

such a position. The school then has to decide whether they can cover the costs of such activity from within the budget or by fundraising, or whether the activity has to be cancelled. If there is a residential activity taking place largely during school time, or which meets the requirements of the syllabus for a public examination, or is to do with the national curriculum or religious education, no charge may be made either for the education or for the cost of travel.

Q. Can governing bodies charge for educating children in maintained schools and academies?

A. The local authority or governing body cannot charge for education that takes place in school hours. Nor can they charge for activities that take place outside school hours if these are part of the national curriculum, necessary as part of a syllabus for a prescribed public examination that the pupil is being prepared for at the school, or part of religious education. They can charge for permitted 'optional extras', provided they have drawn up a statement of general policy on charging and given details of 'optional extras' they intend to charge for. The governing body's policy does not have to be the same as the local authority's policy, as long as it meets the requirements of the law.

Q. Can a school charge for an activity that takes place out of school hours?

A. This kind of activity is often referred to as an 'optional extra'. Where an optional extra is being provided, a charge can be made for providing materials, books, instruments, or equipment. See advice on optional extras in section 4.3. The actual charge for the optional extra cannot exceed the actual cost of the provision. Schools cannot and must not make a profit from charging for optional extras. Participation in any optional extra activity will be on the basis of parental choice and a willingness to meet the charges. Parental agreement is therefore a necessary prerequisite for the provision of an optional extra where charges will be made.

Q. Can a school ask parents for voluntary contributions?

A. Schools may invite parents and others to make voluntary contributions to make school funds go further. All requests to parents for voluntary contributions must make it clear that the contributions would be voluntary. It should be remembered that education provided during school hours must be free. This includes materials, equipment, and transport provided in school hours by the local authority or by the school to carry pupils between the school and an activity. Governing bodies should also clearly explain that children of parents who do not contribute will not be treated any differently, and that the activity might be cancelled if insufficient contributions are received.

Q. The school has sent letters out to parents asking for contributions towards a school visit, do parents have to pay?

A. Head teachers or governing bodies may ask parents for voluntary contributions towards the cost of:

- any activity which takes place during school hours;
- school equipment; and
- school funds generally.

Children of parents who are unable, or unwilling, to contribute may not be discriminated against. However, if insufficient voluntary contributions are received to cover the cost of the visit, or activity, and there is no alternative method to make up the shortfall, then the school should cancel the activity/visit. It would be advisable to make parents aware of a possible cancellation to the activity/visit if insufficient voluntary contributions are received from the outset.

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Q. Can a state boarding school make compulsory charges for day pupils?

A. State funded boarding schools cannot charge for education during school hours. They may however charge for extended services offered to day pupils, but this must be optional. Compulsory charges must never be made for extended day services including breakfast clubs, after-school clubs, evening meal and supervised homework sessions whether the pupils take up these services or not. Many maintained schools provide wraparound services but they are not part of the school day and it would be unlawful for state funded boarding schools to make wraparound services compulsory.

Q. What happens if the school is not able to raise enough voluntary contributions to cover costs?

A. Where there are not enough voluntary contributions, and there is no way to make up the shortfall, for example school funds and/or fundraising activities, then it must be cancelled. The possibility of the activity/visit being cancelled due to a shortfall in contributions should be made clear in the information sent to parents.

Q. What if a parent is unable, or unwilling to make a voluntary contribution? How does this affect their child(ren)?

A. The school cannot exclude a child from taking part in an activity that is part of the national curriculum purely on the grounds that the parent or carer cannot make, or refuses to make, a contribution. This can clearly place schools in some difficulty on occasions where a number of parents/carers might be in such a position. The school then has to decide whether they can cover the costs of such activity from within the budget or by fundraising, or whether the activity has to be cancelled.

Q. What support can a school offer a parent/carer who has difficulty making a financial contribution?

A. Where a residential trip includes education for which charging is prohibited and the pupil's parent is in receipt of certain benefits, they will be exempt from paying the cost of board and lodging. The list of benefits to which this applies can be found here. Schools must ensure that parents are aware of the support available to them when being asked for contributions toward the costs of school visits. Some schools also have funds available to enable families in financial difficulty to send their children on visits/activities. Parents should be encouraged to speak to the head teacher in order to establish if such funding arrangements exist. No charge may be made if there is a residential activity taking place largely during school time, or which meets the requirements of the syllabus for a public examination. In addition, if the activity is to do with the national curriculum or religious education, no charge may be made either for the education or for the cost of travel for any pupil, not just those whose parents are in receipt of benefits.

Q. What about charges for transport during school hours?

A. Any transport provided by the school in school hours must be provided free of charge (though a voluntary contribution could be requested).

Q. Can the school charge for something like cooking ingredients or materials needed for a technology lesson?

A. The school can make a charge to cover the costs of materials/ingredients for subjects such as design or food technology where parents have indicated in advance that they would like their child to bring home the finished product.

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Q. Can the school charge entry fees for examinations?

A. An examination entry fee may be charged to parents if:

- the examination is on the set list, but the pupil was not prepared for it at the school;
- the examination is not on the set list but the school arranges for the pupil to take it;
- a pupil fails without good reason to complete the requirements of any public examination where the governing body or local authority originally paid or agreed to pay the entry fee.

Q. Can a school make a charge to pay for the administration required as part of the admission process?

A. Paragraph 1.9 (n) of the 'Schools Admission Code 2012' rules out requests from admission authorities for financial contributions as any part of the admissions process. Legislation prevents state funded schools from charging fees for admission or for providing education during school hours.

Q. Can a school ask for a direct debit to the school fund?

A. No. A school may ask for voluntary contributions, as long as it is clear that they are voluntary, but we are clear that state education should be free and we have no intention of changing this policy. No contributions may be sought as part of the admissions process.

Q. Can a school ask parents to contribute to (or pay in full) the cost of a tablet or computer?

A. Sections 451 and 454 of the Education Act 1996 prohibits schools from charging for education and the supply of materials, books, instruments or other equipment (this would include tablets), during school hours. However, there is no prohibition on asking parents to make voluntary contributions. Additionally there is a specific exception in the legislation which enables schools to charge for materials where the pupil's parent wishes them to own the materials. All contribution requests to parents must make clear that the contributions are voluntary and that, if a parent cannot make or refuses to make a contribution, their children will not be treated any differently and will not be excluded from taking part in any activity or related equipment.

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