**Educational Visits to Essex County Council Country Parks**

Please use this information to help you plan your visit. If you would like to discuss your day in more detail or require further information, please contact Michelle Hopkins on 07584 909434.

# Timings

Please arrive at the Country Park for a 10.00am start. The day finishes at

2.30pm. However, we are aware that travel times vary and will accommodate necessary changes.

# Car Parks

Some of the larger Parks have designated coach parking. If going to

Danbury the driver may or may not choose to enter the Park. The common practice in this case, is for the driver to ensure that children are dropped off on the correct side of the road at the entrance to the Park. Education staff are familiar with this and will be ready to act. If visiting Thorndon, double decker buses may have access issues due to low hanging branches.

If you are on a Ranger-led experience, you do not have to pay for the coach in the car park, or for up to 5 cars per booking. We are unable to refund or retract any money put into the machines. Please advise the coach driver if they choose to remain on the Park for the day.

NOTE: If visiting Cudmore Country Park, double decker coaches are NOT permitted, due to access issues. Please note all coaches MUST have a coach permit before entering the park. This will be e-mailed to you once you have confirmed your booking and should be displayed in the coach. If you have not received this, please e-mail michelle.hopkins@essex.gov.uk.

# Arrival

You will be met at the Visitor Centre or the car park by one of the Education Rangers. They will advise you where to put school bags etc. and where the toilets are. Please bring only minimum personal valuables with you. We do not lock things away and you will want to have your hands free for activities. Your Education Ranger will confirm the expected learning outcomes for the day and do their best to ensure that any priorities are met.

# Snacks

If your class normally have a snack mid-morning, you are welcome to bring this with you and we will plan snack time in. It is simpler if snacks are brought separately, rather than in children's lunch bags.

# Toilets

The number of toilets varies in each park. Each park has an accessible toilet. For large groups we will ensure that all the facilities we have will be available on arrival, before lunch and home time.

# Health & Safety

The Education Ranger will have completed a dynamic risk assessment prior to the start of the day. Please ensure that you have read this and signed it. This will be kept on file for future reference. Please note the school is responsible for first aid. Our Education Rangers are first aid trained and can assist or give first aid if required and notified. It is recommended that one member of staff drives to the park in a car, to give urgent travel as required. Please ensure you understand our adult/child ratio requirements (detailed on your provisional booking form and listed below)

# Weather

The Education Rangers will continue with activities in almost all-weather conditions. In the event of poor weather, we are happy to alter our timetable to ensure that you get the most out of the day. In cases of extreme weather, a joint decision between the lead teacher and the Education Ranger will take place. We are able to provide drinking water at all Parks and can refill bottles in hot weather. During cold weather, it may be useful to bring hot water bottles or hand warmers for those more sensitive to temperature.

# Discipline

Whilst at the County Parks, the discipline of the class remains the responsibility of the class teacher. Our Education Rangers are experienced outdoor educators and if they see something that may cause immediate harm or danger, they will act without delay to prevent injury.

# Lunchtime

During this time the Ranger will leave you with your class. There are a wide variety of picnic areas within the Country Parks. Some of them are dog free and enclosed, others have play equipment. Please note our lunch areas are outside. Your Ranger will agree a lunch period with you, usually for around 45 minutes.

# Waste Free Lunch

We are unable to accept the waste from school trips and request that you take it back to school with you. We are happy to provide black bags if you have none. **Please ask the children to bring their normal lunch bag to the park, this will deter the squirrels and crows and will also enable the children can take their own rubbish home**.

# Ratios

* Nursey 1:4
* Primary 1:6
* Secondary 1:10
* Education Ranger 1:35

Please don’t count the Education Ranger in your staffing ratio

We find the whole class benefit when the lead teacher is free to move between groups.

If you attended with a ratio outside our recommendation we include this detail on our Dynamic Risk Assessment and will ask the teacher to sign.

# Supporting Adults

The supporting adults attending can make a big difference. If you know some who are happy to be around mud and mini-beasts and get stuck into the activities, they would be a great asset.

# Clothing

Dressing appropriately can have a big impact on participants’ enjoyment of the day and their wellbeing (both adults and children). Please note that inappropriate clothing or footwear may prohibit children from safely participating in some activities. Please see our Outdoors, Whatever the Weather guidelines [https://www.explore-essex.com/schools-andgroups/schools](https://www.explore-essex.com/schools-and-groups/schools) and make parents and guardians aware. You may wish to involve children in discussing this aspect of preparation as an important life skill.

# Spare Clothes

These are often not required but can cause quite a stir if someone is caught without. Some schools bring a few items of spare waterproofs, for those children who have forgotten. This can be very useful.

# Cameras

Please bring as many digital cameras as possible. We work in highly practical ways and don’t use worksheets out in the Parks. However, we are all aware that evidence recording is important and want you to be able to capture all the ways in which children are using the environment.