

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.

It is recognised that a homestay can provide young people with unique insights into the way of life in another country, as well as a first-hand opportunity to use 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 paper outlines the action required and provides guidance and links to best practice for all school and college staff affected 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 staff 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 or college. The types of background checks available to schools and colleges will vary depending on the partner country. It is vital you have regular communication with your partner organisation and you share this information with pupils' parents and carers.

The government's statutory *Keeping children safe in education (KCSIE)* guidance, *September 2018*, refers to homestay with host families in Annex E.

Homestays overseas

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.

KCSIE guidance states:

"It is not possible for schools and colleges to obtain criminality information from the DBS about adults who provide homestays abroad. Schools and colleges should liaise with partner schools abroad, to establish a shared understanding of, and agreement to the arrangements in place for the visit. They should use their professional judgement to satisfy themselves that the arrangements are appropriate and sufficient to safeguard effectively every child who will take part in the exchange. Parents should be aware of agreed arrangements."

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.

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Therefore, the visit leader must ensure that the host school has a procedure in place to assess the suitability of homestays 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.

Hosting families in the UK

Current KCSIE 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. An adult providing homestay for an exchange student can obtain a check free of charge provided there will be no remuneration other than expenses incurred. When applying for a check, the applicant would need to make this clear in the application.

The guidance states that schools and colleges are free to decide whether they consider it necessary to obtain a DBS enhanced certificate in respect of anyone else aged 16 or over in the household where the child will be staying.

*DfE definition of “must” and “should”:

We use the terms “must” and “should” throughout the guidance. We use the term “must” when the person in question is legally required to do something and “should” when the advice set out should be followed unless there is good reason not to. (Page 3, Keeping children safe in education, September 18)

2 Key points for families, schools and colleges

It is important parents affirm 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 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 and age appropriate, 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 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://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/741314/Keeping_Children_Safe_in_Education__3_September_2018_14.09.18.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>

Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel- National Guidance for the Management of Outdoor Learning, Off-Site Visits and Learning Outside the Classroom

<https://oeapng.info/>

This guidance has been approved by the DfE.

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