

**Dudley Schools Forum - Tuesday 11 December 2007**

**Report of the Director of Children's Services**

**Staying Safe on School Trips.**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek permission from the Schools Forum to fund the Dudley Educational Visits and Journey Service from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

**Background.**

2. The Dudley Educational Visits and Journeys Service was set up following a review of local policy and practice around school trips and outdoor adventurous activities. The review found that many teachers and group leaders valued the opportunity for children and young people to learn outside the classroom but were concerned about the risks involved and the level of support provided by the LEA when taking children and young people out on school trips.
3. Over the last three years all offsite educational visits and journeys across the Directorate have been planned, recorded and assessed using the online risk assessment service OffsiteMag.net. The service is provided by Trilby Multimedia based in Birmingham and has recorded a total of 17,539 planned offsite visits since the service opened in November 2004.
4. The service is now used by 289 registered centre groups including schools, children's homes, children's centres and youth centres.

**Educational Benefit**

5. In November 2006, the government published a *Manifesto for Learning Outside the Classroom* which sets out the educational benefits of learning beyond the classroom as an essential part of all children and young people's learning and personal development whatever their age, ability or circumstances. The Manifesto states that learning outside the classroom helps raise achievement and attainment in a powerful way through a structured and organised approach to learning in which direct experience is of prime importance.
6. The Manifesto sets out that '*learning outside the classroom can take place in the school grounds; local nature reserves and wild places; city farms and parks; streetscapes; field study centres; farms and the countryside; remote wild and adventurous places; heritage and cultural sites; zoos and botanic gardens; places of*

*worship; museums, theatres, galleries and music venues; and on cultural, language and fieldwork visits abroad.'*

7. Dudley Children's Services has taken a national lead with this work and now represents all local authorities on the DCSF manifesto national advisory group.

### **Issues of health and safety.**

8. Following the death of Max Palmer, a ten-year-old Lancashire schoolboy in May 2002 on a school trip to Glenridding Beck in Cumbria, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) produced a wide-ranging report. The report summarised the very detailed investigation by the HSE and Cumbria Police into the tragedy. The HSE found that the chain of events leading to the tragedy began long before the fateful weekend. The report documented how better compliance with local and national guidelines and best practice could have prevented the chain of events leading to the tragic death of the schoolboy.
9. The report emphasised the critical importance of having effective and robust health and safety management systems in place to guard against individual and institutional complacency. The group leader responsible for the school trip pleaded guilty to manslaughter and was jailed for one year in September 2003. The HSE found that improvements could be made to Lancashire County Council offsite risk assessment and safeguarding management systems.

### **Implementing the Glenridding inquiry recommendations**

10. The Dudley Educational Visits and Journey's Service was created to implement all the recommendations in the HSE report and provides head teachers, educational visit co-ordinators (EVCs), centre managers, governors, teachers, youth workers and social care staff with a one-stop shop to help them ensure they comply with relevant health and safety legislation and best practice. In addition, the service also provides a 24-hour telephone helpline and school and centre based training. All staff have full access to the online service and data through a four digit PIN number allowing them to access their risk assessments anywhere, anytime.

### **Expert Panel**

11. The service is managed and monitored by a panel of specialist officers and advisors including a representative from the Teachers Advisory Committee (TAC). Expert officers responsible for child protection, health and safety, legal matters, insurance, emergency planning and the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme meet together with an independent fully qualified specialist outdoor adventure consultant to support schools and other settings. In addition, the service also manages all Home to School Transport risk assessments for the Dudley Children's Services Transport Team. The service has been featured by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) as a model of best practice and will be featured in the new DCSF guidance 'Out and About', due to be published in 2008.

### **Finance**

12. The Dudley Educational Visits and Journeys Service has an annual budget of £20,000 which is used to provide the online assessment service (£4,000), risk

assessment approval, monitoring and training (£14,000) and independent unannounced visits and specialist advice (£2,000). Over the last three years the service has been funded by the Directorate through base budget and Standards Fund. During 2007/2008 £7,000 (35%) has been funded from base budget and £13,000 (65%) Standards Fund. The changes being introduced in April 2008 mean that this funding formula is no longer possible. It is therefore recommended that in future, the service is charged against the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). It is anticipated that a budget of £22,000 will be necessary to cover the additional work required with the new DCSF 'Out and About' guidance and training due to roll out in June 2008.

### **Statutory Regulations in respect of Schools Forums**

13. The capacity for the DSG to accommodate this budget pressure, which is a local authority responsibility, will depend upon the outcomes of the DSG settlement for 2008-11; this will not be known precisely until early February 2008. Therefore, any decisions reached can only be in principle at this stage.
14. Also, Schools Forum colleagues must be aware of the regulations and their powers in respect of the DSG. From 2008/09 onwards it will be easier for local authorities and Schools Forums to approve contributions from the centrally retained Schools Budget to joint working funded through the local authority combined services budgets, many of which may be in support of ECM outcomes. In approving such an arrangement they will still have to assure themselves that there is an educational benefit.
15. Therefore, Schools Forum must agree to any increase in the deduction from the Schools Budget – and the local authority will need to demonstrate to the Schools Forum that there are clear benefits to pupils and schools from the increased contribution. If Schools Forum agrees to a deduction from the Schools Budget under the combined services regulations, then there is no need for the authority to seek the Schools Forum's formal agreement to the continuation of the deduction, but local authorities should report to their Schools Forums on the progress of the joint working.

### **Law**

16. The Council's LMS schemes are made under Section 48 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and Regulations made there under. The Education Acts 1996 and 2002 also have provision relating to school funding.
17. The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 places overall responsibility for health and safety with the employer. For community schools, community special schools, voluntary controlled schools, maintained nursery schools and pupil referral units the employer is the local authority (LA). For foundation schools, foundation special schools and voluntary-aided schools, the employer is usually the governing body. The LA is the employer for statutory youth groups.
18. Education employers have duties to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable:
  - the health, safety and welfare of teachers and other education staff
  - the health and safety of pupils in-school and on off-site visits

- the health and safety of visitors to schools, and volunteers involved in any school activity.

### **Equality Impact**

19. The Council's Equal Opportunities Policy is taken into account when considering the allocation of resources.

### **Recommendation.**

20. Schools Forum to:

- Agree to set a budget of £22,000 for the Dudley Educational Visits and Journeys Service against the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for the financial year 2008/2009 subject to the advice detailed in paragraphs 13, 14, and 15.



John Freeman  
Director of Children's Services

Contact officer:

Lindsay Newton  
Head of Development  
Telephone 01384 813716