real,” says Elaine Skates, the Deputy Chief Executive of the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom. “But there are things that can help. Creating

cross-curricular visits means that money for trips can be financed from more than one department. And schools are also entitled to use the Pupil Premium to help finance educational visits.”

Elaine is also an advocate of changing the language used to refer to excursions. “The often-used term ‘school trips’ has connotations of a one-off, stand-alone, potentially extra-curricular activity,” she says. “Replacing it with the alternative ‘educational visit’ helps everyone: teachers, students and parents, see non-classroom-based learning as having a defined educational outcome, just as classroom-based activity does.”

As a corollary: it’s worth bearing in mind that if parents understand that a visit is being made to support learning, and to support the personal and social development of their children, they will feel more inclined to offer financial support; whether that comes from paying for their children to go on educational visits, or from helping to fundraise.

“Sponsorship is another avenue to explore,” says Kelly Hall, the trips coordinator at St Saviour’s and St Olave’s Church of England Secondary in the City of London. “Livery companies in the City have heavily subsidised us to do a couple of trips that we wouldn’t otherwise be able to afford. Last year, thanks to that sponsorship, we were able to take a group of engineering students for a gliding lesson. As well as learning to fly, they had a wonderful opportunity to see how a simple design can be incredibly effective: and to gain a better understanding of aerodynamics and material science.”

“Try the British Council too,” says Rob. “They offer grants to support educational visits abroad – and may be able to signpost you to other useful organisations.”



## Facilitate the planning

Many schools have a teacher who takes on the role of trips coordinator. "Once a system's in place, having someone to oversee it, makes organising trips an easier process to manage," says Kelly. "I use a spreadsheet to monitor when the trips are happening, which students are going on them and which lessons they are missing as a result. That doesn't just help with planning, it also helps us stop a situation in which particular students were getting to go on a disproportionate number of trips: and means we can allocate the opportunities more fairly."

The trips coordinator can also stay on top of ensuring that all the necessary paperwork, risk assessments and planning have been done with plenty of time to spare. "We'd advise that procedures for planning visits are one of the things included in staff inductions," says Elaine. "That indicates that there's support for them at senior management level: and allows teachers to feel confident about how to organise a visit."

And if you're going abroad, Rob says that one invaluable asset is a contact in a local school.

"If you're taking a group overseas, there's nothing better than linking up with a high school in that country," he points out. "Not only do the students get the unique experience of meeting their peers, seeing how other schools work and potentially experiencing a home stay – but you also get all the benefit of your host school's insider knowledge about the local area. That makes planning far easier."

In fact, a similar principle applies to trips within the UK. If you're planning an excursion to any site, your planning will be made easier if you do a primary visit to scope out its potential. But if that's not possible, a phone conversation with the site about what they can offer – and the logistics involved – will hugely facilitate your planning.

It's also a key part of getting the most out of learning outside the classroom. One reiterated piece of advice is that teachers

should speak – in advance – with the venue, and tell them one clear learning objective they hope to achieve. "If a venue understands what you want, they can help you to tailor activities that will meet your objective(s)," says Elaine.

## ★ EVERYONE WINS

"IF YOU TAKE YOUR STUDENTS SOMEWHERE THAT YOU FEEL PASSIONATE ABOUT – AND YOU SHOW THAT PASSION – IT WILL INCREASE THE LEVEL OF RESPECT YOUR STUDENTS FEEL FOR YOU," SAYS DR BLAIR. "ENTHUSIASM IS INFECTIOUS."

**Evidence from the Institute of Education backs up the idea that learning outside the classroom can strengthen the student/teacher bond – a finding that tallies with the perception of Rory Bines-Morris, 16, from Lewes. "In Y8 I went to Germany with my school," he recalls. "The thing that I really took away from the experience was the chance to see the teachers in a different**

**light. Usually in class we were told off when we joked around, but in Germany they were more relaxed. It became apparent that they weren't just teachers, they were also fun people who liked a laugh. I wasn't alone in thinking that: everyone mentioned it. It certainly helped me to see that the reason they were stricter within the classroom was simply to enable things to get done."**



## 6 WAYS TO GET THE MOST OUT OF AN EDUCATIONAL VISIT

DR JENNIFER DEWITT, RESEARCH FELLOW IN EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL STUDIES AT KING'S COLLEGE LONDON, SAYS:

- 1 **Tell your students what to expect in advance. Talk them through maps of the venue, what you will be doing and the learning objective of the visit. This will allow them to adjust faster to the novelty of the experience and focus on the activity you actually want them to do.**
- 2 **Less is more. Have one clear learning objective for the visit. A clear focus will increase everyone's engagement.**
- 3 **Avoid worksheets. If you give students worksheets and ask them to go and find the answers to 39 questions, they'll do it, but they'll be busy filling in blanks and copying one another – instead of actively engaging with what's around them.**
- 4 **Set a challenge. Come up with a subject-and-location appropriate activity – it could be as simple as 'Go and take a photo of something that you think is meaningful about this museum/ site/ castle.' By giving students control over what they focus on, you're more likely to get them engaged.**
- 5 **If possible, work in small groups. Sharing ideas is one of the best ways to learn. Plus, students will naturally want to gravitate towards one another in a setting like this, so you'll be working with their natural inclinations.**
- 6 **Back in the classroom, take time to reflect. This reinforces the experience and allows the students the opportunity to share their learning and to offer useful feedback.**

## Don't be put off by risk

"My advice is: err on the side of caution, but don't be risk averse," comments Rob. "It's important not to cut corners on the planning, to do thorough risk assessments and to make sure you have contingency plans in place. But don't let the thought of potential risk put you off giving students the opportunity to have experiences that will enhance their learning."

Underlining that, the advice from the Health and Safety Executive is that "Teachers will only become personally liable if they ignore clear, direct, instructions about serious risks and depart from all common sense. Teachers who try to act responsibly will be on the right side of the law."

It's also worth bearing in mind that any venue that holds a Learning Outside The Classroom Quality Badge has already had a comprehensive risk assessment carried out in order to achieve that status. This eliminates the need to do your own risk assessment of the site.