

TAKE A TRIP...

ELAINE SKATES ANSWERS YOUR QUERIES ABOUT ORGANISING A SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL EXCURSION

Q I teach MFL in a large academy in Norfolk. Although we have a long-standing exchange programme in place, which enables Y10 students to spend two weeks in France or Germany as well as acting as hosts in their own homes, I would love to be able to take our younger learners to hear these languages spoken in an everyday context, at a time when they may still be struggling with the idea of a practical application for what we are learning in the classroom. At the moment, however, I'm struggling to persuade my SLT that there is solid educational value in, say, a day-trip to Calais for a class of 11/12-year-olds. Can you help me press my point?

A With strong evidence that learning outside the classroom raises attainment and engages all groups of pupils, you can certainly build a compelling case for an educational visit to Calais.

Many pupils have never travelled abroad, and for these young people learning a language may simply not seem relevant to their lives. The opportunity to speak and listen to a language in a real life setting can help promote enjoyment and enthusiasm for learning and expand the horizons of all pupils, particularly those from disadvantaged groups.

My advice would be to focus on what you would like to achieve from the visit and why it will be more effective than classroom teaching in helping your pupils make accelerated progress. Be clear about the learning objectives and the outcomes you are anticipating.

Have you considered the cross-curricular opportunities this visit could offer? Working with the geography or history department could help you resolve budgetary or cover issues and ensure that the school derives the maximum benefit from the visit.

Finally, make sure you evaluate the impact the visit has had when you get back to school.



ABOUT THE EXPERT



Elaine Skates is the deputy chief executive of the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom (CLOtC), the national charity that campaigns to get children out and about more often. CLOtC offers support for LOfC including CPD, the LOfC Quality Badge and LOfC Mark accreditations. Free guidance is available at lotc.org.uk

This will help you build the case for more educational visits in the future and change the perceptions of your SLT.

If you aren't able to persuade your SLT to let you take your pupils on a day trip to France, then why not create your own language immersion experience closer to home, perhaps whilst camping close to your school? One of the pupils attending Samuel Whitbread College, who are taking part in Paul Hamlyn Foundation's Learning Away special initiative, initially resisted his parents' attempts to persuade him to learn Spanish, but became an enthusiastic convert after the school's Spanish immersion residential programme. This proves that learning outside the classroom needn't be expensive to be effective!

Q As a head of year in a rural comprehensive, I am keen to develop ways in which pupils at the school can engage with the countryside that is so fundamental to the community of which they are a part. At the same time, though, I'm conscious of the need not to limit their horizons and aspirations, and keep them open to the possibilities offered by a more urban environment. Any advice on how I can manage this tricky balancing act would be gratefully received!

A I recently met a head teacher when delivering "Planning an LOfC

Curriculum" training with a similar dilemma. Her small village school offered frequent opportunities to learn outdoors. However their children, the majority of whom were from farming families, had little experience of urban settings and rarely visited cultural venues such as art galleries or theatres. So, whilst the pupils had rich experiences of the countryside and natural world, in other areas their background was quite sheltered and limited. Therefore, the school identified a clear need to provide the pupils with a wider experience base to expand their horizons and develop skills they would need in later life.

I think the answer is to think about whole curriculum planning to ensure that your pupils benefit from a breadth of experiences, both rural and urban, close to home and further afield.

As a starting point, think about what you would like to achieve for your students and then consider the best place to achieve those aims. Providing children with new experiences and expanding horizons is one objective for LOfC. However, connecting children to their local environment and community is equally important.

LOtC is about so much more than a once a year 'school trip'. With this in mind, making the most of the opportunities around you is the most cost effective way of integrating frequent, continuous and progressive LOfC into the curriculum. Using your local environment will enable you to make learning real, promote enjoyment of learning and engage active learners.

My advice would be to play to your strengths, and offer regular opportunities for LOfC utilising your rural location. Alongside this, however, it's a good idea to make sure you incorporate occasional educational visits to urban settings into your curriculum planning. Finally, if you take the pupils on residential maybe you could consider an urban rather than rural setting next time!