

**CASE
STUDY**

School visit to Ridings Sawmill, Cardross, Argyll and Bute



Why visit the sawmill?

Over the years, several schools¹ in Argyll and Bute have taken pupils (nine–13 years) on trips to a local woodland to teach them first hand about biodiversity, woodland wildlife, forestry, etc.

Argyll and Bute decided to extend this approach by arranging half-day trips to a local sawmill so that pupils could understand the connections between the trees, the timber produced by the sawmill, and how the wood is then used for building and furniture making.

By providing pupils with an insight into a busy, working factory with a wide range of powerful machinery, pupils could also consider the safety issues involved in visiting an important local industry.

How did they plan the visit?

Teachers worked with sawmill staff to explore the learning potential, identify possible problems and develop solutions. Having worked out a suitable route around the sawmill, identifying points of interest and risks, the local authority's health and safety manager worked with the owners to refine these plans. Issues they considered included:

- heavy vehicles in frequent use within the sawmill
- proximity of machinery, plant and equipment
- wood dust
- noise levels from machinery and vehicles
- visibility of the children
- prior understanding of the risks by the children

How did they manage the risks?

Size matters! After the initial site briefing, pupils were split into three groups (ten children plus a teacher and sawmill employee per group). The tours were staggered allowing five–ten minutes between each one. Sawmill staff kept the groups occupied (Q&A session, issuing protective equipment, etc) until it was their turn to do the tour.

¹ St Joseph School, Rhu School, Parklands School, Rosneath School; Kilcreggan School

Students had an initial site briefing and were then split into three smaller groups for site tours



Restriction on movements. The established route was deliberately kept quite short and all vehicular traffic was suspended until the last group had gone inside the building. Where necessary, machines were stopped to allow the groups to walk past.

Protective equipment. The children were kitted out with high-visibility jackets, goggles and hearing protection.

Communication. Prior to the visit, the children were briefed on the risks and how to keep safe.

What was the result?

Pupils had a positive ‘learning outside the classroom’ experience linked to the curriculum. Teachers and the local authority had confidence in the sawmill’s ability to manage their part in the safety of the children and so were able to focus on the educational outcomes for the children.

The sawmill demonstrated that, with goodwill, a little forethought, and a few adaptations, it was entirely feasible to allow schools to visit a ‘high-risk’ workplace.



Carol Walker, Head of Education at the Council, said:

‘Argyll and Bute Council is committed to providing a well-balanced education to the children of Argyll. As Head of Education, I fully support the positive actions taken towards opening the world of work to our pupils. Visits to premises such as Ridings Sawmill are organised with parental consent of the pupils involved. Corporate health and safety staff assist us with the assessments of premises to be visited and, advise on the controls that are required.

‘All too often we hear of the negative side of ‘health and safety’ being used to stop things happening, the preferred option is to use health and safety to make things happen in a safe and positive manner. Early experiences such as these visits are a good foundation for primary pupils who will also participate in the range of work experience programmes operating within Argyll and Bute Council.’