

International School Exchanges and Visits: Homestays

Guidance at a glance

This paper is suitable for school and college leaders across all phases, and for those involved in planning international exchange visits with a homestay element.

ASCL has worked with the British Council, Durham Local Authority's International Office and school and college leaders to produce this practical advice and information.

Homestays

It is recognised that a homestay can provide unique insights into the way of life in another country for young people, as well as giving young people a first-hand opportunity to use their language skills in a 'real' context. A homestay can also result in significant savings in terms of accommodation costs.

ASCL is committed to supporting international exchanges and overseas visits for children and young people. This guidance outlines the action required and provides guidance and links to best practice for staff and school leaders to manage and maintain safe exchange visits.

This guidance looks in greater detail at the following:

Section 1 Safeguarding

Section 2 Key points for families, schools and colleges

Section 3 Further information

1 Safeguarding

Safeguarding is paramount for any trip involving under-18s, particularly a trip overseas. It is important to balance safeguarding issues with a common sense approach that does not prevent these kinds of activities happening altogether.

When staying together in a hotel or other form of group accommodation, procedures are relatively straightforward for teachers and leaders where young people are directly under their charge. This becomes more complex when pupils stay with individual families where school leaders and teachers are not immediately on hand to support and supervise their pupils.

Placing students with host families raises safeguarding risks. Key to managing that risk is good preparation with the partner schools as well as preparation of the pupils to educate them how to manage situations as they arise.

Before the exchange takes place, it is important to work closely with your partner school to ensure that the suitability of the families to host has been considered and that the hosts are known to the partner school. The types of background checks available to schools will vary depending on the partner country. It is vital you have regular communication with your partner school and you share this information with pupils' parents and carers.

The government's statutory guidance *Keeping children safe in education* refers to homestay with host families in Annex E.

DBS equivalent checks

Schools and colleges arranging for their students to stay with families overseas should be aware the equivalent to a DBS check is not available in most countries, and where checks do exist, schools and colleges may not have the authority to perform them.

Germany: there is no legal obligation for host families to provide an equivalent of a DBS check. German schools have no authority to request parents to apply and pay for the *polizeiliches Führungszeugnis* or the *erweitertes Führungszeugnis* (for working with children or young people) under German law.

France: there is no law in France which requests DBS checks for host families. The French *extrait de casier judiciaire* which proves whether a person has already been convicted or not, cannot be requested by the schools who have no authority to check the morality of its pupils' parents.

Spain: since 2015, it is mandatory for anyone with a profession or participating in an activity which regularly involves contact with children under 18 to hold a *Certificado de Delitos de Naturaleza Sexual*. This certificate is issued electronically (free) by the Ministry of Justice, and includes a confirmation code which allows anyone to verify its validity and authenticity online.

Therefore, the visit leader must ensure that the host school has a procedure in place to assess the suitability of home stays and obtain confirmation of this in writing. This should then be communicated to parents and carers with their written agreement obtained to confirm they are satisfied with the hosting arrangements and the way in which the hosts have been identified.

Current guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) sets out that schools "should" (rather than 'must') request a DBS certificate (with the barred list option checked) in respect of UK host families. If schools decide not to carry out the DfE's recommended homestay checks, the DfE suggests that schools and colleges should still satisfy themselves they are not putting a child at risk and be able to justify the decision made if challenged.

2 Key points for families, schools and colleges

It is important parents affirm that the following aspects have been assured to their satisfaction:

- Where a visit is being arranged for the first time, or involves a significant number of new staff members, a preliminary visit has been carried out.
- Families and young people have been carefully matched and consideration given to particular aspects including, for example, gender, diet, religious belief, and special needs.
- Hosting families are well known to the school or college and the host schools have identified no concerns about the suitability of the host family to care adequately for the visiting child.
- The pupil will have his or her own bed in a room of someone of their own gender, or a separate bedroom.
- The pupil will have privacy whilst dressing, washing, and using toilet facilities.
- Pupils feel confident about how to contact supervising staff, and can identify and report risks or situations which make them feel uncomfortable.
- Contingency measures are in place if a child needs to move from the host family.

All planning for educational visits, trips, and excursions should fully take into account any child or young person with a disability (as defined by the **Disability Discrimination Act**). Schools and colleges have a legal duty to ensure all children and young people have equal access to the curriculum, supported as appropriate to their individual needs.

However, it may be thought inappropriate for students with certain types of disability to be offered a homestay situation. If they are integrated in a group with young people who do not have disabilities, and they are staying with families, then it is important that those who are staying in a hotel or hostel as part of the programme, are able to visit their partner's family.

3 Further information

DfE, *Keeping children safe in education* (sources for all parts of a visit in Section 3)

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/550511/Keeping_children_safe_in_education.pdf

Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Foreign travel advice*

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>

British Council:

List of Travellers

<https://www.britishcouncil.org/school-resources/partner/list-travellers>

Toolkit for planning a school exchange (includes templates for download and use)

<https://schoolsonline.britishcouncil.org/partner-school/school-exchange>

School exchange case studies

<https://schoolsonline.britishcouncil.org/partner-school/school-exchange/get-inspired>

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