



To: Ofsted
From: Ian Pearson, General Manager, School Travel Forum
Date: May 2011
Re: Consultation on Inspection of Maintained Schools and Academies

1. Executive Summary

The School Travel Forum (STF) welcomes Ofsted's consultation on the inspection of maintained schools and academies in England and would like to highlight the benefits of outdoor education in enhancing a student's engagement with the curriculum and improving attainment levels. We believe that Ofsted should promote outdoor education by specifically evaluating the provision of and access to outdoor learning within its new inspection framework. In addition, we would like to see the inspection framework consider the promotion of good health and safety in school travel such as through reputable providers of the Learning Outside the Classroom Council quality badge. We would also like to see Ofsted judge school leadership and management based on its ability to overcome bureaucratic barriers that prevent teachers from taking their students into the outdoor classroom.

In this submission we have used our experience to highlight the following areas:

- The benefits of outdoor education in enhancing student engagement and behaviour as well as improving educational attainment. The need for the new inspection framework to give particular attention to the provision of outdoor education in regards to the quality of teaching.
- The worrying decline in outdoor education in recent years due to health and safety concerns and bureaucratic procedures which restrict teachers from organising school trips.
- The need to evaluate effective health and safety in school travel as part of Ofsted's plans to judge pupils' behaviour and safety.
- The importance of effective school leadership and management which encourages the use of outdoor education by overcoming bureaucratic barriers that can prevent teachers from taking their students into the outdoor classroom.
- For Ofsted to evaluate access to outdoor education for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds in as part of its judgement of school measures to narrow the attainment gap.



2. About The School Travel Forum

Since its inception in 2003 the School Travel Forum has won widespread recognition and support for the way it simplifies and provides essential reassurance for leaders looking to organise study, sports and ski trips. The STF, which includes the major companies in the school travel business, has estimated that around 40% of all school visits are organised through our members. Our members are required to adhere to a rigorous Code of Practice and Safety Management Standards and are externally verified each year by a leading Health and Safety Consultancy. Founded in 2003, the School Travel Forum is a democratic, not for profit organisation of leading school tour operators that promotes good practice and safety in school travel.

Our Objectives include:

- Promoting best practice in educational school travel and support the principles established by the Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto
- Designing and promoting sector-specific standards that will be periodically reviewed and adapted to reflect changes in education, health and safety legislation and any other relevant influence.
- Ensuring the needs of schools and teachers are understood and adopted into our standards by regularly meeting bodies such as the Learning Outside of the Classroom Council (LOtC), the Department for Education (DfE), the Outdoor Education Advisors Panel (OEAP), Head Teacher Associations and Teacher Unions.
- Ensuring that independent assessment of travel companies offering educational travel in line with the requirements of the LOtC Quality Badge and the STF Code of Practice.
- Providing a forum for members to discuss non-competitive issues of common interest and concern.

3. The benefits of outdoor education

The School Travel Forum would like to highlight the importance of outdoor learning in enhancing the curriculum and improving attainment. The known benefits for pupils of learning outside the classroom are many and varied. They include: improved engagement and attendance; the development of learning and thinking skills; and the strengthening of personal, social and emotional development (e.g. confidence, self-reliance, and management of risk). Hands-on practical education is known to stimulate and inspire and effectively-planned and well-taught fieldwork is a particularly powerful



approach which helps to improve education standards¹. School trips are becoming increasingly recognised as an important, irreplaceable part of understanding your subject in the real world, as well as being an excellent opportunity for team building and personal development.

The School Travel Forum welcomes Ofsted's previously acknowledgement of the value of outdoor learning experiences as part of a full and rounded education, and that it can contribute "significantly to raising standards and improving pupils' personal, social and emotional development"². In addition, we endorse Ofsted's recently published report on the teaching of History which found that the curriculum is most effective if it is "enriched by wide-ranging out-of-classroom opportunities which complemented students' knowledge and historical understanding", such as field trips to the Ypres battlefields³.

Furthermore, and often most importantly, out-of-classroom activity provides an exciting and memorable experience for young people, particularly for those who are not engaged by traditional teaching method, and 77% of teachers feel it to be a more effective teaching method in terms of motivating and enthusing students⁴. Evidence suggests that low attainment can frequently be linked to a lack of engagement in the teaching style, making it vital for schools to examine and use a wider and more flexible range of teaching methods, such as outdoor education, to engage all pupils, particularly those who are at risk of becoming NEET. Indeed, in 2008, Ofsted recommended that schools ensure their curriculum planning includes sufficient well structured opportunities for all learners to engage in learning outside the classroom as a key, integrated element of their experience⁵.

4. Quality of Teaching

STF welcomes Ofsted's proposals in the consultation to evaluate teacher performance based on their ability to "enthuse, engage and motivate pupils so that they learn and make progress". As demonstrated above, outdoor learning plays a vital role in engaging pupils and in helping to improve their attainment. Given Ofsted's recognition of the benefits of outdoor education, we would like to see Ofsted judge the quality of teaching by giving particular attention to the provision of and access to outdoor education.

¹ National Foundation for Educational Research (2004)

² Ofsted, *Learning Outside the Classroom: How far should you go?* (October 2008)

³ Ofsted, *History for All: History in English Schools* (2011)

⁴ TeacherVoice survey on behalf of the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom (2010)

⁵ Ofsted, *Learning Outside the Classroom: How far should you go?* (October 2008)



In addition, STF would also like to raise the importance of adequate teacher training in order to equip teachers with the skills to meet the modern day challenges of teaching the curriculum through high quality outdoor education. Teachers are the gatekeepers of students getting out of the classroom and the commitment of teachers and school managers to outdoor education will be vital in any reversal of the decline of education school trips and fieldwork. Teachers must have the knowledge, skills and experience to deliver effective outdoor education in order to enhance every child's engagement with their education.

However, evidence suggests that the UK is not currently producing sufficient numbers of teachers with the necessary skills to deliver effective outdoor education. A recent report by Kings College London found that the one of key barriers to learning outside the classroom was a lack of teachers' confidence, self-efficacy and access to training⁶. The report recommended greater support for schools to develop their capacity to integrate activities and resources that promote learning outside the classroom as part of the curriculum. In addition, a report by Association for Science Education (ASE) found that the quantity and quality of training and development within ITT for outdoor education is highly variable and is weakened generally by the absence of any minimum training requirement in this regard⁷.

The STF is delighted that the Government has asked Sally Coates to review the Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) standards and recommends the review strengthen QTS standards for ITT outdoor education and training through the introduction of a minimum requirement for trainees to plan, organise, take part in or lead outdoor learning activities. We hope that this will equip teachers with the skills to meet the modern day challenges of teaching the curriculum through high quality outdoor education and encouraged the use of this teaching method to help ensure all pupils and students can actively engage with the curriculum to enable them to achieve the highest possible standards. We would like to see Ofsted carry forward this good work, by including the inspection of the quality of teaching of outdoor education in its new inspection framework.

⁶ Kings College London, *Beyond Barriers to Learning Outside the Classroom in Natural Environments* (December 2010)

⁷ Association for Science Education *Outdoor Science Working Group, Initial Teacher Education and the Outdoor Classroom: Standards for the Future* (2011)



5. Pupil's Behaviour and Safety

Safety

The STF believes that the safety of children and young people is the most important priority; however, we were disappointed not to see the consultation mention the importance of health and safety in school travel in Ofsted's plans to judge pupils' behaviour and safety. The STF works to assist schools in identifying external travel providers who deliver good quality teaching and learning experiences and manage risk effectively. STF members are required to adhere to a rigorous Code of Practice and Safety Management Standards and are externally verified each year by a leading Health and Safety Consultancy. This not only reduces the burden on teachers, enabling them to dedicate more time to ensuring a high standard of teaching and learning, but also helps schools to make savings through more effective procedures, ever more important in the current fiscal environment. For teachers, membership of the STF provides an assurance that a provider:

- Meets their need for due diligence
- Takes account of the needs of users
- Operates in a healthy and safe environment
- Has an emphasis on 'learning/skills outcomes'

However, only 40% of all school visits are organised through our members so there are hundreds of schools trips taking place every year where there is no guarantee of quality or health and safety. In addition, the STF are concerned that an unnecessary and disproportionate level of risk averseness, particularly among public bodies in the education sector, has led to an approach to avoid all activities perceived as 'risky', to the detriment of children's experiences of out-of-classroom activity and real-world experience. A recent survey revealed that 46% of teachers placed health and safety concerns, including risk assessment, paperwork and fear of litigation, as one of the most significant barriers to learning outside the classroom, second only to cost⁸.

We recommend Ofsted do more to highlight the work that organisations like the STF do in promoting health and safety and challenging providers to raise their game in terms of safety management, the learning opportunities that they provide and helping relieve the burden of bureaucracy in schools and ensure that schools are able to provide high quality outdoor education experiences which are safe for all pupils.

⁸ Opinion Matters survey on behalf of TUI Travel PLC (2010)



Quality Badge

In addition, the STF is one of the Awarding Bodies for the Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) Quality Badge which is the self regulation scheme with the widest acceptance. The Quality Badge provides for the first time a national accreditation combining the essential elements of provision – learning and safety – into one easily recognisable and trusted Quality Badge for all types of Learning Outside the Classroom provider organisations. The badge serves an important purpose and helps to promote safety and best practice for outdoor learning providers. Local Authority have previously taken a prominent role in encouraging schools to adopt these standards because they provided a relatively uncomplicated way of ensuring high class provision in outdoor learning as well as meeting health and safety standards. However, the major barrier we have found is that there is a lack of awareness of the badge in schools and we are concerned that this could be further exacerbated by the diminishing role of local authorities in school management. The STF would like to see Ofsted recognise the value of the Quality Badge within its inspection framework and encourage schools to engage with Quality Badge providers in outdoor education activities to ensure schools are able to access reputable and recommended travel companies.

Behaviour

The STF would also like to highlight the behavioural benefits of outdoor education and school trips, particularly in regard to engaging the hardest to reach groups and those at risk of becoming NEET.

Evidence demonstrates that pupils who are positively engaged in learning are less likely to have behaviour problems and it is well known that trips to museums, visits to historical landmarks in foreign countries, and practical science field work all increase pupils' involvement, enjoyment and achievement. The Education Select Committee's recent inquiry into Behaviour and Discipline found that the curriculum should be both "differentiated and enjoyable" if it is to have a beneficial effect on standards of behaviour. The Committee also highlighted the link between the way a teacher effectively uses the curriculum to hold children's attention and good behaviour. In conclusion, the Committee recommended that the Government take a less prescriptive approach to allow teachers to apply the curriculum in ways which engage children more including the use of "practical learning"⁹.

⁹ Education Select Committee, *Behaviour and Discipline in Schools*, (2011)



In addition, a recent Ofsted report on English teaching found that an inappropriate or dull curriculum will not inspire pupils or generate high standards and emphasised the importance of school trips and outdoor education in helping to enthuse pupils. The report also demonstrated that schools with good practice “ensured that pupils’ experience in English extended beyond the classroom”, highlighting the benefits of extracurricular experiences outside school, such as theatre trips, in helping to meet pupil’s needs and interests¹⁰. A previous Ofsted report on learning outside the classroom also found that well planned out of classroom activities can “not only enhance pupils’ learning, but can also re-engage those who are hard to motivate”¹¹.

Outdoor education and other forms of school trips help to enthuse and engage pupils, particularly those from the hardest to reach groups. This not only encourages good behaviour but also helps to improve attainment. Therefore, the STF would like to see the new Ofsted inspection framework assess the ways in which teachers’ engage children curriculum through innovative practice, such as outdoor and practical education, in order to help improve pupil behaviour.

6. Effectiveness of Leadership and Management

The STF also welcome Ofsted’s proposals for leadership and management to focus strongly on improving the quality of teaching and learning, in order to promote pupils’ learning and progress. Within this context, the STF would like to see school leadership and management evaluated on its ability to facilitate good teaching practices through the encouragement of outdoor education, particularly in regard to over coming bureaucratic barriers that can prevent teachers from taking their students into the outdoor classroom.

For example, in recent years the STF has found that the “rarely covers” guidance has had a significant impact on all the uptake of outdoor learning experiences. As you may be aware, the Government have an agreement with teaching unions which states that teachers must only ‘rarely cover’ for absent colleagues, and in unforeseen circumstances. School trips are considered to be planned absences. Unfortunately there is evidence emerging of outdoor learning activities being cancelled due to the ‘rarely cover’ provisions. We support the view expressed by Anthony Thomas, Chairman of the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom, that young people are becoming “entombed” indoors at least partly due to the “rarely covers” guidance.

¹⁰ Ofsted, *Excellence in English* (2011)

¹¹ Ofsted, *Learning outside the classroom: how far should you go?* (2008)



We would like to see Ofsted judge school management in terms of its effectiveness in reducing such burdens on teachers, enabling them to dedicate more time to ensuring a high standard of teaching and learning. We welcome the findings of Lord Young's Review and his proposals to simplify the process that schools and other organisations undertake before taking children on outdoor learning experiences and recommend Ofsted help to implement these proposals by evaluating the effectiveness of school leaders in reducing such burdens. As outlined above, we would also like to bring to your attention the valuable role that organisations such as the STF can play in overcoming such burdens involved in arranging school trips.

Pupil Premium

The STF welcome the consultation's proposals that school leaders have a particular responsibility for narrowing the gap in achievement between potentially vulnerable pupils and their peers and promote equality of opportunity. The STF would like to highlight the vital role that outdoor education plays in enhancing and raising education attainment, particular for pupils in some of the hardest to reach groups. We welcome the Coalition Government's commitment to a Pupil Premium to provide additional funding for more disadvantaged pupils to ensure they benefit from the same opportunities as pupils from richer families and specifically endorse Schools Minister Nick Gibb MP's recent Parliamentary Written Answer which states that "school may in future wish to consider using the pupil premium funding to enable such children to benefit from out of school educational activities." We are aware that the Department for Education is exploring options for supporting disadvantaged pupils and we would like to highlight our concerns about the access that pupils from low income families have to school trips and visits; for these children school provision may be the only opportunity they have to experience different environments from their immediate locality.

Therefore, it will be important for Ofsted to consider access to outdoor education for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds in any evaluation of school measures to narrow the attainment gap going forward to ensure that pupils from poorer socio-economic backgrounds are also able to access the benefits brought by outdoor education.

7. Contact Details

If you require any further information, please contact Ian Pearson, School Travel Forum, 222 Southbank House, London, SE1 7SJ by telephone 020 7463 0690, or by email: liane.cresswell@whitehouseconsulting.co.uk