

Why investing in school camps, field trips and excursions is good for students.

Children and young people's overall experience of school is strongly influenced by their differing abilities, where they live, their family backgrounds, and whether they need extra support to attend and remain in school.

Their experiences are also impacted by how schools balance their personal wellbeing and academic achievement with their personality and talents. By recognising individual needs and aspirations we can better prepare students to participate in their community in ways that best suit them, thereby developing their mental and physical abilities and growing their self-confidence.

These worthwhile aims are reflected in The Department for Education's strategy for public education that requires schools to include "opportunities that enable all learners to explore and build on their own abilities, interests, culture and experiences" while simultaneously seeking out inequity and eliminating "barriers to opportunities and support all students to learn and thrive".

Despite a clear call for equity in opportunities, schools in disadvantaged, rural and remote areas find it very difficult to offer their students the same opportunities other more advantaged schools do. This means students attending these schools will often miss out on immersive experiences that can include school camps, field trips and excursions.



The benefits of active and immersive experiences

The benefits of active and immersive experiences are well understood, which is why many schools offer them.¹ They provide students with a rich variety of activities outside the school setting, placing them in different environments that promote their participation and engagement with sporting, cultural, educational, and outdoor activities. Active experiences can include attending a school camp, going on a field trip, being part of a music or sports tour, undertaking a language exchange, or contributing to a humanitarian service or global adventure trip, both domestically and overseas.

Hands-on learning opportunities, like field trips, camps, or school excursions, improve outcomes for students in a range of ways. They help students to achieve higher test scores, promote better school attendance, and foster an environment of striving for better educational performance overall.

Outdoor education, like that provided by many schools at annual camps, is known to be particularly beneficial, not only for fostering student engagement and performance, but also for improving students' physical and mental health and wellbeing.²

While any school excursion is of value, visits to Parliament House, Government House, and other civics institutions, as well as to inspiring workplaces and career fairs showcasing emerging industries, provides students with a memorable and positive educational opportunity that can open-up potential career ideas and nurture their individual ambitions – opportunities that many students may otherwise have heard of or known about.

In so many conversations with children and young people on what would make life better they say:

“ [The world would be better if...] “...Everyone could join the same activities no matter what. Trips and activities wouldnt be so expensive so everyone could participate and have fun in all sorts of things.”
(F, aged 11)

“ More excursions!!!! More camps, every year!!”
(F, Year 8)

“ More camps and excursions!” (F, Year 8)

“ More camps (1 a term).” (F, Year 8)

“ Camps to america.” (F, Year 8)

“ Excursions to bounce, icecream places. More camps in every year level.” (F, Year 8)

“ More out-of-school opportunities are needed in the Barossa Valley.” (F, aged 8)

“ One thing you should remember about kids is we want to explore, go on adventures etc. Not be in a classroom for 5 or so hours a day.” (F, aged 10)



Challenges for families and schools

Commissioner for Children & Young People
Anti-Poverty Week Statement, October 2023

In South Australian public schools, there are some families who cannot afford to pay for their children to participate in school camps, field trips and excursions. Neither can the school generally afford to fund places for these students out of their annual school budget to attend.

While some schools and local organisations try to support those students from families they know are living in disadvantaged and remote areas through a variety of fundraising efforts, there is rarely enough funding available to ensure all students who need it can be supported to attend educational camps, field trips or excursions.

Schools in remote areas face significant cost barriers to travelling anywhere beyond their local area. They need funds to cover long road journeys or air travel, and on occasions to cover accommodation expenses when these are needed.



Free public transport is available to primary school students on excursions in metropolitan Adelaide. However, this is only made available within normal school hours, which limits the time students can spend at their excursion destination.

Barriers to participation not only include transport and accommodation costs. They also include a crowded curriculum and staffing challenges.

Educators report that they are unable to undertake school visits due to the inherent costs involved:

“ Due to the low socio-economic nature of our school community, we are unable to go on excursions or school camps. A vast majority of families simply cannot afford to pay for this to occur. This is a shame, as other public schools often take trips...”

“ Our students respond very well to hands-on activities and learning experiences outside the classroom. Our staff are very enthusiastic and keen to offer as many different learning opportunities as possible. However, these are currently restricted due to high bus costs.”

“ We went on our first visit to the city two weeks ago. It was the first time many students had gone on an excursion and the first time most students had visited the Art Gallery or Museum. With over 70% of students on a school card, these opportunities are few and far between for our families. We want to change that.”

“ As a rural school all city/metro excursions cause a degree of financial hardship for our students. Buses cost in excess of \$1800 for one day. We can't absorb the costs, so must impose excursion fees for students, which always precludes some from attending – meaning that the valuable learning opportunities are missed.”

“ We have to travel between restricted hours so we can get free Metro transport (as our families cannot afford the cost of the excursion otherwise) and the travel means we are in the city for a short period of time and then we have to turn around and start the journey back.”

To ensure equity amongst students, I propose that, at a minimum, additional transport funds be made available to disadvantaged regional and remote schools to enable students in these locations to undertake active learning experiences in the same way others do. I am also proposing development of a state wide grant program to enable all students to participate in school camps, field trips and excursions.

1. Expand financial support for families on the School Card to include excursions

Parents of students on the School Card currently get support for school materials and services charges, but not for additional expenses such as school excursions. While schools receive additional funding for students with low socio-economic status (SES), I have heard from students and schools that this is not sufficient to enable low-SES and regional and remote schools to provide their students with the same opportunities made available to more affluent schools situated across metropolitan Adelaide.

2. Develop a state-wide grant program that will enable all students to participate in school excursions

Given the significant impact transport costs have on students and poorer families, I have repeatedly called for free transport to be expanded to cater for all students on School Cards, so that they can access other school and sporting activities. This grant proposal is an extension of this call, to include costs associated with school excursions.

A new state-wide **Educational Excursions and Camps Grant Program** would enable students from disadvantaged, regional and remote government schools to attend educational excursions to Adelaide and elsewhere.

It would also enable disadvantaged students to attend outdoor school camps, enjoy cultural visits, and attend vocational career and work experience opportunities designed to help them make more informed decisions about their future.

The new grant program would provide funds for students in need to attend the following school camps, field trips and excursions:

1. **Civics in the City**
2. **Career and Work Experience**
3. **Cultural Visits**
4. **Outdoor School Camps**

It is also proposed that priority be given to those government schools known to struggle with provision of excursion opportunities for their students:

- those with an SES level of 1–4
- those in regional or remote areas of SA (beyond 30km from the Adelaide CBD).

The amount provided for each student should cover all costs associated with transport and accommodation, entry fees, and other relevant expenses for the excursion.

Schools would be invited to apply to the grant program providing brief information about how the funds will be spent, how the visit will support students participating to attain learning outcomes outlined in the national curriculum, and how other relevant learning and development goals will be met.

1. Civics in the City Field Trip

The aim of the Civics and City Field Trip grant is to improve South Australian students' understanding of government and citizenship in an engaging way and its relevance to their lives. Funds are provided on the condition that schools incorporate a formal visit to SA Parliament House. While in Adelaide students groups are encouraged to visit other learning destinations related to civics, or to other topics relevant to each group.

Civics destinations in addition to SA Parliament House could include:

- Government House
- The Centre for Democracy
- The Migration Museum
- SA Museum
- Holocaust Museum and Steiner Education Centre
- State Library of South Australia
- Art Gallery of South Australia

2. Career and Work Experience Excursions

Currently the workplace visits and work experience opportunities available to South Australian students are more a matter of luck than design, relying mainly on personal contacts and geography rather than being anything more strategic. This is despite the current employment crisis and growing demand for workers who will bring specific skills to industry growth areas across the State.

While destinations like Sundrop Farms, Tonsley Innovation District and the Australian Space Discovery Centre do offer school group tours, transport to these destinations is beyond the means of many schools and students, with visits from metropolitan schools to regional workplaces almost unheard of.

We know that in South Australia there is a shortage of workers across some industries with this shortage expected to grow over the near future. At the same time regional employers continue to struggle to attract the workers they need. As the State's draft Skills Plan states, "we need to strengthen connections between learners, providers, and employers".

Given the focus of the State on the need to expand capability in green industries, the space sector, defence, and the regions, it is proposed that the Department for Education and Skills SA work together with South Australia's growth industries to enable students to visit relevant sites and workplaces, utilising funding from the proposed grant scheme to support this as follows:

- Students from metropolitan government schools visit workplaces and other sites of interest in regional areas;
- Students from all areas of the State undertake active learning experiences in green industries, technology, defence, the space sector, and other growth industries.

3. Cultural Visits

Each year, the Department for Education pays the State's arts entities millions of dollars³ to provide cultural educational opportunities for school students. However, these opportunities do not include funding for the additional costs involved in transporting students to visit or attend these cultural destinations or events.

Outreach Education partners include:

- Adelaide Festival Centre
- Adelaide Zoo (Zoos SA)
- Art Gallery of South Australia
- Botanic Gardens of South Australia
- History Trust of South Australia
- SA Parliament House
- South Australian Museum
- Windmill Theatre Company
- DreamBIG Festival

If the Department for Education could work with these outreach partners to support students from disadvantaged and regional/remote schools to visit and take part in hands-on learning at their venues, this would have a significant positive impact on these students.

By providing funding to enable regional and disadvantaged students to travel to these destinations, and where necessary incorporate a stayover in Adelaide city, a much greater number of students would benefit from the educational offerings these cultural institutions and arts organisations offer.

4. Outdoor school camps

We know that many children and young people learn more effectively in environments that go beyond the classroom, particularly the outdoors. Camps and other field trips and excursions provide personal development opportunities that can help young people build their confidence, resilience, and personal skills in a more holistic way. These opportunities can be particularly beneficial for students who have diverse learning needs.

Environmental education is often much more powerful when taught in nature, particularly for city dwellers who are being increasingly distanced from the natural environment. It is proposed that grant funding be provided to cover costs of transport, accommodation, and other fees associated with students attending outdoor school camps that will enable them to take full advantage of the personal growth and development opportunities these can provide.

Endnotes

- 1 Want student to do better in class? Send them on culturally enriching field trips, Science News, 2022: <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2022/02/220222125106.htm>
- 2 Getting Out of the Classroom and Into Nature: A Systematic Review of Nature-Specific Outdoor Learning on School Children's Learning and Development, Public Health, 2022: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2022.877058/full>
- 3 <https://www.education.sa.gov.au/docs/ce-office/annual-reports/financial-statements-department-for-education-2022.pdf>



2023 Anti-Poverty Weeks: Sunday 15 to Friday 27 October

Poverty exists. Poverty hurts us all. We can all do something about it.
antipovertyweek.org.au/

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