

Glenridding Beck – Investigation Report

Drowning of Max Palmer in Glenridding Beck 26 May 2002

PART B. HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL'S VISITS TO GLENRIDDING

These pages describe the origin and nature of the visits to Glenridding by the School. The lessons learned cover particularly the need for schools to:

- check claimed competencies
- do risk assessments before introducing new activities
- have clear risk-based arrangements for the supervision of pupils on educational visits
- have effective procedures for responding to complaints about unsafe practice

The left hand column sets out some facts and the right hand column provides comment and further sources of information.

Note: Comments in *bold italics* draw particular attention to points that those involved in educational visits and adventurous activities may need to consider.

This Part has three sections:

- The leader's background
- Nature of the Glenridding visits
- Supervision of pupils

It ends with a summary of the key points.

Facts

The leader's background

1. The visit leader joined the school as Head of Geography in 1998.

2. In his application for the post he made a number of claims relating to mountain leadership qualifications. He had attended part of the training for the Mountain Leader Award (Summer), but had not completed the required logbook or assessment. Therefore, he did not hold that qualification.

3. The leader had previous experience in running outdoor visits. For some of these visits he had used accommodation at Greenside, Glenridding belonging to another school.

4. Soon after he started at the School, he began organising "activity trips" at Glenridding. These visits were additional to the School's existing programme of visits to the LEA's outdoor centres.

Nature of the Glenridding visits

5. These visits involved a range of activities, such as walking, ghyll scrambling and (if a suitably qualified instructor was present), rock climbing. However the centrepiece of each trip was "plunge-pooling". This involved jumping 4 metres from a rock into a pool in Glenridding Beck where, ultimately, the fatal accident occurred.

6. The visits were well-publicised in the school and there were photographs of the plunge pool activity on display.

Supervision of pupils

7. In July 2000 a concern had been raised about the level of supervision during the evenings on a previous visit.

8. In response, a meeting was held in October 2000. The concern was seen as a "personality clash" between teachers and the meeting took the form of a general review of the school's procedures for school visits.

Comment

Neither the school (under the tenure of a previous head teacher) nor the LEA checked with the Mountain Leader Training Board that the leader held the claimed qualifications.

Had such checks been done, they might not only have indicated a lack of certification for mountain activities, but also have raised questions about his suitability as a leader.

There was a lack of clarity at the school about who was responsible for checking qualifications.

LEAs and schools need to be clear about where the day-to-day responsibility for checking qualifications lies. LEAs may need to consider what advice and support they give to schools on checking qualifications (see PART G). They also need to be clear on whether "desirable/additional" qualifications such as outdoor qualifications should receive the same level of scrutiny at appointment as "essential" qualifications. It would be good practice to specify in service level agreements, contracts etc the respective role to be undertaken by the school, the LEA and the contractor in checking qualifications.

Having failed to check the leader's qualifications on appointment, no subsequent assessment of his qualifications, technical competence or suitability as an outdoor leader was done before he began organising the Glenridding visits.

There should be proper risk assessments for proposed new activities, including assessment of the skills, competence and, where appropriate, qualifications required by leaders and helpers. Head teachers should seek expert advice if new activities are proposed, and check qualifications.

Even if the visit leader had a Mountain Leader Award (Summer), this is relevant to fell walking. For rock climbing, at least a Single Pitch Award (SPA) is required. (See also Part A3)

Supervision on educational visits needs to be 24 hours per day 7 days per week. The precise nature of and planning for 24/7 supervision should be risk-based, for instance taking account of the environment and the maturity of the children (for certain expeditions, specific remote supervision arrangements may be agreed in advance). (Further guidance is given in the DfES publication "[Standards for Adventure](#)".)

Teachers who fail to provide adequate supervision place themselves at risk of action under both civil and criminal law. They are also likely to be in breach of their professional duties under Paragraph 65.7 of [“School Teachers’ Pay and Conditions Document”](#) and liable to disciplinary action.

9. The Glenridding visits continued as before until the day of the fatal accident.

We recommend that:

- any complaint about unsafe practice should be referred immediately to the Head teacher
- the circumstances of the complaint be investigated objectively, putting aside possible “personality issues”
- underlying and wider issues should be examined, for instance, is this an isolated incident or is there a poor culture or lack of understanding within the school of the procedures for the safe conduct of school visits?
- lessons learned should be shared with the school staff, the governors and, if appropriate, the LEA

Key points

LEAs and schools need to be clear about where the day-to-day responsibility for checking qualifications and competence lies (Para B 2).

LEAs may need to consider what advice and support they give to schools on checking qualifications and technical competence (Para B 2).

There should be proper risk assessments for proposed new activities (Para B 4).

Headteachers should seek expert advice if new activities are proposed (Para B 4).

Supervision on educational visits needs to be 24 hours per day 7 days per week, the precise arrangements being based on risk assessment (Para B 7).

Schools and LEAs need clear procedures for dealing with any concerns about unsafe practice (Para B 10).