



BEST PRACTICE GUIDE FOR EXCURSIONS & INCURSION PROCESSES IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

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NEW WORLDS OF OPPORTUNITY

Learning activities outside the classroom are on the rise as schools worldwide adapt to a dynamic educational future. As trends such as a personalised learning, machine augmented learning and distributed teaching take hold, school staff find themselves tasked with delivering an increasing and diverse array of educational experiences outside traditional learning environments.

Education outside the classroom (EOTC) has been associated with greater levels of intrinsic motivation in students (Bølling et al., 2018), making it an appealing driver of student engagement. These opportunities also enable different student learning styles to be catered for, in line with our improved understanding around these styles. Lastly, the number and quality of external providers of learning activities outside the classroom has dramatically increased over the years. From farm experiences to atom-smashing science immersions, the options for educators are dazzling.

NEW SCAFFOLDS TO SUPPORT

As learning outside the classroom grows, schools and policy makers are working hard to create the necessary frameworks to support and scaffold those experiences.

The flip side of opportunity is the increase in administrative workload and increased legal and procedural obligations that educational staff have not traditionally been expected to take on or have expertise in.

State and Territory governments have provided broad guidance and checklists for those involved in planning and decision-making for excursions and incursions. It's incumbent on school personnel to understand their legal and regulatory obligations and to deploy this guidance to the best of their ability.

Schools will generally apply a Governance, Risk, Compliance & Policy Management (GRC&P) Framework to their excursion and incursion processes, however this manifests in a wide variety of policies and requirements that are often sprawling and disconnected. They are also challenging to scale and verify without technological intervention.

A SMART SCHOOLS FORMULA

All excursion/incursion processes should feature the following elements and forms to support them.

Success measures

Schools should create a statement about what makes an excursion or incursion successful from a pedagogical perspective. This should be measurable across qualitative and quantitative metrics.

Activity application – Approval, Verification and Compliance

Educators should apply for their excursion/incursion activity to ensure it meets educational purpose, fits into the school calendar and existing programming, and to prepare to assess the resources required.

Risk assessment - Approval, Verification and Compliance

Schools must allow for risk assessment and minimisation strategies to protect students and staff, and to honour compliance.

Informed consent

Schools must provide information to parents/guardians to let them make an informed consent of attendance or participation. The information sent, and the permissions themselves must be visible to the school in aggregate and in detail to allow oversight.

Additionally, best practice excursion/incursion process should include:

- The ability for schools to act on relevant information during the activity
- The ability for schools to record incidents and issues that impact the activity
- The ability for schools to record reflection to inform future process repeats and process or policy evolution

ENABLING TECHNOLOGY

"Having an online portal where:

- risks can be identified and assessed;
- planning and approval can take place;
- due diligence processes with all external providers can be accessed and stored;
- parent approvals can be digitally recorded and stored;
- policy and procedure documents can be accessed; and
- past excursion documentation can be archived for use at a later stage;

seems to be a no-brainer, but even with the available technology and the knowledge that it is invaluable, it is still rarely done."

Craig D'cruz, The Excursion Management Problem – Balancing Legal Risks and Practical Realities (2017)

Paper processes are poorly suited to risk management. The nature of excursion and incursion processes requires multi-user access to content (synchronously and asynchronously), and the ability to scale and report on content and flows associated with both processes.

Technology is uniquely suited to support these needs, but the same rigour of governance applied in managing school activities should be applied in selecting tools that help your school deliver against best practices and actively reduce effort over time.

This latter point is important. How many tools cumulatively add to workload instead of reducing it? The iterative quality of technology means that it is often under constant development. This is typically in the form of new software releases, feature additions or changes (guided by user request) or fixing known issues. Unlike many products, software appreciates rather than depreciates.

KEY ELEMENTS OF A BEST PRACTICE EXCURSION/INCURSION MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGY

Ease of use

If something isn't easy to use it won't be used, negating an otherwise powerful tool. Technology solutions supporting school excursion/incursion processes must be simple and reasonably intuitive for their key users, without the burden of ongoing expert operators.

Seamless access to and interaction with real, live data

Data is only useful if its accessible and accurate in that moment. Technology must be able to interface with core school systems as required and deliver access to data in a timely fashion. Information such as medical alerts cannot afford data latency. Data availability also impacts insights and intelligence. Post-activity analyses and cumulative studies will be useful only if data is the best possible reflection of reality at that time.

Templates that reflect your specific school needs

Templates are the key to streamlining your excursion and incursion processes and workflows. What works for one school may not work for another, so it's essential your technology allows you to create and draw on templatised forms and triggers that suit your pedagogical, cultural and administrative contexts.

Capability to build templates to form and automate a functional workflow or series

Your technology needs to facilitate the building and automation of workflows associated with key excursion and incursion processes. Automated checks and balances support compliance, and has the added benefit of freeing staff time, which can be critical in an emergency.

Flexibility in workflow and series construction

Excursions and incursions are not one single administrative journey. Technology solutions should allow the creation of different stages that can be activated and actioned around school specific needs.

Enable access for staff, parents, students and leadership

A functional and high-performing excursion/incursion process demands that multiple user groups interface with that process. Here are only a few common use cases: parents, to grant informed consent and update information; students, to make content selections and advise personal requirements; leadership, to grant approvals and have an aggregate view of an activity; and of course, staff, for communicating details, approvals and more. Each of these groups at a minimum should be able to be worked into a process from end-to-end.

Security and permissions customisation

Supporting the Governance, Risk, Compliance & Policy Management (GRC&P) Framework, access and agency over data and content relating to excursion and incursion must be able to be regulated (granted, modified and withdrawn). This allows governance officials within a school to distribute workload yet retain overall protection.

Dashboards that can be tailored around specific user needs

Time is precious and school staff rarely have the luxury of wading deeply into data-sets (unless it's their job). Technology solutions should provide role-tailored dashboards, so school users can get the information they need front and centre in a way that makes the most sense to them.

Data return and checkpoints

Data gathered in the excursion/incursion process needs to travel back to core school systems – principally the Student Information System (SIS). Note that data should pass through multiple checkpoints enroute to core systems, not directly to SIS tables. This ensures approval processes that protect both data and SIS integrity.

Robust governance practices

Any technology provider must demonstrate credible and considered governance practices. Legal and regulatory checks must be met, but due to their unique duty of care and risk landscape schools should seek out technology operators with committed governance cultures. This may present as consistently going 'above and beyond' their basic obligations, demonstrating transparency around operating strengths and vulnerabilities, and accessibility for governance related conversations.

Reliable access to useful support

Technology supporting excursion/incursion/Education Outside The Classroom risk management should always offer service level agreements and reliable support. No technology is full proof and there will always be new questions and emergent needs. Schools require solution providers to be an active partner in issues management and ongoing operational success.

COLLABORATION TO UNLOCK POSSIBILITY

Historically, schools were on their own in shouldering the burden of learning outside traditional classroom environments. Advances in technology, pedagogical perspectives and a ripe ecosystem of partnerships means that schools are no longer facing this challenge alone.

REFERENCES

Bølling, B., Otte, C.R., Elsborg, P., Nielsen, G., Bentsen, P. 'The association between education outside the classroom and students' school motivation: Results from a one-school-year quasi-experiment', International Journal of Educational Research, Volume 89, 2018, Pages 22-35 (2018)

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