

# Glenridding Beck – Investigation Report

## Drowning of Max Palmer in Glenridding Beck 26 May 2002

### Circumstances and lessons

#### OVERVIEW

1. Three staff from a Lancashire high school took a party of twelve Year 8 pupils to Glenridding, Cumbria for an activity weekend. The party also contained three primary school-age children including the deceased, Max Palmer. The deceased's mother was one of the adults accompanying the visit.
2. On the Sunday morning, the party went to a pool in Glenridding Beck to do an activity called "plunge pooling". This involved jumping 4 m into a rock pool in a mountain stream and swimming to an exit point. Parties from the school had done the plunge pooling a number of times in the past.
3. On the weekend of the tragedy, the weather was cold and wet. The stream was in spate and the water very cold. Immediately after jumping in, Max was seen to be panicking and was unable to get out. The leader jumped in to rescue him, but after a few minutes was overcome by the cold and left the pool. Max's mother who was helping out on the weekend then jumped in, but was also overcome by the cold and had to be rescued. The pupil who pulled her from the water was also affected by the cold. Both he and the mother were airlifted to hospital and treated for hypothermia.
4. Max was washed over the weir at the exit of the pool. He was pulled from the beck approximately 150 meters below the pool, but was pronounced dead at the scene.
5. The investigation of this tragedy by the HSE and Cumbria Police showed:
  - serious errors of judgement by the party leader in planning and leading the activity - the main cause of the tragedy
  - some shortcomings in checking procedures
  - some shortcomings in the LEA's arrangements for educational visits
  - misunderstandings between the LEA and the school as to certain responsibilities
6. This report identifies these mistakes and shows what teachers, schools and LEAs can do to learn from them so that children can enjoy educational visits safely.

#### PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

The publicity surrounding the incident and the subsequent jailing for manslaughter of the teacher who led the trip has led to a lot of concern about the safe running of school visits. This was reflected in a recent report from the Commons Select Committee. To put the Glenridding tragedy in context, however, it has been estimated that in England there are 7-10 million pupil visits per year, which involve educational or recreational activity. The overwhelming majority of these visits are carried out safely and responsibly by teachers who take the time and effort to get things right. The benefits to children of these trips are immense.

When a tragedy does occur on an educational visit, it is important that lessons are learned and widely disseminated. This report is written with the following aims:

- To provide an account of the incident and the underlying circumstances
- To identify what went wrong and provide guidance on good practice to prevent others from making similar mistakes
- To make some wider observations on the role of school trips.

**This report is published to help prevent further tragedies, not to blame.**

## FACTS & COMMENT

The following pages set out in the left hand column the facts relating to the incident and in the right hand column comment on them.

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

Throughout the report reference is made to the following DfES documents which provide the main source of good practice guidance to schools and LEAs on educational visits:

- Health and Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits (HASPEV)
- Health and Safety: Responsibilities and Powers
- Standards for LEAs in Overseeing Educational Visits
- Standards for Adventure
- A Handbook for Group Leaders

These documents can be found at: <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/healthandsafety/visits/>

**The report is in seven parts:**

[PART A: PLUNGE POOLING AND RELATED ACTIVITIES](#)

[PART B. HISTORY OF SCHOOL VISITS TO GLENRIDDING](#)

[PART C. LCC AND SCHOOL PROCEDURES FOR SCHOOL VISITS](#)

[PART D. PREPARATIONS FOR THE FATEFUL TRIP](#)

[PART E: EVENTS AT GLENRIDDING BECK](#)

[PART F: GENERAL HEALTH AND SAFETY MANAGEMENT AT THE SCHOOL](#)

[PART G: HEALTH AND SAFETY MANAGEMENT WITHIN LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL](#)

## CONTEXT

1. Under health and safety law:

- Employers are responsible for ensuring that there is effective management of H&S
- People such as school managers and teachers are responsible for the H&S of pupils both when they are authorised to be on the school premises and when they are on authorised school activities elsewhere.

2. Besides the overriding need to put the health and safety of children at the very top of the education agenda, effective H&S management systems are needed to:

- meet legal requirements
- assure parents that the school is good at managing risks
- give staff the confidence that they can rely on well-planned H&S systems when carrying out their responsibilities

3. Successful H&S management has five key elements

- Establishing policies
- Organising the health and safety management system
- Planning, assessing risks, setting standards and implementing procedures
- Monitoring performance
- Review

Further guidance is given in the HSE publication "[Successful Health and Safety Management](#)" (HSG65).

4. Experience shows that accidents usually result from several factors coming together to cause harm. This report:

- Summarises the very detailed investigation by HSE into the tragedy at Glenridding Beck
- Shows that the chain of events leading to the tragedy began long before the fateful weekend

- Shows how compliance with existing guidelines and good practice prevents such chains developing and identifies some new issues
- Makes clear that such prevention relies on having effective H&S management systems and guarding against individual and institutional complacency
- Demonstrates the importance of pupil involvement in organising safe and successful educational visits

5. Many of the learning points, recommendations and good practice in this report reinforce these messages and support the existing guidance.

## PART A. PLUNGE POOLING AND RELATED ACTIVITIES

These pages look at the type of activity that the party was doing at Glenridding Beck. The lessons learned cover particularly the need:

- to ensure leader competence, particularly for activities for which there are no specific national qualifications
- for LEAs and others to have policies in respect of activities for which there are no specific national qualifications
- for leaders to base risk assessments on a thorough understanding of the variables and how they may change with time

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:**

- Types of activity
- Assessing leader competencies
- Understanding hazards and assessing risks

It ends with a summary of the key points.

## Facts

### Types of activity

1. Plunge pooling involves jumping from a height into a natural pool, often in a mountain stream.
2. Activities such as plunge pooling and ghyll scrambling/gorge walking/canyoning (ascending or descending a mountain stream) are known as “combined water/rock activities”. They are part of a growing number of “hybrid” activities, so called because they require more than one outdoor skill.

### Assessing leader competencies

3. There are National Governing Bodies (NGBs) for sports/activities such as mountaineering, caving and canoeing. They have structured programmes for the training and assessment of instructors. There are no such programmes in respect of hybrid activities, mainly because of the range of possible combinations of activity.

4. A typical NGB - approved programme for a trainee leader would involve a residential course followed by a requirement to keep a logbook of relevant activities for a minimum period or number of trips. This would be followed by a formal assessment.

## Comment

There were no formal standards for hybrid activities, but the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority (AALA) had produced guidance for its inspectors. This document “Collective Interpretation 6.6: Combined water/rock activities” is now on the AALA website <http://www.aala.org/guidance.html>.

This and other “Collective Interpretations” on the website provide invaluable practical guidance on managing outdoor activities. There is also a useful paper “Good Practice in Adventure Activities Within the Education Sector”.

HSE has produced an Information Sheet “Combined water and rock activities: Guidance for providers”. A download is available at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/etis13.pdf>

***The plunge pool activity would not have been licensable by AALA if offered by a commercial provider. Combined water/rock activities which involve climbing are licensable.***

***In the absence of formal qualifications for hybrid activities, it is good practice for leaders to hold qualifications in closely-related activities. For instance, for plunge pooling or gorge walking, qualifications in caving (a gorge is a cave without the roof) or mountaineering plus white water canoeing may be appropriate.***

***In the absence of NGB awards specific to combined water/rock activities, in-house approval following appropriate training, assessment and certification by recognised technical experts would be appropriate. It is particularly important that the leader understands the relevant hazards and risks and is able to implement effective rescue procedures. Given the nature of the competencies required, many schools will use licensed outdoor centres.***

***The level of the qualification required needs to be matched to the levels of hazard and risk. Combined water/rock activities should always be treated in the first instance as high hazard. Only when proper risk assessments have been done can the necessary understanding of the hazards, risks and precautions be gained.***

***The NGB assessment of a trainee leader is likely to cover technical competence in the activity, including the ability to assess and control risk. Some NGBs use the following statement: “It is a combination of technical competence and leadership skills supported by a wide range of experience that forms the basis for effective group management. The scheme addresses all these elements. However, the employer or operating authority must ultimately decide whether a leader possesses the personal attributes needed to take responsibility for a particular group of people”.*** Head teachers and other senior managers should be best placed to consider whether a member of staff has appropriate leadership skills, experience and other personal qualities needed to run a particular visit.

## Understanding hazards and assessing risks

5. Conditions in mountain rivers can change immensely over short periods. Heavy rain can quickly change a shallow warm stream into a raging freezing torrent. A person proposing to lead an activity such as plunge pooling would need to understand the significance of a number of variables (**hazards**) which could give rise to danger (**risk**). These include:

Water depth  
Water flow  
Water temperature  
Water currents  
Air temperature  
Rocks and other physical features  
The ability/make-up of the group.

6. Many outdoor activity incidents occur when a leader, who has done an activity in good conditions attempts to repeat it in poor conditions with little thought that anything can go wrong. Because they have not personally experienced the range of conditions at the site nor sought local advice, they may be unprepared for the effects of more extreme conditions e.g. wind/water/cold.

7. The overall risk assessment for an activity such as plunge pooling would need to cover:

**Generic risk assessment** - The risks inherent in the activity (written)

**Site-specific risk assessment** - Particular risks associated with the site e.g. water depth, ease of exit, difficulty of rescue (written)

**Dynamic risk assessment** - The risks at the time, taking account of, for instance, the changing conditions and the fitness of the party to undertake the activity (physical, mental and attitudinal)

Dynamic risk assessment should continue throughout the day/activity to take account of any changing circumstances

***The variability of the environment and the lack of formal qualifications and standards for hybrid activities means that leaders require a high degree of skill and judgement. Head teachers need to consider whether the school should provide water/rock activities and, if so, whether it has the resources to provide them safely in-house, or whether they should approach a licensed provider. If such activities are to be provided by school staff, the head teacher should seek independent verification of the suitability of the venue and the technical competence of the proposed leader(s) to provide the activity at that venue. The fact that someone has led an activity before does not, in itself, mean that they are competent.***

***It is good practice for LEAs to have a clear policy and provide guidance in this area.***

***It is good practice for the generic and site-specific risk assessments to identify "cut-off" criteria which can be used as reference points for the dynamic risk assessment. These might:-***

- ***Be absolute e.g. "we don't do the activity if the water is above this level"***
- ***Identify additional precautions e.g. "wet suits are essential if the water is colder than...."; "buoyancy aids if the depth of the water exceeds... or the group includes poor swimmers"; "helmets if there is a risk of contact with rock"***
- ***Set a minimum age or skill level required to undertake the activity safely in particular conditions.***

DfES publications on educational visits, particularly "[Standards for LEAs in Overseeing Educational Visits](#)" and "[Standards for Adventure](#)" provide much useful practical guidance including information on risk assessment and leader competence. The Scottish Executive provides guidance "Safety of Pupils on Educational Excursions"

***Note: Risk assessments are a leader's fundamental intelligence on health and safety. They are the route to identifying the right control measures, not an end in themselves. They need to be fit for purpose. If the assessment paperwork is seen to be more important than the control measures, the system is probably too complex.***

## Key points

Nobody should lead adventure activities unless they have been assessed as competent, understand the full range of hazards and risks and can implement rescue and emergency procedures (Para A 3).

Head teachers need to consider whether the school should provide water/rock activities and, if so, whether it has the resources to provide them safely in-house, or whether they should approach a licensed provider (Para A 5).

If such activities are to be provided by school staff, the head teacher should seek independent verification by a competent person of the suitability of the venue and the technical competence of the proposed leader(s) to provide the activity at that venue (Para A 5).

"Head teachers and other senior managers should consider whether the proposed leader(s) have the appropriate leadership skills, experience and other personal qualities needed for a particular visit, in addition to the technical competence required." (Para A 4/5)

The fact that someone has led an activity before does not, in itself, mean that they are competent (Para A5).

There is much useful technical guidance on the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority (AALA) website (Para A 2).

LEAs should have a policy on the provision of combined water/rock activities (Para A 5).

Leaders must be competent in dynamic risk assessment for the activity, so that they can continuously evaluate the implications of changing conditions. Dynamic risk assessments will need to take account of any generic and site-specific risk assessments and good practice (Para A 7).

Risk assessments should be fit for the purpose (Para A 7).

The comments in Part A are applicable to many other potentially hazardous activities.

## **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).

## **PART C. LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL AND SCHOOL PROCEDURES FOR SCHOOL VISITS**

These pages describe the LEA's guidance and the School's procedures.

The lessons learned cover particularly the need for:

- clear LEA guidance for schools which is regularly reviewed
- clear procedures within schools which establish accountabilities and are regularly monitored
- school governors to question the objectives of and management arrangements for educational visits

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 two sections:**

- Lancashire County Council guidance
- The School's visits procedures

It ends with a summary of the key points.

## Facts

### Lancashire County Council guidance

1. Lancashire County Council (LCC) sent its internal guidance "LCC guidelines for day and residential visits" to all LEA-maintained schools in April 1997.
2. These "LCC Guidelines" did not make specific reference to risk assessment. However, the LEA's general statement on H&S matters, set out as an annex to LCC's Scheme for Financing Schools, drew the attention of school governing bodies to the need for suitable and sufficient risk assessment.
3. The LCC Guidelines had an Appendix: "Guidance for validity of National Governing Body awards in outdoor activities". This included activities such as mountain walking, canoeing, rock climbing, caving, sailing,
4. The LCC Guidelines also contained a specific requirement for supervisors of water-based activities to have relevant life saving qualifications.
5. The Guidelines made reference to the British Association of Advisers and Lecturers in Physical Education (BAALPE) guidance "Safe Practice in Physical Education".
6. LCC had previously issued the BAALPE Guidelines and any revisions to all its schools and outdoor centres. In February 2000, the then latest version, the "Millennium Edition" was sent to all its maintained schools
7. On 26 August 1999, LCC had issued to all its schools the DfES guidance "[Health and Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits](#)" (HASPEV).
8. LCC had adopted the BAALPE guidelines as policy in respect of physical education, but their policy status in respect of outdoor visits was unclear. The Advisory Service based its training for PE teachers on the BAALPE guidelines.

## Comment

This was a slightly amended version of guidance originally issued to schools in February 1993. The guidance was informed by the Department for Education guidance "Safety in Outdoor Education" 1989.

***It is good practice for all LEA guidance on outdoor activities to set out clearly the LEA's expectations for risk assessment and provide any useful aids to help teachers carry out assessments to a level proportionate to the risk. Guidance documents etc should be kept up to date and checked for consistency.***

This guidance on NGB qualifications was helpful for schools in matching qualifications to the proposed activities. However, it did not cover situations where schools might provide activities outside the scope of the NGB qualifications. ***This was a weakness.***

***It is good practice for LEA guidance on outdoor activities to set out the extent and limits of what is covered and the activities for which specialist advice and/or high-level approval is required. This would include a clear statement of its position on activities not covered by NGB standards or guidance.***

The provision of the BAALPE (and DfES) guidelines to all schools by the LEA was a positive action. Both documents were sent to head teachers.

It is likely that in many schools the BAALPE guidelines will have been passed to the Head of PE. Hence they may not have been readily available to other teachers organising residential visits or outdoor education activities, particularly as the BAALPE guidelines had been adopted as policy in respect of PE. (See C8)

***It is important that LEA and school procedures and policies, not only draw attention to any supporting documentation, but also indicate how and why it is relevant.***

***The issue or revision of important documents such as the BAALPE and DfES guidelines should lead to review of an LEA's policies and procedures.***

***Review should also take place in the light of potential lessons to be learned from serious incidents both within and outside the Authority.***

***With many LEAs now having an intranet, it should be possible to disseminate rapidly revisions to policies or procedures.***

## The School's visits procedures

9. The Head teacher took up post in January 2000. As a priority, she revised the Staff Handbook to clarify roles and responsibilities and made it a Controlled Document.

10. The Staff Handbook contained the school's Safety Policy Statement which stated under "Out of School Activities" that (a) the Governors had formally adopted the County Guidelines. (b) "Accident and emergency procedures should be understood by all taking part and strictly adhered to" (c) it was the responsibility of the person organising the visit to ensure that the LCC guidelines and school policy were adhered to.

11. The Handbook also held the school's "Residential and Out of School Visits Policy". This did not set out the approval process *per se*, but it included a "School Visit Form" with a heading "approvals" containing spaces for the following to sign and date it:

- Teacher in charge
- Deputy Head
- Head teacher
- Governors

12. The opening paragraph of the LCC guidelines stated: "Approval of the Head teacher is required for all visits and activities off the school site. Approval of Governors is required for residential visits and they should be kept fully informed throughout the planning stage to ensure their continued approval."

13. The governors at the School expected the organiser to have followed the relevant guidelines and the information provided to have been checked by a member of the school's senior management. The governors might ask questions about new or unusual visits before giving approval but were less likely to do so for repeat visits.

***Ensuring clear lines of responsibility is an important aspect of good management.***

*The principles of document control are set out in ISO 9000 <http://www.bsi-global.com/>*

***This was a clear statement of the school's position on out of school activities.***

The system for checking the approval of visits had become degraded over time. There was also a lack of clarity over some of the responsibilities. The form itself was not seriously deficient. The weakness lay in the fact that there was no check of compliance with its requirements.

***Compliance with procedures should form part of a school's internal monitoring arrangements and should be a feature of LEA monitoring.***

HASPEV makes clear that the primary responsibility for ensuring the safety of a visit lies with the leader and the head teacher.

However, HASPEV also sets out (paragraph 20) some checks that the Governing Body should do.

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/healthandsafety/visits/>

***It is good practice for the Governing Body to be told well in advance of proposed visits. Governors should always be prepared to ask searching questions about the educational objectives and management arrangements for forthcoming school visits and the outcomes of completed visits.***

***LEAs can help Governors by providing information/training on key questions relating to educational visits.***

## Key points

- LEA guidance on outdoor activities should set out clearly the LEA's expectations for risk assessment
- LEA and school procedures and policies should draw attention to any supporting documentation and indicate how and why it is relevant
- LEAs should review their policies and procedures for educational visits whenever significant new or revised guidance is published by authoritative bodies
- It is good practice for documents relating to H&S policies and procedures to be subject to an appropriate level of Document Control
- Compliance with procedures should form part of a school's internal monitoring arrangements and should be a feature of LEA monitoring (PARA C11).
- Governors should always be prepared to ask searching questions about the educational objectives and management arrangements for forthcoming educational visits and the outcomes of completed visits.

## 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/](http://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***



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

*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.*

*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.

## PART E: EVENTS AT GLENRIDDING BECK

These pages describe what happened on the fateful visit to Glenridding.

The lessons learned cover particularly a leader's need:

- for good awareness of environmental conditions and their implications
- to continually reassess the risks and to be prepared to cancel the activity if it cannot be delivered safely
- to manage pupil expectations if the activity cannot be delivered
- for thorough and effective preparation
- for an emergency plan for the rescue and recovery of the party

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 six sections:**

- Environmental conditions
- Decision to do the activity
- A warning ignored
- The jump into the pool
- The failed rescue attempts
- Recovery of casualties

It ends with a summary of the key points.

## Facts

### Environmental conditions

1. It had been wet for much of the week and rained heavily en route to Glenridding on the Friday night. The beck outside the hostel was fast-flowing and noisy.

2. The next day was cold, wet and windy. The leader dismissed the idea of doing anything in the Glenridding area and took the party to Ambleside and Keswick. The children repeatedly asked when they could do the plunge pool. In the afternoon, they stopped in the car park at Glenridding where there was a Tourist Information Centre (TIC) displaying local weather forecasts. The forecasts warned of cloud and rain and a temperature of 5°Celsius at 3000 feet. The party did not visit the TIC.

### Decision to do the activity

3. In the evening, the leader said that they would do the plunge pool the following day.

4. There was no rain on Sunday morning. The leader looked at the beck and took the view that it had gone down considerably. He told the children that they would go to the plunge pool.

5. Only about half the party wanted to do the plunge pool, but the rest were told they had to walk up anyway. Those wanting to do it were told to put on shorts (or swimming kit), T-shirts and trainers and to take a towel. They left the hostel at about 10.30am.

## Comment

**Local knowledge can be very important for assessing the risks of proposed activities. Relevant information might include:**

- **An understanding of the behaviour of local streams and rivers in response to rain**
- **Changes in the condition of local watercourses, footpaths, footbridges etc since the activity was last done**
- **Local weather in the previous few days**
- **Local weather forecasts**
- **Advice from other users or local Outdoor Activity Centres/National Parks Service about changing conditions**

Interpretation of the current and past forecasts would indicate that any rainwater running off the fells into Glenridding Beck would be very cold. **This would be important information for a dynamic risk assessment.**

The leader was under pressure to do the activity because of the pupil expectation that had been created. Leaders need to be careful not to create unrealistic expectations and should not allow participant pressure to cloud their judgement.

Close to the hostel there was an Environment Agency weir equipped with an instrument to record the water level every 15 minutes. Further up the beck was a depth marker post.

These devices might have been used during a site-specific risk assessment to identify possible "cut-off points" (see paragraph A6). Furthermore, involving the children in looking at the water level at these devices would have involved them in practical decision-making and subtly educated them a little in risk assessment. There was also a bridge nearby from where they might have thrown sticks into the water to estimate its velocity.

Reluctance of participants to do a planned activity should lead to a reassessment of the risks because:

The activity might need to be modified (with possible implications for supervision levels) or "Plan B" implemented

Any genuine concern by a pupil about their ability to do an activity safely should always be taken seriously

The pupils should have been adequately equipped for the weather, since it was foreseeable they might be standing around in the wet. They should have carried insulating and windproof clothing with them. Such matters need to be considered in risk assessments.

## A warning ignored

6. A party of similarly - aged children from another school (which had also used the plunge pool on previous occasions) was staying at a neighbouring hostel. Their teachers had decided not to use the pool that day because of the weather and water conditions, but to take the children up anyway and show them why it was too dangerous. One of these teachers subsequently gave a description of the water movement in the pool which closely matched the video evidence.

7. Those children accepted that it was too dangerous and the party began to walk back to their hostel. Shortly after leaving the pool, the descending party met Max's party coming up. One of their teachers told the leader that he thought the pool was too dangerous and that they would not let the children jump. The leader replied that he had a rope and continued towards the pool.

## The jump into the pool

8. The party arrived at the jumping point - a flat ledge about 4 m above the pool. The leader jumped in and got out quickly, saying it was fine. The other teacher went down to the exit point while the leader and Max's mother stayed at the jumping point.

9. When it was Max's turn to jump, the leader asked him if he could swim and if he wanted to go in. Max replied "yes" to both questions. The leader directed him where to jump and Max entered the pool.

10. As soon as he surfaced, it was evident that he was in trouble and panicking.

The teachers from this other school took the opportunity to teach their pupils about risk and thus gave value to the "failed" activity.

Videos of the pool taken on the day show foaming water rushing across the middle of the pool towards the exit, but some apparently calm water at the side forming a back current. A short clip forms the background to the Home Page. [To see more of the video, click here.](#)

***The warning from the other school should have led to an immediate reassessment of the risks (dynamic risk assessment). The failure to respond was a grave error.***

The rope was in a minibus parked at the hostel about half a kilometre down the valley.

***A rope on its own would neither prevent anyone getting into trouble, nor be much help in an attempted rescue unless there is someone trained to use it and the rope is of a suitable type and length.***

It must have been evident to the leader as soon as he entered the water that it was extremely cold. ***That alone should have caused him to cancel the activity.*** Several of the witnesses from the mountain rescue team said how cold the water was. It was subsequently measured at 8.6°Celsius (47 Fahrenheit) - as cold as the English Channel in February.

***It was far too late to be asking about Max's swimming ability. Hence the importance of the "parental consent to swim" proforma for water-based activities (see paragraph D9).***

***A sensation of "having the breath knocked out of you" is a feature of jumping into cold water. It can be very frightening when experienced for the first time and can lead to panic. This should be recognised at the risk assessment stage.***

***(Note: The "sudden panicker" phenomenon is increasingly being recognised as one of the risk factors in outdoor drownings. It should be considered in the risk assessment and emergency plan). It is recommended that people do not jump into water outdoors without having first swum in it to assess the conditions for themselves. There is more detailed guidance in the AALA "Collective Interpretation" for combined water/rock activities.***

<http://www.aala.org/guidance.html>

## The failed rescue attempts

11. The leader jumped in and attempted to get hold of Max, but the boy was so panic-stricken that he kept pushing the leader under the water. He tried a number of times to get Max out. Then Max's mother jumped in to try and save her son. Shortly afterwards, the leader realised that he was succumbing to the cold and went to the exit point where the teacher helped him out. He was by now so cold that he was unable to contribute anything further to the rescue.

12. There was an attempt to use a string of towels as a substitute rope, but they sank. Eventually Max's mother was also overcome by the cold.

13. At some time when Max's mother was in the water, the teacher told some of the boys to get the rope. They ran to the hostel. Some fetched the rope while others raised the alarm. Three staff from the other school ran towards the scene with rescue and survival equipment.

## Recovery of casualties

14. One of the pupils went into the water to try to grab Max. However, Max was washed out of the pool and down the rocky bed of the stream. This pupil then found Max's mother and, with the teacher's help, pulled her onto a small ledge. He was by now very cold. She was semi-conscious.

15. The children with the rope arrived back at the pool at about the time that Max was washed over the weir. The teachers from the other school arrived soon after. They put Mrs Palmer in a sleeping bag to keep her warm until the mountain rescue arrived.

16. Max was pulled from the beck further downstream by some pupils. He was pronounced dead at the scene. His mother and the pupil who saved her were flown to hospital and treated for hypothermia.

***The leader might have been able to rescue Max at this point if he had had training on how to deal with a panicking swimmer. Expert witnesses commented that the effective use of a rope at this point could have led to a successful rescue. However, not only was the rope not there, but the other two adults were inexperienced in its use. The leader's bold attempts to save Max were no substitute for proper preparation, organisation and equipment.***

The leader had no warm clothing to put on, despite the fact that jumping into the pool was the planned activity

### ***Safety ropes for water-based activities should float.***

All the time that these rescue attempts were going on (approximately half an hour), a number of people (including some highly experienced mountaineering instructors) were ascending a path approximately 10 metres away. However, the pool is largely hidden from people ascending the path and the noise of the water that day probably meant that they heard nothing of the incident. Had the party sought outside help at the outset, the outcome might have been very different. The children were only told to get the rope (not explicitly to go for help) and that was after Max had been in the water for about 20-25 minutes.

***Risk assessments should consider how the party might respond to a serious incident, including identifying any emergency procedures for contacting sources of help. A few minutes could make all the difference.***

The actions of the pupil who pulled Max's mother from the water and of the teachers from the other school who attended to her probably saved her life.

***Those teachers demonstrated the level of preparedness for an emergency which should be expected from leaders of outdoor activities. Hence the importance of effective NGB training and assessment (or LEA- accredited training, assessment and certification by recognised technical experts). See paragraphs A3 and A4.***

Despite their lack of experience, some of the pupils acted with great bravery in trying to save Max. Fortunately none of them was seriously harmed, but the conditions were such that these rescue attempts could easily have had a more serious outcome.

***These children were put at risk as a direct consequence of the failure to plan for an emergency.***

## Key points

- Leaders should make sure that they have sufficient “local knowledge” (Paras E 1, E 4)
- It is extremely important to have the best available information to support dynamic risk assessment (for example in this case, pupil and leader capabilities, water temperatures and rescue options) (Para E 2)
- Risk assessments should consider how the party might respond to a serious incident, including identifying any emergency procedures for contacting sources of help (Para E 13).
- Children should be involved in practical risk assessment and decision-making to help them become “risk aware” (Paras E 4, E 6).
- Leaders need to be careful not to create unrealistic expectations and should not allow participant pressure to cloud their judgement (Para E 3).
- Reluctance of participants to do a planned activity should lead to a reassessment of the risks (Para E 5).
- Any warnings should lead to an immediate reassessment of the proposed activity and the likely risks (Para E 7).
- Parties should be properly equipped for the environmental conditions according to the findings of the risk assessments, including dynamic risk assessments (Para E 5).
- Risk assessments for outdoor water-based activities should take account of the possibility of a panicking casualty (Para E 10).
- Emergency equipment is of limited use if people have not been trained to use it correctly (Para E 7).

## **PART F: GENERAL HEALTH AND SAFETY MANAGEMENT AT THE SCHOOL**

These pages look at the underlying arrangements for health and safety management at the school.

The lessons learned cover particularly the need:

- clear lines of accountability
- health and safety management arrangements to consider activities and systems as well as premises
- effective procedures for monitoring

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 school environment
- Priorities
- Monitoring

It ends with a summary of the key points.



## Facts

### The school environment

1. The Head teacher took up post in January 2000. Health and Safety (H&S) had previously been seen as the Head teacher's personal responsibility and there was little delegation of H&S functions. One of the new Head's early tasks was to clarify responsibilities and revise the staff handbook accordingly.

2. The Head teacher revised the school visits section of the staff handbook in 2000. She was mindful of the (then recent) Stainforth Beck tragedy, so downloaded relevant guidance from the DfES website and showed it to the governors. She considered that the policies and procedures that she had put in place were appropriate.

3. At the time of Max Palmer's death, most of the H&S issues in the school related to the poor condition of the buildings. The Governors had a "Buildings and Health and Safety Committee" which considered mainly premises matters. A senior teacher was given responsibility for the premises and reported to that Committee. He also helped informally with some H&S matters together with one of the administrative staff.

### Priorities

4. In 2000 the School had a number of difficulties. Pupil numbers were falling and it was being reorganised onto one site. The incoming Head teacher had numerous issues to address, including accountability. She prioritised accordingly. H&S was not seen as an immediate problem because staff were in regular contact with LCC's schools Health and Safety Team and there was considerable H&S - related activity in the school e.g. risk assessment training.

5. The School's Ofsted reports in 2000 and 2002 had commented positively on the fact that children had the opportunity to go on activity weekends in the Lake District.

## Comment

While we expect every head teacher to accept a personal responsibility for H&S, there is a danger that they will not be able to give sufficient time to the detail, particularly in a large school.

***It can be good practice for head teachers to delegate many H&S functions, providing that they clearly define responsibilities and establish clear lines of accountability and monitoring arrangements.***

In October 2000 two schoolgirls were drowned while river walking in Stainforth Beck. There is a note on the incident on the AALA website <http://www.aala.org/guidance.html> Look under "Articles"

***It is good practice to review H&S procedures in the light of reported incidents and developments in local and national guidance***

***It is good practice for every school to have a person with a formal responsibility to act as the focal point for H&S.***

***Educational Visit Co-ordinators (EVCs) have a specific role within the school in respect of school visits. They may or may not have additional H&S functions***

***The H&S responsibilities of such people should be clearly defined (including both the extent and limits of those responsibilities) in their job descriptions. They should have sufficient training and resources to do the job effectively.***

***Although the most "visible" H&S matters are often premises-related, they should not obscure the need for effective H&S management, including establishing systems and accountabilities and monitoring compliance.***

***Head teachers have to prioritise, but it can be dangerous to assume that if something is not an immediate problem, it is functioning correctly. Active H&S management, including monitoring by head teachers, senior managers and governors is important to ensure compliance and prevent complacency.***

Ofsted views favourably a good level of provision of extra-curricular activities, but inspectors would not normally look at the processes involved.

***Favourable Ofsted reports about school trips are not confirmation of safe practice and are no substitute for thorough risk assessment and monitoring.***

Note: An Ofsted paper on the personal development aspects of outdoor education is at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/>

## Monitoring

6. Health and safety monitoring was largely premises-related. There were termly inspections of the buildings and the results were sent to the Governors' Buildings and Health and Safety Committee.

7. By 2002, the school had structured systems for performance management, staff appraisal and staff development and had received Investors in People (IIP) accreditation.

Although the Glenridding weekends, including the plunge pooling activity, were well known in the school, no one in senior management identified the need to find out what actually happened on the visits. ***This was a serious omission.***

***As with risk assessment, monitoring needs to cover both activities and sites. One simple way of monitoring is to check compliance with the precautions identified in risk assessments or set out in safe operating procedures.***

***Monitoring should be seen as supportive, recording and acknowledging good practice and achievement, as well as identifying problems and remedying lack of achievement. H&S monitoring should be part of wider monitoring arrangements in the context of improving performance.***

***It is good practice for school governing bodies to receive evidence of monitoring by the school and LEA which shows both what has been done well and what can be done better. The aim should be to achieve continuous improvement.***

***H&S considerations should feature in performance monitoring, staff appraisal and staff development programmes.***

## Key points

- Head teachers can delegate H&S functions, but need to clearly define responsibilities and establish clear lines of accountability
- It is good practice to review H&S procedures in the light of reported incidents
- Every school should have a person acting as a focal point for H&S who has clearly defined responsibilities and is provided with effective training and resources
- Educational Visit Co-ordinators (EVCs) have a specific role within the school in respect of school visits
- Monitoring by head teachers, senior managers and governors is important to ensure compliance and prevent complacency.
- LEAs should have monitoring systems in place and provide feedback to schools (Para F6)
- Monitoring needs to cover activities and H&S management systems as well as sites.
- One simple way of monitoring is to check compliance with the precautions identified in risk assessments or set out in safe operating procedures.
- Monitoring should be seen as supportive, recording and acknowledging good practice and achievement, as well as identifying and remedying lack of achievement.
- It is good practice for school governing bodies to receive evidence from monitoring by the school and LEA which shows both what has been done well and what can be done better. The aim should be to achieve continuous improvement.
- H&S considerations should feature in performance monitoring, staff appraisal and staff development programmes
- Favourable Ofsted reports about school trips are not confirmation of safe practice and are no substitute for thorough risk assessment.

## **PART G: HEALTH AND SAFETY MANAGEMENT WITHIN LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL (LCC) AS A LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY (LEA)**

These pages describe the education H&S management arrangements within LCC in the environment of Fair Funding. The lessons learned cover particularly the need for:

- unambiguous systems for assuring the competencies of staff
- LEAs to have policies which cover the eventuality of schools wishing to do activities for which there are no nationally defined standards or awards.
- clear arrangements for the monitoring by the LEA of schools' Health and Safety performance consistent with the requirements of Fair Funding
- training and support for Governors to help them ask the right questions on Health and Safety

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 nine sections:**

- Statutory responsibilities
- Local management of schools
- Appointing staff and checking competencies
- Standards for outdoor activity providers
- Role of School Advisers
- General H&S advice to schools
- Health and safety training
- Monitoring and audit
- Support for governors

It ends with a summary of the key points.

Note: The present tense is used for much of the text as many of the procedures are still current. It will be clear from the context where procedures have since been changed.

## Facts

### Statutory responsibilities

1. The investigation concentrated on the health and safety management arrangements in LCC's Education and Cultural Services Directorate, particularly on the role of LCC as a Local Education Authority (LEA).

2. Within LCC, H&S responsibilities are largely delegated to Directorates, but there are several cross-directorate policies, procedures and structures, such as a central health and safety committee. At the time of the accident there was a Director and an elected member with specific briefs for Health and Safety.

3. Lancashire is a large LEA with over 600 schools. About half the primary and secondary schools in Lancashire are voluntary aided or foundation schools, in which the LEA is not the employer.

4. The statutory responsibility for H&S has not been changed substantially by the requirements (under the Education Reform Act 1988 and subsequent legislation) for Local Management of Schools (LMS) - also referred to as "Fair Funding" or "Delegation".

## Comment

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HSW Act) places overall responsibility for health and safety with the employer.

Employers' duties in respect of schools include ensuring, so far as is reasonably practicable:

- the health and safety of pupils in-school and on off-site visits
- the health, safety and welfare of staff
- the health and safety of visitors to school and volunteers involved in any school activity.

LCC, as the LEA, is the employer in community, voluntary controlled, community special, and maintained nursery schools. Also in pupil referral units.

The governing body is the employer, for most staff, in foundation, foundation special and voluntary aided schools.

LEAs also have wider responsibilities under education law in connection with all maintained schools in their area.

## Local management of schools

5. As a result of local management, an increasing number of decisions are taken at school level by governing bodies and head teachers, but in practice much day-to-day responsibility for Health and Safety functions was devolved to schools before LMS.

In those schools where the LEA is the employer, it can delegate certain H&S tasks and functions to head teachers. **The LEA cannot delegate its HSW Act statutory duties as an employer.** Further information is contained in the DfES publication "[Health and Safety: Responsibilities and Powers](#)".

***Where tasks/functions are delegated, the LEA should make clear who is doing what, and monitor to confirm that tasks are being carried out.***

***It is good practice that Schemes should contain such provisions. However, in practice, achieving the correct balance between autonomy and support can be difficult.***

An important lesson from the investigation was the need for much greater clarity and guidance on monitoring arrangements and responsibilities.

6. LCC's "Scheme for Financing Schools" requires schools to have regard to H&S requirements. However, their health and safety management arrangements also have to take account of the DfES view that LEAs should strike a balance between the reasonable autonomy that individual schools can expect under Fair Funding and the provision of support to them.

Where an LEA believes that the Health and Safety of anyone on-site or engaged in school activities off-site is at risk, it can make a direction to the Governing Body and Head teacher of a community or voluntary controlled school.

7. The Fair Funding legislation gives LEAs some powers of intervention and direction in the event of non-compliance with health and safety requirements. LCC has not had to apply the sanctions available under the Scheme or issue directions to schools, but has given advice to schools on Health and Safety concerns.

Education law allows LEAs to retain funds:

- where compliance with Health and Safety duties cannot reasonably be achieved through tasks delegated to schools
- to monitor the performance of these tasks by schools
- where necessary, to give Health and Safety advice to schools

## Appointing staff and checking competencies

8. Under Fair Funding, all categories of schools are responsible for appointing and dismissing staff and for arranging the checking of staff qualifications.

*It needs to be absolutely clear who is to do these checks and what monitoring is appropriate.*

LCC's guidance also advises schools to contact the LEA to arrange for Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) clearance for voluntary helpers on educational visits.

9. Schools may buy personnel services from the LEA or elsewhere. Safe recruitment practice includes scrutinising applicants, verifying identity and any academic or vocational qualifications, obtaining professional and character references, checking previous employment history and physical capabilities.

***If schools buy a service they need to be very clear about the extent and limits of any checks undertaken by the service provider. Likewise LEAs should also make clear to schools their expectations and requirements regarding the checking of qualifications etc where schools use alternative providers.***

10. LCC provides model personnel policies to help schools. They advise that all candidates should be asked to show proof of their qualifications prior to appointment. LCC also issues a model letter to schools for inviting candidates to interview. This includes the text: *"Where possible, please produce at the interview documentary evidence for all qualifications stated on your application form. The successful applicant will be required to produce original certificates prior to the appointment being confirmed."*

***A requirement to produce original certificates is very valuable, but there is no substitute for cross-checking with the awarding bodies. It is good practice for LEAs to provide guidance for Governors on how this can be done.***

***For adventurous activities, ensuring the competence of proposed leaders may be a wider task than a simple check of qualifications, for instance, it may need to involve "field" monitoring by a competent technical adviser. The DfES supplements to "Health and Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits", which were published in July 2002, contain helpful advice on arrangements for assessing and ensuring competence.***

## Standards for outdoor activity providers

11. LCC operates four Outdoor Education Centres (OECs) through its Outdoor Service. These centres are visited by LEA Advisers and are subject to AALA inspection and licensing. The LEA encourages schools to use the OECs, which have a good health and safety record.

Many schools deliver the outdoor education part of the curriculum by arranging visits to an OEC.

***Where OECs are used, schools should clarify respective roles with the OEC to ensure that appropriate risk assessments are carried out for all aspects of the visit and activities to be undertaken.***

12. LCC's Youth and Community (Y&C) Service has for many years overseen extensive arrangements for outdoor activities, including those associated with the Duke of Edinburgh (DoE) Award Scheme. Many secondary school groups have participated in the DoE Award Scheme. LCC's arrangements involve a system of approval for instructors and provide for sample field monitoring of activities. The Y&C Service also provides training and accreditation for instructors and leaders.

In-house training and assessment, verified by a Statement of Competence signed by a suitable experienced person may be the most appropriate way of verifying technical competence, and is the only option when no external qualification exists. The DfES publications "Standards for LEAs in Overseeing Educational Visits" and "Standards for Adventure" contain much good advice on competence.

[Standards for Adventure](#)  
[Standards for LEAs](#)

## Role of School Advisers

13. LCC has an Advisory Service with a team of about 100 school advisers. They provide the direct interface between schools and the LEA. Most have held senior management posts in schools. The Service is available to schools to purchase.

14. The main role of the Advisory Service is to help schools identify their needs (including helping Governing Bodies prepare and implement action plans) and to promote professional development. Advisers did not have a specific remit in terms of H&S (including monitoring), but were expected to report evident concerns to the head teacher or, if necessary, to their own superiors.

15. For some time, the Physical Education (PE) Advisers have provided training for teachers based on the BAALPE Guidelines.

16. The PE Advisory Service gives advice and guidance to schools about visits involving adventurous and/or outdoor activities as part of its role in supporting delivery of the National Curriculum. As noted above, monitoring of outdoor education by the PE Team is targeted at the LEA's Outdoor Education Centres (which a significant number of the LEA's schools attend) through a programme of systematic inspection and review.

***It is good practice for all school advisers to be aware of and consider health and safety matters both in their general role and their area of specialist expertise.***

The focus for LCC's monitoring arrangements was on the OECs and DoE activities. Responsibilities for monitoring other visits by schools were not made clear.

Hence the importance of an LEA being clear about who is responsible for monitoring what. Priorities for field monitoring should be established using risk management procedures.

***Further information on the BAALPE guidelines is given in Part C.***

***HASPEV's supplementary guidance "Standards for LEAs in Overseeing Educational Visits"***

***states that it is good practice for LEAs to have an Outdoor Education Adviser and sets out (at paragraph 3) the functions of such an adviser, recognising that the adviser should be suitably experienced and might need to obtain advice from specialists in connection with particular activities.***

At the time of the tragedy LCC's PE and Sports Development Adviser undertook many of these functions. They are now incorporated into the policy for educational visits and reflected in staff roles/job descriptions. Specialist tasks are undertaken by technical advisers with relevant accreditation.

Before the Glenridding tragedy, the Advisory Service did not receive any enquiries from schools about combined water/rock activities and had no intelligence that individual schools were doing them.

***In the event of an LEA becoming aware of such activities, it should, as an immediate precaution, assume that they are "high risk". The school should be advised not to proceed until the LEA is satisfied that all reasonable precautions have been taken to control the risks (see also comment against Part C, paragraph 4).***

***It is important that LEAs have policies to cover the eventuality of schools wishing to do activities outside the scope of NGB or other defined standards (see Part A).***



17. PE Advisers did not routinely check qualifications such as NGB awards, but would do so if requested by a school.

18. LCC teachers are encouraged to take part in off-site activities and to obtain NGB awards if appropriate. LCC also runs its own qualifications in outdoor education for leaders not requiring NGB qualifications

19. Advisers and the H&S Team were involved in the periodic review of Lancashire's guidelines on educational visits. Following the Stainforth Beck tragedy in which two schoolgirls died, LCC's arrangements for school trips were reconsidered and the view was taken that, because the BAALPE and DfES guidelines had been issued to every Lancashire school and LCC had its own procedure, LCC needed to take no further action.

#### **General Health and Safety advice to schools**

20. The Education and Cultural Services Directorate has a dedicated Health and Safety Team. They provide health and safety training, an audit service, advice and investigate any serious or unusual incidents. The Manager is responsible for issuing to each school a "School Safety Manual" which contains corporate and directorate policies and procedures

21. LCC's School Safety Manual states that schools should have a named co-ordinator for health and safety. For a secondary school that person should be a member of the Senior Management Team. In a number of larger schools there might be more than one co-ordinator to cover different tasks.

22. All generic correspondence from the Health and Safety Team to a school is addressed to head teachers. Replies to specific enquiries from a co-ordinator are sent to the co-ordinator.

See also comment against Para 12 (above)

***It is good practice to review policies, procedures, guidance and training in the light of incidents locally and nationally, changed national guidance etc.***

The lack of detailed information on the root causes of a number of previous tragedies involving school trips has often made it difficult for schools and LEAs to identify and implement the relevant lessons. *Schools and LEAs are encouraged to share the lessons as widely as possible.*

LCC's involvement in preparing the present report reflects its determination that others may learn from the Glenridding tragedy.

The Health and Safety Team had occasional enquiries from schools relating to off-site activities. Most came via the Advisory Service. People asking specifically about outdoor activities would be referred to the LCC and BAALPE guidelines and/or to the Advisory Service.

Little guidance was given in the manual on the expectations of co-ordinators, although this was covered in training courses and at audit. It should be clear who in a school has specific health and safety responsibilities and the extent and limits of their functions should be clearly set out. Those people should have training relevant to their role.(see also paragraph F 3).

***Health and Safety information and any implications need to reach the right people and be shared appropriately. LEAs and head teachers should ensure effective arrangements are in place for communication with and within schools.***

***LEAs may wish to consider having document house styles which require the author to identify clearly the intended readers, distribution and action required.***

## Health and safety training

23. LCC's "Scheme for Financing Schools" required schools to provide health and safety training, but was not specific on what was required, nor did it set any minimum standard. It was considered that the school should identify its own needs, in consultation with the H&S Team. That Team also asked questions about training during Biennial Reviews and Audits (see below)

24. It was considered that subject-specific health and safety training was the responsibility of the Advisers for that subject, but this was not clearly set out.

25. The Health and Safety Team monitors requests for general health and safety training. The team also keeps registers of attendance on training courses provided by them. It was expected that schools would keep records of training done in-house.

## Monitoring and audit

26. The Health and Safety Team has two main mechanisms for checking on schools' health and safety performance:

- a five yearly "audit" visit to the school by a member of the Health and Safety Team. Since 2001 these have covered (in addition to premises issues) the Health and Safety management systems, including the school's internal monitoring and audit processes
- A "Biennial Review" form sent to Head teachers seeking information on the school's health and safety management arrangements and training needs.

***The level of detail on Health and Safety training required by Fair Funding schemes is very limited.***

***It is good practice for LEAs to provide supplementary information to indicate their general expectations of schools in respect of H&S training.***

***It is good practice to ensure that roles are clear in order to avoid misunderstandings and gaps in provision.***

***It is important to have clear arrangements for the maintenance of training records.***

***Monitoring and audit provide mechanisms for identifying when Health and Safety systems are degraded or abused.***

***Organisations with otherwise robust H&S management systems are often weak on monitoring.***

The Health and Safety Team was not involved in the "field" monitoring of educational visits e.g. Team members had not accompanied any school parties on visits. ***Hence the Team was lacking any first-hand information on an important area of school activity.***

***It is important that LEAs have arrangements for ensuring that schools have appropriate mechanism for H&S monitoring. These can be part of wider performance management systems. Regular questionnaires or governors' Core Agenda Items (see para 34) are two mechanisms for achieving this.***

***The LEA's monitoring and audit arrangements should include H&S management systems, not just premises issues.***

***Monitoring done by the LEA is not a substitute for the day-to-day monitoring which a school should be doing, but should check that such monitoring is being done.***

***LEAs also need to be clear on what is monitoring and what is audit – they are different processes.***

LCC's Biennial Review is a form of monitoring. Part of the value of the Biennial Review is in providing a periodic challenge to schools to review their H&S arrangements and training.

27. At the time of the Glenridding tragedy, decisions on what monitoring systems might be appropriate were left largely to individual schools. The Health and Safety Team encouraged Heads to involve Governors in monitoring health and safety, but did not routinely seek information on monitoring from governors.

***It is good practice for an LEA to make the Governing Body aware of such reviews and to invite them to ask the head teacher for copies of any monitoring documents returned to the LEA.***

Since the incident, and in view of the emphasis on increasing self-management by schools, LCC has put additional guidance on monitoring and audit in the School Safety Manual and provided training and support in self-assessment of H&S for school governors and senior managers.

***LEAs are encouraged to critically review the training and support in self-assessment of H&S that they provide for school governors and senior managers.***

28. The School Safety Manual issued in 1999 contained a Model Health and Safety Policy for schools setting out LCC's expectations.

The manual has since been revised

29. It also contained a hazard checklist. There was nothing specific on school visits, but the section on Physical Education referred the reader to the BAALPE guidelines.

***Hazard checklists have their value, but can often distract from looking deeper into management systems where the real problems may lie. However, LEAs may find it helpful to provide an aide-memoir for leaders on its main requirements for educational visits.***

### **Support for governors**

30. The Directorate has a "Governor Services" unit which provided comprehensive information, training and support to the 9800 governors associated with the schools funded through the Council.

Governors have commented positively on the support and training they had received from LCC.

31. The unit has organised H&S training for governors since 1993. The training was revised in 2000 to provide a greater emphasis on accountability and helping governors "to ask the right questions".

***It is good practice for governors to receive training to help them in their role as "critical friend".***

Since the tragedy at Glenridding Beck, LCC has provided workshops for governors on the educational visits guidance.

32. The LEA keeps records of governors' participation in training courses provided by the LEA. Governors may also access training courses offered by other providers.

***It is good practice for records of staff/governor Health and Safety training to be updated and reviewed annually. It should be clear who is responsible for such tasks.***

33. The LEA governor training is available through a "buy-back" system. The training programme is issued termly to each governor.

34. Each term, LCC issues a "Core Agenda" of matters for consideration by governors and also provides a briefing service for Clerks to Governing Bodies. The subject of Educational Visits has been a regular Core Agenda item for many years. Governor Services were not responsible for monitoring educational visits.

***It is good practice for LEAs to provide governing bodies with guidance on the issues they need to be considering. The "core agenda" is one way of doing this.***

***It is good practice for clerks to governing bodies to be briefed to remind governors of the approval procedures and the questions they should ask in connection with proposed visits.***

35. While Governors were understood to have a monitoring role, LCC's expectations of this role in respect of health and safety were not set out, rather the expectation was "that the governors would ask pertinent questions".

***There was no guidance from LCC to schools or governors on what monitoring of H&S might look like or to whom any reports should be sent.***

36. LCC's Model Health and Safety Policy for Schools" stated that "...a Monitoring Report must be submitted to the Governing Body and to the LEA annually".

***It is good practice for clear guidance on these matters to be given by LEAs to governors and head teachers.***

37. LCC's corporate procedure on monitoring had been finalised, but not yet issued, at the time of the incident.

38. In December 2003 LCC produced a booklet of practical guidance for Governing Bodies and head teachers on monitoring, evaluation and

***It is good practice for LEAs to have clear policies and guidance for governors and head***

accountability.

39. Further guidance for governors on monitoring is currently being developed by Governor Services in association with the H&S team.

***teachers on monitoring, evaluation and accountability.***

***The lack of clarity on monitoring was a weakness in an otherwise largely sound health and safety management system.***

***LCC has now revised its Policy and Guidelines on Educational Visits and developed integrated approval and monitoring processes.***

## Key Points

- Fair Funding Schemes should require schools to have regard to H&S (Para G 6).
- Where H&S tasks/functions are delegated under Fair Funding, the LEA should make clear who does what, and monitor to confirm that the tasks are being carried out (Para G 5).
- It is good practice for LEAs to provide guidance on their general expectations of schools in respect of H&S management and training in the context of Fair Funding (Para G 23).
- It should be clear who in a school has specific health and safety responsibilities. The extent and limits of their functions should be clearly set out. They should receive relevant training (Para G 21).
- LEAs and head teachers should have clear communication arrangements. LEAs could use document house styles to require authors to identify clearly the intended readers, distribution and action required (Para G 22).
- It should be clear who is to provide generic Health and Safety training and who is to provide subject-specific H&S training (Para G 24).
- There should be clear arrangements for maintaining training records (Para G 25).
- Records of staff/governor Health and Safety training should be updated and reviewed annually (Para G 32).
- LEAs need clear arrangements for checking qualifications and competencies and identifying what monitoring is appropriate (Para G 8).
- It is good practice for LEAs to provide concise guidance for head teachers and governors on their expectations for checking staff qualifications and competencies (Para G 10).
- If an external provider handles recruitment, the service user needs to be very clear about the extent and limits of any checks of staff qualifications and competencies undertaken by the provider (Para G 8).
- A requirement to produce original certificates to demonstrate qualifications held is very valuable, but there is no substitute for cross-checking with the awarding bodies (Para G 10).
- For adventurous activities, ensuring the **competence** of proposed leaders may be a wider task than a simple check of qualifications and technical skills (Para G 10).
- For adventurous activities, in-house training and assessment, verified by a Statement of Competence signed by a suitable experienced person is acceptable, and is the only option for verifying technical competence when no external qualification exists (Para G 12).
- As recommended in "[Standards for LEAs in Overseeing Educational Visits](#)" it is good practice for LEAs to have a suitably qualified and experienced outdoor education adviser or a member of staff with the relevant functions in their job description, and clear arrangements for obtaining specialist/technical advice where needed (Para G 11).
- All school advisers should be aware of and consider health and safety matters both in their general role and their area of specialist expertise (Para G 13).
- Schools using Outdoor Education Centres (OECs) should clarify roles with the OEC to ensure that appropriate risk assessments are carried out for all aspects of the visit (Para G 11).

- If an LEA becomes aware of schools doing combined water/rock activities, it should:
  - as an immediate precaution, assume that they are “high risk”
  - advise the school not to proceed until the LEA is satisfied that all reasonable precautions have been taken to control the risks (Para G 16).
- LEAs should have policies to cover the eventuality of schools wishing to do activities outside the scope of NGB or other defined standards (Para G 16).
- LEAs should review policies, procedures, guidance and training in the light of known incidents, changed national guidance etc (Para G 19).
- Schools and LEAs are encouraged to share as widely as possible the lessons from any incidents (Para G 19).
- Monitoring and audit provide mechanisms for identifying when Health and Safety systems are degraded or abused (Para G 28).
- Organisations with otherwise robust Health and Safety management systems are often weak on monitoring (Para G 28).
- Priorities for field monitoring should be established using risk management procedures (Para G 14)
- LEAs need to make clear to head teachers, Governors and advisers:
  - what effective monitoring “looks like”
  - who is responsible for monitoring what
  - how the findings should be recorded and reported
  - how reports should be evaluated and actioned (Paras G6, G14, G35).
- Training and support for school governors and senior managers in the self-assessment of Health and Safety will support the monitoring and audit processes (Para G 27).
- Monitoring and auditing of schools by the LEA should be wider than just premises issues and include evaluation of the monitoring and auditing done by the school (Para G 26).
- Hazard checklists have their value, but can often distract from looking deeper into management systems where the real problems may lie (Para G 29).
- It is good practice for LEAs to
  - provide governing bodies with guidance on the issues they need to be considering. A “core agenda” is one way of doing this
  - brief clerks to governing bodies to remind governors of the visit approval procedures and indicate questions they might ask in connection with proposed visits
  - make the Governing Body aware of reports of any monitoring or review of Health and Safety performance done by the LEA and of any monitoring documents that the school submitted to the LEA
  - have clear policies and guidance for governors and head teachers on monitoring, evaluation and accountability
  - provide training and support for governors in the self-assessment of Health and Safety performance to help them in their role as “critical friend”. (Paras G 27, G 34)