

What special schools need

Here are some top tips on how to create a high-quality special school visit.

- Work with special school teachers in advance of a visit to identify key access requirements and activities
- A pre-visit face to face meeting and walk round the museum is important, but if it's not possible, make sure you discuss the visit online or on the phone.
- Highlight which museum spaces are accessible for children in wheelchairs and for children with other access needs.
- Include a safe space or quiet room where a child can chill out.
- Parking for high-top minibuses, ideally free of charge next to the museum or for safe drop-off outside, with nearby car parks highlighted.
- Free pre-visits for teachers to chat to museum staff about the visit, discuss activities and specific needs, and do a walk through and risk assessment.
- A booking form with a section where the needs of SEND children can be highlighted, and where staff have had training in taking SEND bookings and welcoming SEND groups on site.
- A reduced carer rate or free ticket for special schools where the adult-pupil ratio is higher.
- Clear access information on the website to help plan a visit.
- Information on sensory challenges, including changing light levels, flashing lights and noises.
- Highlight multi-sensory resources, object investigation activities and large print text around the museum.
- Accessible toilet facilities and a space to change larger children, ideally a change bed.
- Access to a quiet room for tube feeding and administering medication.
- Separate lunch space, ideally not shared with another school.

- Teachers NEED to be able to use their mobile phones for safety reasons. A no phone policy within the museum will put SEND teachers off visiting.
- SEND schools/groups need flexibility. The option to change time/date/type of visit or possibly cancel at short notice.
- Schools need to be updated of any changes at the museum, such as a new layout, or new exhibitions. Suggest schools join the mailing list.
- Familiarisation information about who works at the museum and what they do. For example *My name is... I work as... My favourite colour is...* This can be sent to the school in advance with a photo of people the children will meet.
- A simple map of the museum identifying where toilets, lunch room, activity spaces/galleries and shop are.
- Sensory toys in the shop.
- For children with autism, DON'T talk too much!
- Use short stories to hook an audience and break story down to bite-sized pieces.
- Train staff and volunteers about appropriate language and non-verbal behaviour (body language).
- Train staff on simple Makaton signs such as *Hello, How are you? Wait, Stop! Yes/No, Good, Goodbye.*
- Offer safe experiences that challenge boundaries. Help children to experience something new and different.
- Recognise the whole of the museum experience is valid and valuable. Keep activities loose and open-ended, not target or results driven.
- Ask museum front of house staff to tell other visitors on the day about the SEND school visit so they know what to expect.
- Inform school staff and children about what to expect. For example, if a member of museum staff/volunteer will be dressed in character.
- Involve the children. Welcome them! Chat to them, show them around.