

# 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.

Portlethen Academy has a long tradition of pupils in S1 and S2 being offered overnight excursions as part of 'GOOSE Week' as well as a biennial ski trip, Youth Achievement trips and subject field trips and visits. 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 the threat of terrorist activity has become an increasing factor in planning for and going on school trips. 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 small chance that a trip has to be cancelled, sometimes at short notice, because of an increased threat of, or actual terrorist activity.

Depending on the circumstances in which a trip is cancelled, a claim may be possible against Aberdeenshire Council's excursion insurance, but not in all situations. This is because, in some circumstances, our decision to cancel a trip is classed by the insurers as 'elective'.

An example of this was the cancellation a trip in May 2017. A group of pupils were due to travel to Manchester on the morning after the terrorist attack on Manchester Arena. The Government and Police had not indicated that people should stay away from Manchester, however, following consultation with risk experts within Aberdeenshire Council, it was decided that, as the risk of further attacks had not been ruled out, and there was a possibility of the pupils witnessing distressing scenes, the trip should not go ahead.

In insurance terms, we had elected not to go and therefore the insurance policy did not cover the loss. In this case parents and carers were refunded their money and an alternative trip was created for the pupils. Although this was the right thing to do in the circumstances, school took a substantial financial hit. Having sustained this one hit, we cannot do this again, going forward.

While the chances of future trips having to cancel remains small, the only way we can continue to offer residential trips which, by their very nature are a higher cost, is by spreading the risk. This means that where a cancelled trip is not compensated by the insurers, the risk will sit with parents and carers. In the Cancellation section of this booklet we have given four scenarios which we hope will help you when deciding whether your child should sign up for a trip.

I hope the information contained within this booklet is useful. If you have suggestions for other information you think would be useful, I would be delighted to hear from you.

Neil Morrison, Head Teacher

## **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. For non-residential trips, in the absence of written consent, verbal consent will be sought, but written consent is essential for residential trips.

### **Information Events**

For residential trips, the Trip Leader will organise at least one Information Event where parents/carers have the opportunity to 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**

In order 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 a number of instalments, or full payment if this is preferred. We ask that cash payments above £50 are not sent to school with pupils, but are brought to the School Office by parents/carers. 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 pupil's Guidance Teacher.

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.

## **Allocation of Accommodation**

Wherever possible allocation of accommodation will be made to best match friendship groups, but the final decision regarding allocation of accommodation rests with the Trip Leader.

## **Expectations of Pupils**

School trips are usually extremely successful, with pupils and teachers alike enjoying new experiences and getting to know one another in less formal settings than school. This success is dependent both upon the willingness of teachers and volunteers to organise and accompany trips and upon the active participation and good behaviour of the pupils.

### **Behaviour**

- Pupils remain under the jurisdiction of school throughout a visit or trip, and must follow instructions given to them by the accompanying staff or those leading activities e.g. ski instructor.
- Pupils must familiarise themselves and follow any emergency instructions or procedures.
- Pupils must be punctual and polite, abide by curfew and lights out timings, show consideration towards other guests/venue- users, maintain their accommodation in a reasonable state and leave it in an acceptable condition
- Pupils must not leave their rooms overnight, except in emergency, permit other guests into their room or enter other guests' rooms
- Pupils must make no unauthorised attempts to leave accommodation, venues or activities on their own or in groups.
- Pupils must never deliberately put themselves, or others at risk and this includes through 'horseplay'
- Pupils must refrain from drinking alcohol and trying to purchase alcohol, from smoking or trying to buy cigarettes and from possession or use of any illegal substances throughout the visit or trip.
- Pupils must abide by any specific visit or trip specific rules identified to them.

Prior to any residential trip, pupils and parents/carers will receive a *Pupil Behaviour Contract* which must be signed and returned to the Trip Leader before the pupil is permitted to join the trip.

### **Sanctions**

In the run up to a trip, the Head Teacher reserves the right to remove a pupil from a trip if they commit a serious breach, or repeated smaller breaches, of school rules. In this circumstance deposit will be forfeited. It may be possible to refund some monies, for example, if the trip has not been confirmed and paid for in full by school, but parents/carers should be aware that they may not receive back the balance of the trip payments.

During the trip, it is expected that minor breaches of the rules will be successfully dealt with by the trip staff as they arise. However, in circumstances where there is a significant single breach or a repeated disregard for the rules, parents/carers will be expected to collect their child from the trip, arrange collection of their child or receive their child when they are brought home. Parents/carers will be required to bear any costs associated with the repatriation of their child when they are brought/sent home.

## **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 by seeking a view that considers both the benefits and risks associated with visits and activities.

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 involved, and where appropriate the pupils going on the trip. 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**

As trips are arranged in advance, there may be some circumstances that change between the date of the trip being booked and the date of the trip itself. Whilst not exhaustive, this may include a change in pupils' relationships (e.g. falling out with friends) or a move (of school or area). If there is a change which results in a pupil requesting withdrawal from a trip, the school would seek confirmation from parents/carers that they wish to withdraw their child from the trip and any monies which can be retrieved from the trip/activity providers will be refunded. Parents/carers should note that the amount might be nil or be significantly less than the original cost of the trip.

## **External Impacts on Trips and the Outcome**

When the unforeseen happens and a trip is affected, there may be a range of different outcomes. Some examples are given below, based upon the situation where an event, such as a terrorist attack, disaster or other significant incident has occurred in, or close to, a trip route or destination. Parents/carers should note that this set of examples is not exhaustive and that whenever an insurance claim is possible, it will be submitted, however, any payment from our insurers is subject to their terms and conditions

### **Example 1**

The Police and/or Government for UK destinations or The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, for overseas destinations, **are advising against travelling** via or to the destination.

In these circumstances, the school will cancel the trip and the Head Teacher will consider if an alternative trip is feasible.

If no alternative is possible, a claim will be submitted against the insurance held for the trip for monies which cannot be retrieved from the trip/activity providers. Refunds will be made from any retrieved monies/insurance pay-out. Please note that any cancellation at a late stage will likely forfeit any chance of refund and any refund received may not match the full amount paid for the trip and may take some time to be processed.

Where an alternative, similar trip can be offered, it is unlikely that the experiences in the replacement trip will match all those of the original. If pupil's parent/carer decides that they do not wish their child to go on the replacement trip, funds which can be retrieved from the trip/activity providers will be refunded to the parent/carer, but this might be nil or be significantly less than the original cost of the trip

### **Example 2**

The Police and/or Government for UK destinations or The Foreign and Commonwealth Office **are not advising against travel** via or to the destination.

The Head Teacher may decide, through a process of robust risk assessment (see Fig 1) to cancel the trip. Depending on the circumstances of the cancellation, the Council's insurers may class this as elective cancellation and the policy will not respond. In this circumstance, any monies which can be retrieved from the trip/activity providers will be refunded, however this may be nil or significantly less than the original cost of the trip

### **Example 3**

The Police and/or Government for UK destinations or The Foreign and Commonwealth Office **are not advising** against travel via or to the destination.

The Head Teacher may decide, through a process of robust risk assessment (see Fig 1), that the trip can go ahead, but the staff who were to accompany the trip are not willing to go, and substitutes cannot be found. Depending on the circumstances of the cancellation, the Council's insurers may class this as elective cancellation and the policy will not respond. In this circumstance, any monies which can be retrieved from the trip/activity providers will be refunded, however this may be nil or significantly less than the original cost of the trip

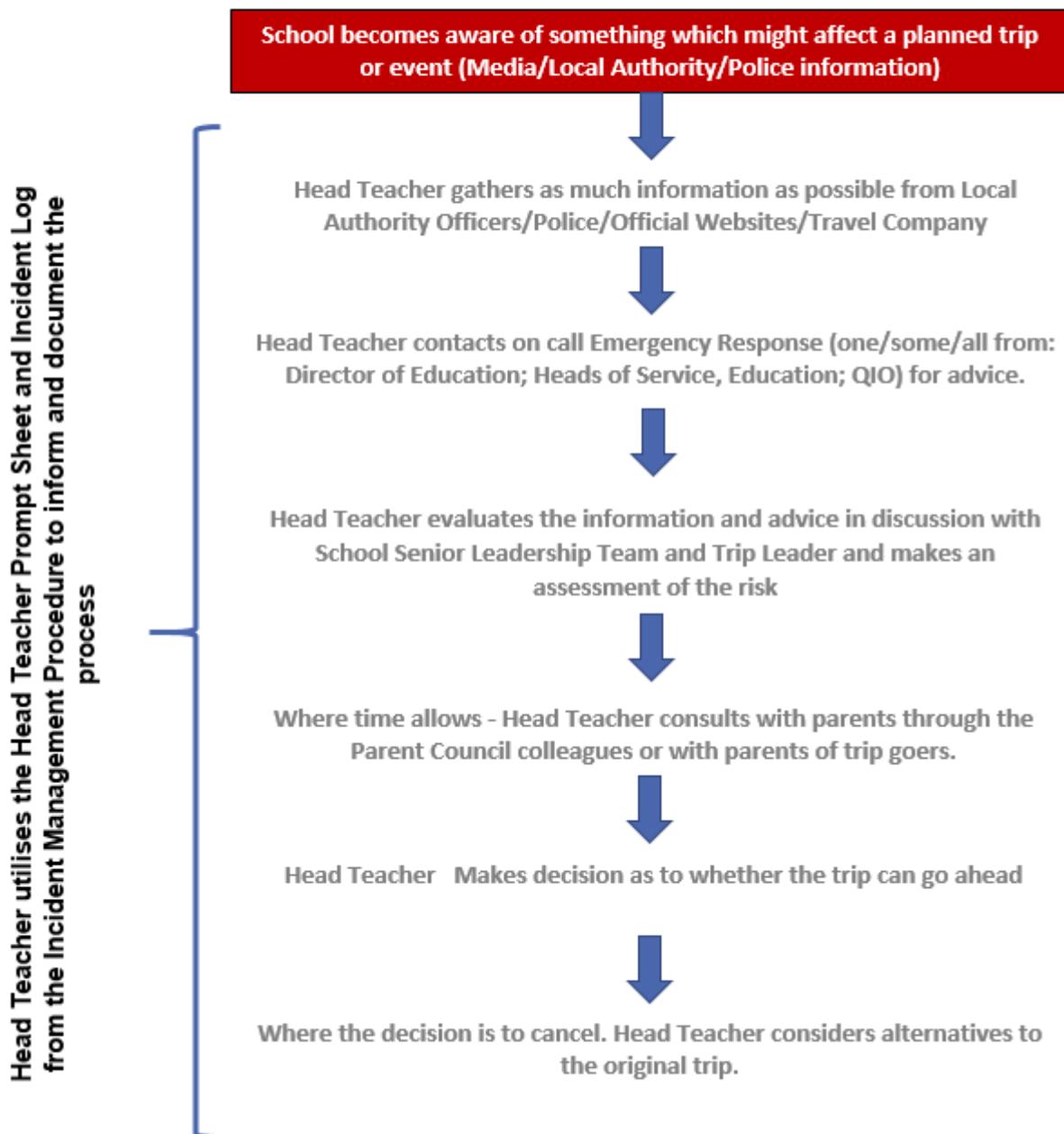
### **Example 4**

The Police and/or Government for UK destinations or The Foreign and Commonwealth Office **are not advising** against travel via or to the destination.

The Head Teacher may decide, through a process of robust risk assessment, that the trip can go ahead, but the pupil's parent/carer decides that they do not wish their child to go. In this circumstance any funds which can be retrieved from the trip/activity providers will be refunded to the parent/carer, but this might be nil or significantly less than the original cost of the trip

Fig.1

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



## **Insurance**

### **Aberdeenshire Council**

Aberdeenshire Council have in place a 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, curtailment and change of itinerary (along with other sundry benefits) etc. for worldwide trips and adventurous activities (including winter sports), subject to the policy terms and conditions.

The policy covers Medical expenses and Personal Accident cover, along with other items - see policy summary on Aberdeenshire Website for details. 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**

Parents may choose to hold 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.