



BE INSPIRED BY..... OAKWOOD SCHOOL

BATTLEFIELD EXPERIENCE ON A BUDGET

Findings from research published by The Sutton Trust this year revealed how funding pressures on schools have forced some to cut back on educational visits¹. Schools of all types are feeling the impact of the rising cost of visits and are doing what they can to give children and young people enriching experiences, despite tough economic times.

In this article we hear how Oakwood School's annual trip is designed to keep costs down while still delivering an authentic Belgium battlefields experience.

At 3.30am on 23rd June – a sticky night during the hottest June on record – 63 excited Year 9 students met at school for our first battlefields visit since the pandemic.

We study twentieth century conflict in Year 9 and our visit to sites in Ypres, Belgium that commemorate World War One is an important learning experience. Standing in the trenches and learning about what happened in the places where it occurred, the young people get a much deeper understanding of the conflict.

Low cost - high impact

We work hard to ensure that this trip is very low cost to make it as accessible as possible. It's a DIY trip, in that we do all the site visits and teaching ourselves, and we keep to a tight schedule to enable us to do it all in one (long) day. As a result, we keep the price down to £80. For some young people this is still beyond their means, so we offer additional support for those who qualify for pupil premium, although they do need to have their own passport. Every year, for some of our students this is the first time they have gone abroad – that element alone is a valuable life experience for them.

And they're off!

We took the ferry from Dover to Calais and then made our first stop at Essex Farm graveyard where Mr Edwards told us about John McCrae and Mr Herbert read us the poem written by him 'In Flanders Fields.'

We moved on to the Passchendaele Museum, followed by two further graveyards called Tyne Cot and Langemark, where we contrasted design and layout of the graveyards and reflected on Remembrance. The young people were respectful, and we talked about how being there made them feel about what had happened.

Our final historical site was the Menin Gate, which is currently undergoing refurbishment, but we were still able to lay a wreath on behalf of the school. It was another important moment of reflection before we navigated our way through Ypres to visit the amazing chocolate shop (where many deals were struck!) followed by dinner in a restaurant.



ONE-DAY TRIPS: ADVICE

Sometimes visits don't go to plan.
Ensure you have:

-  Contact details for parents/carers to inform them in the event of delays;
-  Discussed with the coach company about additional driver(s) if the driver hours are exceeded;
-  Contact details for the ferry, train or plane company;
-  Insurance details to hand in the event you need to claim for overnight accommodation;
-  A plan B for self-led visits, to ensure if things don't go to plan you have an alternative option.

Tired, but having had a great day, we headed back to Calais where, despite the best efforts of Mr Gladstone and our coach drivers, we were pushed back to a later ferry. This made the day extremely long and challenging, but the students were all in great spirits and endured the five-hour delay really well.

We finally arrived back at school at 4:30am, exhausted and in need of sleep! We will run the trip again in June 2024, this time with two coaches so we can take more students. We have, however, already booked the channel tunnel (in the hope it won't be such a very long day!).

Catherine's tips for visit leaders

-  Pick a few impactful sites - don't try to visit everything.
-  Use pre- and post- visit activities to build on the day's learning.
-  Build-in time for some fun.
-  Have a plan for communicating delays to parents.

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www.oakwood.surrey.sch.uk

¹ 'School Funding and Pupil Premium 2023', The Sutton Trust available at <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/school-funding-and-pupil-premium-2023>