



# Successful science trips

In this, the first of a two-part article, Carol Ballard shares her experience in organising successful science day trips.

## First things first

Let's assume you've decided you want to arrange a day trip to a science venue. That's great – but just where do you start the planning? In this article, I've tried to present a step-by-step account of my own approach to this – I hope it works for you too!

The first thing to do is to ask your head teacher for their approval – it's pointless planning a trip if you will not be given permission to go! You may need to check the school diary and avoid particular dates if they clash with other school or local events.

Check your school's /LEA's policy for day trips and ensure that you are aware of all the issues raised. Find out whether the school/LEA/venue requires any insurances to be taken out and obtain costings.

Then check how many children you intend to take, and then check your school or LEA policy on teacher to pupil ratios and adult to pupil ratios. Look at your school timings. How long will you actually have at the venue? Are you restricted by the timings of the normal school day, or can you plan an earlier start or later return than normal? If the venue is not within easy walking distance, contact your local bus, train or coach company and ask for estimated journey times and costs. Contact the venue and ask for up-to-date charges, number of free adult places, etc. Find out whether the entrance fee covers everything or whether there are any additional charges that may be





## Science



incurred. Once you know the transport cost and the entrance cost, you can work out the cost per child. Ascertain what your school policy is in respect of paying for trips.

### Making it happen

Once it's all agreed in principle, you have to take action to make it happen.

Dates and times – once you've agreed some suitable dates with the head teacher, check with the venue about availability. Make a provisional booking and then check transport availability with your transport company. Once you've established a date that fits both venue and transport, confirm the bookings with each. Complete any booking forms required and arrange for payment of any necessary deposits. Ensure any necessary insurances are taken out.

Follow your school's/LEA's protocol with regard to risk assessments. Some venues will provide their own risk assessments for specific activities, but your school risk assessment will probably cover additional items such as transport arrangements. For your own sake, as well as for the children in your care, it is vital that this is done thoroughly.

Notify pupils and parents about the intended trip. The timing of this will vary from one school to another – some like to provide plenty of advance warning so that parents can change any arrangements if necessary. Follow school/LEA policy in respect of payments for trip, medical forms, disclaimers etc. Internal arrangements are important – the rest of the school will be carrying on as normal while you're out, so check that lesson covers and supply staff are organised. Inform any other staff who will be affected by your trip.

### Moving on

It's a good idea to take up the offer of the free planning visit that many venues make available to teachers. Your school may allow you time off to do this, but many will not; however, it really is worth sacrificing a day at the weekend or in your holiday in the interests of being fully prepared and organised for your trip. Obtain a floor plan of the venue and check you know where to find:

- ❖ Car parks, entrances and exits
- ❖ Cloakroom/bag storage facilities
- ❖ Toilet facilities
- ❖ Lunch facilities
- ❖ Staircases, lifts etc.
- ❖ The exhibits you plan to visit
- ❖ Souvenir shop

Walk around the venue and locate and evaluate each of the above – they'll feature in your detailed planning later. Bear in mind the needs of any disabled pupil and ensure they can be met. If the venue provides pupil worksheets and teacher resources, make sure you have these with you so you can see how they relate to the exhibits. As you walk

around, try to envisage how long your pupils will need to spend in each area; noting it on your floor plan provides a quick and easy for reference later. At each exhibit, you might also want to annotate a copy of the pupils' material to jog your memory later about particular points you noticed.

### Planning your pupils' day

The actual details depend on the venue and the activities on offer, but here are some general suggestions.

### Groups

How will you organise your pupils? A lot will depend on the type of place you are visiting, the activities involved, the number of pupils and the number of adults. At one extreme, the whole party stays together throughout the day, with collective supervision by all the adults; at the other extreme, children are allocated in advance to a specific adult and expected to stay within that small group for the duration of the visit. In between are arrangements where part of the day is spent together and part in groups, or where the makeup of groups changes for different activities. It is entirely a matter of choice – but whatever you decide, it is very helpful if everybody, both pupils and adults, knows in advance exactly what is expected of them.

### Timings

If you have had a planning visit, you will have some idea of how long pupils will need at each exhibit or activity. Plan a timetable for the day; a detailed rota showing which group should be where and when will help to avoid everybody crowding into the smallest exhibit at the same time. The timings of some activities, such as slide shows or demonstrations, may be fixed by the venue, in which case you need to start with these and work everything else around them. This is the sort of plan I would use:



Times	Group A – Mrs. Brown	Group B – Mr. White	Group C – Mrs. Black
9.15	Board coach		
9.30	Leave school		
10.00	Arrive at venue		
10.15	Dinosaur display workshop	Fossil centre	
10.45			
11.15	Workshop	Dinosaur display	Slide show
11.45			Souvenir shop
12.15	Lunch in red room		
1.00	Fossil centre	Slide show	Workshop
1.30		Souvenir shop	
2.00	Slide show	Fossil centre	Dinosaur display
2.30	Souvenir shop		
3.00	Back on coach		
3.15	Leave venue		
3.45	Arrive at school		

- ❖ Medical: any necessary medical details and medications, first aid kits
- ❖ General: bin liners for rubbish, vomit bags, tissues, spare pencils and rubbers

Most teachers are instinctively paranoid about continually counting pupils while they're out – so it hardly needs to be said that you will, of course, do a head count as pupils get on the coach . . . as they leave it . . . when you assemble . . . and at regular intervals throughout the day.

Once all this is done, you can enjoy your trip. It may seem an awful lot of organisation, but science can only really be experienced outside the classroom. It is a 'real-world' subject, and children gain so much from science day trips that they really are worth all the effort and hard work.

If each member of staff has a copy, they know exactly what their group should be doing, and when; they also know where to find each other, and you, if there is a problem.

## Activities

Unless the venue is organising all activities for you, plan suitable tasks for pupils at each exhibit. You may want to use the venue's sheets as a starting point or to create your own from scratch. Whichever you decide, each pupil needs work set at a level appropriate to their abilities; with an interesting, challenging task, pupils will have a real sense of purpose and get a lot more from the visit than if they are simply left to roam aimlessly. Try to make the tasks interesting, include a puzzle or two, perhaps a corny joke here and there – not just another worksheet to fill in, but something which can really inspire your pupils' imaginations. Turn them into detectives, with clues to find to solve a mystery . . . or scientists trying to find the answers to solve a problem . . . or astronauts looking for a planet to locate a space station . . . Different ideas will suit different locations. Finishing

the worksheet with an open-ended task, such as choosing something they have found interesting and either writing about it or drawing it, is really helpful – it keeps early-finishers occupied while others catch up, and if anybody is struggling they can be directed to skip some sections and do the last task.

Documentation: Copy any teacher resources that adults need and distribute these, together with the pupil resources and timetable, well in advance, so they have time to familiarise themselves with everything. File all correspondence, booking forms etc. safely.

## Time to go!

Before you leave, have a last-minute check to make sure you have remembered:

- ❖ Documentation: correspondence, booking forms, means of payment, risk assessments, class/group lists, timetable, map, teacher and pupil resources
- ❖ Contact details: mobile phone, contact numbers for school and venue

