

Glenridding Beck – Investigation Report

Drowning of Max Palmer in Glenridding Beck 26 May 2002

PART D: PREPARATIONS FOR THE FATEFUL VISIT

These pages describe the extent and limits of the arrangements for the visit.

The lessons learned cover particularly the need for:

- good, informed communication with parents and pupils
- clear visit objectives
- staffing needs to be based on risk assessment
- a viable “Plan B” in case the main objective becomes undeliverable

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 four sections:

- Planning and preparation
- Objectives
- The participants and their skills
- Range of activities

It ends with a summary of the key points.

Facts

Planning and preparation

1. The leader sent out a brief letter to parents, but no consent/medical information form. This was in contravention of LCC procedures.

2. There was no parents' meeting, again in contravention of LCC procedures.

3. Although the LCC Guidelines had been brought to the leader's attention at the meeting in October 2000, he admitted that he was unfamiliar with the detail.

Objectives

4. The visit did not have defined educational objectives. The leader said that "the end objective is for them to enjoy themselves and hopefully do something they wouldn't have a chance to do normally".

Comment

The importance of good communication with parents cannot be over-emphasised. Informed parental consent is essential. A brief letter is insufficient. Comprehensive information should be given, which sets out the proposed activities (including alternatives), and provides sufficient information on hazards and risks to allow parents to make informed decisions about their child's participation. Good communication will also allow parents to make the leader aware, in confidence, of relevant information about their child.

It is also essential to obtain the relevant medical information and consents. Teachers who do not seek such information, expose themselves to the possibility of causing and/or having to deal with a medical emergency they could have anticipated or prevented. For example, a child susceptible to asthma could have an attack induced by jumping into cold water.

For adventurous activities and residential visits, it is good practice for the school to hold a meeting for parents so that they can hear first-hand from the leader(s) about the proposed activities and contingency arrangements and can ask questions. It would be good practice for a governor to have the opportunity to attend such meetings. Involving pupils in a pre-visit and/or post-visit presentation to parents can provide a useful opportunity to develop their understanding of potential risk and add to the visit's educational value.

Although they had some shortcomings, the LCC Guidelines contained the basic information that a person would need for the safe conduct of a school visit. In particular, they were very clear about the need for lifesaving provision and swimming consents.

It is essential that prospective leaders are familiar with all relevant guidelines, including relevant guidance on outdoor and open water activities, and seek expert advice if necessary.

We welcome children having the opportunity to enjoy outdoor activities they would not normally have the chance to do. We applaud the commitment of teachers who, every year, give millions of children such opportunities by providing well-planned educational visits. ***However, many of the serious accidents to schoolchildren have occurred on visits not associated with the curriculum.***

LCC consider that every visit should have clear educational objectives as well as providing enjoyment. HASPEV states (Para 20) that Governing Bodies should ensure that the visit has a specific and stated objective

www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/healthandsafety/visits/

Even if the visit has a very limited educational purpose, the leader still has the responsibility to organise the activity to the best of their professional ability. There can be no lower standard because it is a "fun trip". This is a very important point.

The participants and their skills

5. The leader asked another teacher and Max's mother (an Educational Support Worker at the School), to help him with the visit. Neither had any significant experience or formal qualifications in outdoor activities.

On the fateful visit there was a child : adult ratio of 5:1. The lack of experience of the two helpers meant that, at the plunge pool, the overall ratio of novice: "experienced" participants was 17 : 1.

Identifying appropriate ratios is more than a simple numerical calculation. The risk assessment should identify the minimum skills and skill mix required for the safe delivery of each activity (including for dealing with emergencies) and the staffing and roles should be set accordingly. If an incident occurred, it is likely that, as a minimum, a different competent person would be required for each of the following activities (a) dealing with the incident and any casualties (b) going for help (c) leading the rest of the party to safety. The risk assessment should also consider the implications of one of the leaders/helpers becoming incapacitated either before or during the trip.

6. In addition to twelve Year 8 pupils from the school, there were three primary school children, including Max Palmer.

There were no DfES, BAALPE, LEA or school policies or guidance on attendance by non-pupils (other than relating to insurance). It has been suggested that many teachers could not help on visits unless they took their own children. It is an area of considerable ambiguity.

Leaders and helpers who bring additional children will have potential conflicts of responsibility. This may have consequences for supervision levels. The risks must be properly assessed, particularly the implications of any differences in age or experience. LEAs and schools are strongly advised to have a policy on leaders and helpers bringing additional children on educational visits. If that policy allows additional children to be brought, it should make clear that each case should be subject to a risk assessment which includes possible conflicts of interest

7. The LCC procedures required at least one of the supervisory staff to be a qualified first aider and to carry an appropriate first aid kit.

The leader believed that he complied because he had a current first aid certificate and carried a first aid kit in his rucksack.

The certificate was in "Emergency First Aid". This was a one-day, non-assessed course, primarily on resuscitation. It did not qualify the leader as a "first aider". This may be a common misunderstanding.

While it is commendable for staff to attend such courses, LEAs, schools and teachers need to be clear about the scope and limits of the first aid qualifications held and ensure that they are relevant to any activities being done.

The most appropriate first-aid qualification for combined water/rock activities would be one specific to the outdoor environment, which would include dealing with fractures, hypothermia etc.

It would be good practice for school Governing Bodies to ask regularly about the first aid qualifications held by staff.

8. The LCC procedures also required that if swimming, water play or water based activities took place, the event was to be supervised by staff holding the relevant Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS) qualification. No one on the visit held any qualification in water rescue.

An RLSS qualification in pool lifesaving might be helpful in dealing with a panicking casualty. However, a more appropriate qualification for combined water/rock activities is likely to be an award in white water rescue. Alternatively, in-house training and certification could have been used. It is important that

providers ensure that the qualifications held are relevant to the activity. The risk assessment should identify the level of competence/qualification likely to be required.

9. The procedures also cross-referenced the LCC Swimming Code of Practice, which required prior parental consent for swimming activities. No consent was sought.

Prior parental consent for swimming is extremely important and should ask about the child's swimming ability. This gives the leader objective evidence about their ability, rather than relying on verbal information from children who may be tempted to exaggerate, particularly in front of their peers.

Range of activities

10. The LCC guidelines stated that "Information should be obtained about the educational opportunities of the area to be visited". The environs of Glenridding are particularly rich in educational opportunities, both outdoors, and indoors.

While visits may have certain primary activities which may be seen as the "highlight", it is always important to have a viable "Plan B" to provide alternative activities of educational value in case the primary activity is undeliverable.

Note that "Plan B" is an alternative activity, it is not an emergency plan.

A similar standard of risk assessment should be applied to "Plan B" as to the main activities.

The leader should have the competence and confidence to implement "Plan B", particularly where they know that it may disappoint the pupils. Involving the pupils in the arrangements for the visit is likely to make it easier for them to understand and accept the reason for any change of plan.

Most outdoor areas contain a wealth of opportunities to subtly teach the children about the wider environment and the associated risks while doing enjoyable activities. Outdoor visits can thus provide an excellent opportunity to make the children "risk aware" by involving them in practical decision making.

An Ofsted publication "[Outdoor Education: Aspects of Good Practice](#)" provides information on the benefits of outdoor education which includes examples of excellent learning outcomes from the imaginative use of the outdoor environment.

Key points

- **Informed** parental consent is essential. This requires good communication with parents
- It is good practice to hold a meeting for parents before outdoor and residential visits
- It is good practice for a governor to be invited to attend parents' meetings for visits.
- It is essential that prospective leaders are familiar with all relevant guidelines, including relevant guidance on outdoor and open water activities, and seek expert advice if necessary
- Visits should have clear educational objectives.
- Whatever the objectives of the visit, the leader must organise it to the best of their professional ability. **There can be no lower standard for "fun trips"**
- The risk assessment should identify the staffing required to run a visit safely. Staffing should never be decided just by a simple numerical calculation of ratios
- Leaders and helpers who bring additional children will have potential conflicts of responsibility
- LEAs and schools are strongly advised to have a policy on leaders and helpers bringing additional children on educational visits. If that policy allows additional children to be brought, it should make clear that each case should be subject to a risk assessment which includes possible conflicts of interest
- *LEAs, schools and teachers need to be clear about the scope and limits of the first aid and other qualifications (e.g. lifesaving) held and ensure that they are relevant to any activities being done.*
- *Schools should keep a record of staff with first aid qualifications and their renewal dates and should ensure that this information is available to the EVC*
- *It would be good practice for the Governing Body to ask regularly about the first aid qualifications held by staff*
- *The risk assessment should identify the level of competence/qualification in first aid likely to be required*
- There should be prior parental consent for swimming
- **There should always be a viable "plan B" to provide alternative activities in case the primary activity is undeliverable.** A similar standard of risk assessment should be applied as to the main activities
- The leader should have the competence and confidence to implement "Plan B"
- Opportunities should always be taken to make children "risk aware" by involving them in practical decision-making.