Clore Duffield Foundation

SCHOOL TRIPS GRANT

Supporting and Engaging Parents & Carers

INTRODUCTION

This resource draws together experiences and advice from schools in rural settings supported by the Clore Duffield Foundation's School Trips Grant programme. It is designed to help schools in rural areas engage and support parents and carers who may feel anxious or unsure about their child taking part in school trips. Some of the suggested strategies may also work for other forms of parental engagement and support.

For many children, a school trip may be their first opportunity to travel beyond their local community and experience something new. While these opportunities can be exciting, they can also bring feelings of uncertainty or anxiety for both children and their families. If parents or carers feel worried about their child taking part, they may be reluctant to give consent for them to attend. This feeling of anxiety can be even more pronounced in rural areas, where travel outside of the local area can seem particularly daunting.

Effective engagement with parents and carers is therefore essential, not only to reassure and support families, but also to help them understand the wider value of educational visits. When done well, parental engagement can build trust and confidence, demonstrate the positive impact school trips can have on children's learning and development, and inspire greater ambition and aspiration across the whole school community.

A RURAL SCHOOL'S PERSPECTIVE

Elizabeth Fletcher, Trust Civic Leader, CELT

Brannel School, Cornwall

Elizabeth Fletcher, Trust Civic Leader for Cornwall Education Learning Trust, leads enrichment across all 16 schools in the trust, including Brannel School. Brannel is a large secondary school in rural mid-Cornwall. The school received Clore Duffield School Trips Grant funding to deliver an aspirational programme of visits for all pupils in 2025–26. The school has used this opportunity to involve the whole school community and ensure parents and carers feel supported throughout.

Here are Elizabeth's reflections:

What we're noticing (and why it makes sense in Cornwall):

- Cornwall is highly rural with dispersed communities and limited public transport, which shapes families' expectations about travel and access to services. That context can make long trips to busy cities feel outside the norm for many parents.
- Research on educational isolation in Cornwall points to compounding place based barriers (remoteness, limited connectivity and opportunities). This helps explain why out of county visits can feel unfamiliar or risky to families. onecornwall.co.uk
- Research into Cornwall's "Pretty Poverty" describes transport dependency and cultural isolation, reinforcing the idea that long/urban journeys can trigger anxiety. Marjon's Pretty Poverty Report
- Parent Carers Cornwall also flags anxiety as a common barrier to participation and attendance, especially around transitions and unfamiliar settings—very relevant to residentials or city trips. parentcarerscornwall.org.uk

BUILDING TRUST

Elizabeth shares her experience and advice on using effective communication strategies to develop trust with parents and carers around school trips.

What works well:

- **Warm, invitational tone:** Parents respond better to reassuring, human language ("We know this might feel like a big step…" rather than formal directives). This aligns with the local Parent Carer Engagement Framework's emphasis on partnership and trust.
- **Relational over transactional:** Phone calls, informal chats at pick up, and "meet the trip leaders" sessions build familiarity and reduce perceived risk — especially in rural contexts where relationships matter deeply.
- **Consistency and clarity:** Clear, proactive communication is a known driver of parental engagement nationally — families feel safer when nothing is a surprise.
- **Avoiding jargon:** Using everyday language ("Here's exactly what the day will look like…", "This is who to contact…") helps anxious families feel included and respected.
- **Affirming parents' expertise:** Acknowledging parents' deep understanding of their children helps reduce anxiety and increase trust.
- **Two way communication:** Invite questions early and often — structured, but friendly ("Tell us anything that would help your child feel confident") echoes best practice from parental engagement guidance.

PRACTICAL IDEAS TO TRY

- **Pre-trip briefings** for families: short, friendly sessions (in person/online) covering itinerary, travel, safeguarding, contact info, and “what if” scenarios. This directly tackles anxieties linked to unfamiliar environments.
- **Transport reassurance:** explain coach operators, rest stops, teacher to pupil ratios, and contingency plans; share maps and timings to demystify distance.
- **Parent voice:** a quick Q&A or drop in calls for those who can’t attend; collect questions in advance via a simple form. (This matches the Parent Carer Engagement approach promoted locally.)
- **Storytelling:** circulate one page photo summaries or short reels from past trips to normalise the experience and show benefits.
- **Personalised adjustments for SEND/EBSA:** sensory plans, buddying, alternative meeting points, or opt-in partial itineraries to reduce threshold anxiety.
- **Practicalities:** publish clear kit lists, costs, deadlines, subsidies, and who to contact—small frictions often amplify anxiety in rurally isolated contexts.
- **Host a parents’ evening** to share school trip plans for the full year ahead. Use friendly but informative language to build awareness early to help alleviate any concerns or anxiety.
- **Plan a trip** that invites parents and carers along too. Read on to hear how one school in North Cornwall did this for their pupils and families and the impact it had.

A TRIP FOR PUPILS & FAMILIES

Anne Howard, Headteacher, Camelford Primary School

Camelford Primary School in rural North Cornwall took their whole school community — children and their families — to the Theatre Royal in Plymouth for an opera performance using funding from the Clore Duffield Foundation's School Trips Grant programme.

Headteacher, Anne Howard, describes their approach:

The trip took place on a Saturday, by choice and by design. We wanted parents there. Many of our families include children in receipt of Pupil Premium, and many of those parents had not been to Plymouth, let alone to a live opera performance. The children hadn't either. One parent told us afterwards that we had offered her family something she would never have booked herself — that without us, they simply would not have gone.

That comment has stayed with us, because it gets to the heart of something we hadn't fully understood before. When parents haven't experienced theatre, heritage sites or live performance for themselves, it can be hard for them to feel the urgency of their child attending a school trip. It's not disengagement — it's a gap in shared experience.

The opera trip showed us that when we include families, we don't just give children a great day out — we shift something in the culture of our school community. Parents who've sat in a theatre with their child become parents who encourage the next trip. That's the multiplier effect we want to build on.

Low-cost options work too - a trip to the local beach, a picnic or a visit to a free museum or gallery. Contact galleries or museums in advance to find out what's on offer for families.

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QUICK WINS

- **Encourage parent and carer volunteers** and try to engage different parents and carers for each trip to share the experience as widely as possible. Communicate useful information and aims of the trip beforehand so they can actively engage with the activities and support pupils to get the most from their visit.
- **Create a group of parents in each year group** who can be School Trips Champions. Share their reflections about previous school trips in your school's newsletter and via social channels.
- **Sharing photos when you get back to school is great but find ways to show impact too.** Carefully planned, high quality school trips can have a transformational impact on pupils. If you notice a direct link, find ways to share and celebrate this.

cloreduffield.org.uk/schooltripgrant

With thanks to the Clore Duffield School Trips Grant schools for contributing ideas to this resource, in particular Elizabeth Fletcher of Cornwall Education Learning Trust and Anne Howard of Camelford Primary School, Cornwall.

Cover image: Pensans CP School trip to St Michael's Mount © Ian Kingsnorth