

Mercy Limited Education

Operational Instructions Overseas Tour Approval (Policy 5.01)

Introduction

Mercy Education Ltd (Mercy Education) supports the integration of overseas learning experiences for its students, including educational tours and cultural immersions (“overseas tours”). Such experiences provide opportunities for students to broaden their understanding of the global community, to experience and work with different cultures and to develop international networks.

Cultural immersions may include short-term homestay arrangements. In contrast, student exchange programs are provided by registered student exchange organisations (SEOs) and are not covered in these operational instructions. Mercy Education schools wishing to organise student exchange programs should consult their respective state guidelines or regulations.

Schools should consider the number of overseas tours that they offer to students at each year level or during their schooling and whether these are affordable for families or balanced across the curriculum.

Rationale

A school’s educational programme is directed to the holistic development of young people and specifically to:

- 1) their personal and spiritual growth
- 2) the community nature of their lives
- 3) their response and responsibility to the community

Criteria which reflect this concept of holistic education are:

- 1) Spirituality
- 2) Pastoral Care and Community
- 3) Leadership
- 4) Curriculum and co-curriculum
- 5) Cultural immersion

This document expands on these criteria and then addresses operational guidelines for those activities that take students on overseas tours.

1) Spirituality

- a) To provide opportunities for prayer, liturgical celebration and reflection so that students can continue to deepen their personal relationship with God and to continue their search to find meaning in their lives.

2) Pastoral Care and Community

- a) To provide for the extension of the concepts and principles dealt with in school pastoral programmes
- b) To provide situations where social interactions and working relationships between students and between staff and students can develop more rapidly and in ways which are not always possible under the normal constraints of the formal classroom
- c) To provide opportunities for students to develop responsibilities, maturity, tolerance and co-operation
- d) To provide opportunities for students to work with other cultures in their local communities
- e) To allow students to develop a sense of their place in the world

3) Leadership

- a) To provide opportunities for students to exercise personal decision-making and to develop their awareness of their capabilities
- b) To provide opportunities for as many students as possible to exercise leadership or to observe leaders in action

4) Curriculum and co-curriculum

- a) To develop an awareness, appreciation and understanding of the natural environment; of our relationship to it; our dependence on it; and our responsibility for it
- b) To develop an awareness, appreciation and understanding of global environments and international perspectives
- c) To provide opportunities for the enhancement of school-based curriculum
- d) To explore and experience co-curricular activities or areas of specific interest or ability

5) Cultural Immersion

- a) To provide opportunities for students to learn about their roles and responsibilities as global citizens
- b) To experience new cultures, engage in cultural activities and develop intercultural understanding
- c) To gain independence and maturity by facing challenges outside of their familiar comfort zone
- d) To support and develop sister school relationships where appropriate.

Travel Advice Levels

Overseas destinations are categorised in levels according to the [Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade \(DFAT\)](#). DFAT provides country-specific travel advice for destination countries to understand better the specific travel risks, local laws, health issues, visa requirements and local customs. Advice for travellers may be accessed on the Smartraveller website supported by DFAT www.smartraveller.gov.au.

Schools need to determine the travel advice level for a destination country before planning an overseas tour and notify Mercy Education accordingly.

Overseas tour destinations that may be considered for students and staff would be designated by DFAT as:

- “Level 1 - Exercise normal safety precautions”
- “Level 2 – Exercise a high degree of caution”

Overseas tours will not be considered to destinations with higher ‘travel advice levels’.

Overseas Tour Proposals and Approvals

- All *new Level 1 and Level 2 overseas tours* require approval by Mercy Education 15 months in advance of the tour departure.
- All *repeat Level 1 overseas tours* require notification to Mercy Education at least 12 months in advance.
- All *repeat Level 2 overseas tours* require approval by Mercy Education at least 12 months in advance.

All *overseas tour departures* are subject to the approval by Mercy Education of the school’s Risk Management Plan which should be provided to Mercy Education *at least 6 months in advance* of the departure of the tour.

All *Level 1 and Level 2 overseas tours* proposals requiring approval or being notified to Mercy Education must include the following criteria:

- Purpose
- Objectives
- Responsibility: Teacher in Charge
- Draft Itinerary (including potential activities)
- Risk Management (including child protection risks)
- External providers
- Accommodation and transport arrangements

A proforma proposal form is provided by Mercy Education for addressing these criteria, available at www.mercy.edu.au/resources

The Mercy Education Executive will endeavour to respond to the *Overseas Tour Proposal* within one month of receiving the appropriate documentation.

School documentation

Schools should prepare and maintain their own documentation for each overseas tour, which includes:

- Rationale
- Objectives
- Responsibility: Tour Co-ordination
- Itinerary, proposed dates and activities
- Parent Information
- School Rules and Student Behaviour Guidelines
- Student Selection
- Staff and Volunteer Participation
- Fundraising, Staff and Student costs
- Risk Management Plan
- Child Protection
- Host school arrangements
- Accident and Incident Management
- Crisis Management
- External providers

- Accommodation and transport
- Communications and Social media
- Passport, Visas, Vaccinations & Insurance
- General Information
- Reflection and Evaluation processes

The requirements for documentation are outlined below.

Rationale

There are broad educational and cultural reasons for overseas tours to take place and the Principal will consider proposals made by staff and students. Staff who wish to organise overseas tours should consult the Principal in the first instance and then follow these operational instructions.

Objectives

The objectives of the overseas tour should align with the current curricular and co-curricula activities offered by the school. The objectives should be clearly stated in writing for the information of the students, parents, staff, Principal and Mercy Education. While the overseas tour may be exciting and thoroughly enjoyable, it is not to be seen as just a holiday for staff or students. The tour must also be seen as an equitable offering for students, in light of other school programs and curriculum offerings.

Responsibility: Tour Co-ordination

- a) The Principal must be confident that the proposed tour is to be well-supervised, has a teacher in charge, has the appropriate staff:student ratio (refer to relevant jurisdictional guidelines) and that staff can execute their 'duty of care' to the students. Child protection obligations are paramount. If a third party is engaged to assist with the tour, the duty of care is non-delegable.
- b) It is expected that overseas tours will take place mainly during normal school vacation time. This will ensure a minimum interruption to the normal education programme of the school.
- c) The responsibility for the wellbeing, safety and protection of students while in transit and in other countries lies with the Principal.
- d) On overseas tours, there should never be more than 10 students for each teacher, and a minimum of 2 teachers attending. The ratio is subject to change and is dependent on tour activities. With a mixed gender group, both male and female staff must be in attendance. State Government and Catholic Education Office recommendations on staff/student ratios must be adhered to, as stated in their guidelines.
- e) The teacher in charge needs to incorporate a detailed Risk Management Strategy Planning session with the Risk and Compliance Leader at Mercy Education at least 6 months prior to the departure of a Level 1 or Level 2 overseas tour.

Itinerary, proposed dates and activities

The Itinerary should include all travel destinations and planned activities. The proposed itinerary should be submitted for approval with the initial submission to Mercy Education. More details can be added and checked alongside the Risk Management Plan, 6 months prior to departure of the educational tour or cultural immersion. High risk adventure activities in overseas locations are discouraged and may not be approved, especially if the equivalent activity is available in Australia.

Parent Information

Parents must be kept fully informed from the *Expression of Interest* phase until the overseas tour has returned. An initial parent evening is required when details can be explained and enquiries covered. Opportunity for feedback from parents is essential and any feedback should be noted. Parents should be kept informed of any updates to information during the planning process. Parents are required to commit financially to the tour with payments made in line with the fee policies of the school.

School Rules and Student Behaviour Guidelines

Overseas tours should operate in accordance with the policies of the school and Mercy Education. Of particular concern must be the presentation and behaviour of a group of staff and students representing Mercy Education. In some cases, school uniform may be required and this should be advised during the planning phase. Serious breach of school rules on an overseas tour may result in students being sent home immediately at the expense of the parents. The school, if considered necessary and in consultation with Mercy Education, may take further action.

Parent and students are both required to sign a *Student Behaviour Agreement* prior to departure.

All travellers must be aware that local laws and customs in other countries are likely to differ from those in Australia.

Student Selection

The criteria for individual student selection should be based on the following:

- a) Suitability of the overseas tour to the age or maturity of the student
- b) Medical or other special needs and the ability to accommodate these needs in another country or while travelling
- c) Previous student behaviour at the school
- d) Student's Tuition Fees are paid at the full level for both the calendar year of tour organisation/planning and the calendar year of the overseas tour
- e) Previous attendance on overseas tours.

The Principal will have the final decision on the selection of students. Prospective students' names or expressions of interest need to be forwarded to the Principal for approval prior to collection of the first deposit of monies.

Staff and Volunteer Participation

The Principal shall make final decisions on selection of staff, including the teacher in charge. Considerations may include teaching loads, previous experience on overseas tours and medical or fitness considerations. Any other accompanying adults need to be approved by the Principal and are subject to police checks, working with children checks and child protection training.

Fundraising, Staff & Student Costs

Fundraising

- a) Fundraising should be restricted to groups/individuals formally representing Mercy Education and to a small number of activities. Fundraising should be largely in the hands of the students and staff involved in the tour. All fundraising activities must have the approval of the Principal prior to commencement. Such activities should not cut across existing functions in the school. All funds collected, deposits and other contributions must be given to the Business Manager for correct school accounting procedures.

Staff costs

- b) Staff costs should be dealt with in consultation between the Principal and the organising teacher. Circumstances will vary from tour to tour. All discounting of fares and/or accommodation is to be evenly distributed among supervising staff. Spouses are not permitted to accompany staff members on overseas tours without the express permission of the Principal.

Student costs

- c) Students are responsible for the financing of their own personal needs. The teacher in charge may direct funds raised as required and as consistent with the purpose of the tour. The school may contribute where there is a considered need.

Risk Management

The teacher in charge is responsible for assessing any risks and for providing an initial draft Risk Management Plan at the time of proposal or notification and the final draft Risk Management Plan to Mercy Education, at least six months prior to the departure of any overseas tour.

Tour departure is subject to the approval by Mercy Education of the school's Risk Management Plan which is consistent with the final itinerary.

The teacher in charge should consult DFAT for travel advice

<http://smartraveller.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>.

All travellers are advised to register themselves with SmartTraveller.

Child Protection

Mercy Education has a zero tolerance to child abuse. When travelling overseas, the teacher in charge must consider child protection strategies for the students, especially when students participate in homestay accommodation or when engaging external operators.

Homestay: Any host family must be capable of providing a safe, comfortable and nurturing home environment. Students should be empowered to recognise and report inappropriate behaviours and have clear arrangements in place for contacting school staff. Students should also inform staff of potentially inappropriate or unsafe activities planned for the student by the family. Staff must organise a schedule of phone and face-to-face contacts during the homestay. Documented screening arrangements should be conducted by the partner-school prior to finalising student placements in homestay arrangements and students should be billeted in pairs (as a minimum).

Child Protection legislation and standards differ between countries and Australia has some of the highest standards globally. Students will need to be competent at managing or self-administering their own medications (as required) in a homestay situation. Students with known medical risks or dietary requirements may need individual management plans to be translated or interpreted for their host family.

Host School Arrangements

Mercy schools may have reciprocal arrangements in place for school visits on overseas tours. In some cases, students experience a cultural immersion which includes school attendance and homestay arrangements. Host schools may organise special programs and activities for the travelling students. Such arrangements should be checked by the teacher in charge prior to departure on the overseas tour. It is recommended that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) or School Agreement is in place with the Host School to assist with the planning of activities and to reduce risk.

Accident and Incident Management

The teacher in charge should follow the accident and incident management procedures of the Mercy school. It is important that detailed records are taken of any accident or incident that occurs and that relevant first aid or medical attention is given.

Mercy Education should be immediately informed of any accident or incident that affects the wellbeing of a student or member of staff during the overseas tour.

Crisis Management

In the event of a crisis, the school should have clear communication and evacuation procedures. Mercy Education must be informed immediately. Social media implications should be considered and enacted upon as necessary.

Should a crisis involve a natural disaster or terrorist attack, the teacher in charge should follow the directions of the relevant emergency or government authority. Third party operators should have communication and transport arrangements in place. The school's travel insurance company should be contacted.

External Providers

Any external party or tour operator engaged by the tour group must have the appropriate accreditations and insurances in their own country. The external party or tour operator must provide risk assessment information for their activities and operations. At no point, should a student be left unsupervised with an external party or tour operator which has been engaged by the school.

Accommodation and transport

Accommodation will vary for students and staff and may include tents, hostels, dormitories, hotels (minimum 3 star) and homestay arrangements. Students should be accommodated in groups (minimum of 2) and staff should be accommodated separately from students. Child protection strategies must be considered. (Refer Child Protection)

Transport arrangements must always allow for students to be supervised by staff. Public transport risks should be assessed in advance (crowding, reliability, safety, etc). Private transport should be arranged by tour companies and partner schools and the safety of transport routes must be considered. Mercy Education will not approve the hiring of vehicles to be driven by staff.

Communications and Social Media

The school should consider the methods of communication and social media platforms used for students during an overseas tour. Students and staff are likely to communicate via mobile phone or other electronic devices and some guidance should be provided which is consistent with school policies, particularly in regard to the posting of student and staff images.

Staff should consider their personal privacy if communicating with students through any form of social media.

In the event of a crisis, the teacher in charge should ensure that consistent and clear messages are provided to students so that social media implications can be contained.

Passport, Visas, Insurance and Vaccinations

All staff and students are responsible for ensuring that they have a valid passport and any visas required to enter the countries in which they will be travelling.

Travel insurance for all students and adults attending the overseas tour will be organised by the school. It is at the discretion of the parent if they wish to pay for additional, independent travel insurance.

All travellers are responsible for obtaining the relevant vaccinations and visas for the countries visited.

General Information

The information listed below needs to be kept with the School Principal (or delegate) throughout the overseas tour and in case of emergency. The teacher in charge of the tour has the responsibility to provide this information. Such information will be kept confidential and only administration staff and those staff on tour are to have access to it:

- a) Complete itinerary
- b) Australian departure and arrival time, flight number, etc
- c) Passport copies - first two pages for each traveller
- d) Medical Profile and Medicare Number for each traveller
- e) Insurance - medical and travel - copies only
- f) Detailed name and address of host families - if applicable
- g) Permission slips from parents/carers/guardians
- h) Mobile telephone contact numbers of parents/carer/guardians
- i) Photo identification of each student and staff member on tour

- j) Risk Assessments and Health & Safety considerations
- k) Names and details of any at-risk students

Reflection and Evaluation processes

On the completion of the educational tour or cultural immersion, the teacher in charge will present a written report to the Principal. Such report should contain a brief review of the objectives, suitability of the location, accommodation, descriptions of any actions related to student or staff incidents, etc and any recommendations for the future. The notes on this report should be reviewed prior to seeking approval from the Principal or Mercy Education for repeating or planning a similar tour.

A template for this report will be provided by Mercy Education.

Review History

Version	Date Released	Next Review	Author	Approved
1.0	February 2017	2020	Chief Executive	MEL Board
1.1	September 2018	2020	Chief Executive	MEL Board
2.0	March 2020	2023	Head of People and Culture	MEL Executive