

Office of the Sheriff of NSW School excursion guide

This guide has been produced to assist school teachers and students to prepare for excursions to Court locations within New South Wales. This guide is to be used where there is no “Law day out” facilitator available through the Rule of Law Institute to facilitate on the day of the excursion.

The NSW Court system recognises the educational opportunities that visits to the Court can afford students and wishes to provide the best environment possible. The Office of the Sheriff takes the safety and wellbeing of all court users including students when they are on Court premises very seriously. However, all visits to NSW Court premises are undertaken at the risk of the individual students and teachers attending for the purposes of a school excursion. There is also the expectation that teachers will maintain a duty of care and level of responsibility for the students in their care when attending on excursions to NSW Court premises.

It must be noted that due to the current Australian security environment and the nature of matters within Courts, any school group booking may be cancelled or rescheduled at any time by the Office of the Sheriff without notice or explanation.

PLANNING FOR THE EXCURSION

It is important that teachers and guardians plan their excursion appropriately and use this guide to assist in this process. Court complexes and premises are secure locations and school groups will have to pass through security scanning and when inside abide by the Court Security Act 2005. Teachers and guardians should instruct students of the following:

- Some everyday pencil case items are considered restricted items on Court premises. Students are to leave at home items such as scissors, compasses, glass bottles and any metal cutlery;
- Items such as knives, guns, toy weapons and other offensive implements as named under the Weapons Prohibition Act 1998 will be confiscated. This can also lead to charges, fines and potentially imprisonment;
- Use of a recording device within a Court complex is an offense under the Court Security Act and can carry a penalty of up to \$2200 and 12 months imprisonment. Students must be informed that this covers all photography (including “selfies” or pictures through augmented reality games such as Pokémon Go) as well as any form of audio recording.
- All of the above restrictions are in place from the moment the students enter Court premises.

ENTRY INTO COURT PREMISES

Teachers and students will see the Sheriff’s Officer(s) at the entrance and security check point upon arrival. It is important that teachers and students provide the name of the school and the supervising teachers name to confirm the booked visit. Teachers are to provide current contact details that the Sheriff’s Officers can contact them on for the duration of the visit.

It is important that teachers and students are aware that some people attending court can be under significant stress and may be charged with committing criminal acts. For this reason, Sheriff's Officers will be on hand to ensure a safe environment for all court users. Due to the nature of the location, wide range of members of the public access court buildings and could potentially negatively interact with students at the time of security scanning processes.

Teachers and students should allow extra time to complete screening by security when entering each venue, with the screening process being similar to airport screening. Items not permitted on court premises will be confiscated. These items (except for knives) will be returned to students as they exit the building. If items that are restricted or prohibited are discovered, this may result in Police action being taken or recommended by the Office of the Sheriff.

It is the role of Sheriff's Officers to determine security considerations for all court users with the primary focus of open access. However, Sheriff's Officers may determine when it is required that certain floors/courtrooms in Courthouses are 'no-go' areas for students because of security concerns. In the rare occurrence when there is an expectation of serious security risks and students are denied access to Courthouses - alternative arrangements for school groups will be coordinated through the Office of the Sheriff and Chief Magistrates Office.

SUPERVISION AND CONDUCT OF STUDENTS

Teachers will remain responsible for students during court visits and their movement between court buildings. Sheriff's officers are available to assist with any concerns or queries from teachers and students about the conduct of any court users. Teachers and students are reminded they are subject to the supervision and direction of Sheriff's Officers and court staff regarding any incident that might occur.

Teachers are responsible for the safety, welfare and behaviour of the students when they are in court buildings. Teachers should have strategies in place for student safety if they get lost; and liaise with Sheriff's Officers regarding any safety concerns or lost students. Students need to be aware that they must remain silent (and have their phones switched off) while in courts that are active. Students are not to leave bags unattended in any area of the court premises.

UNIFORM ATTIRE FOR STUDENTS

Students should be in full school uniform, where possible, with appropriate closed in shoes or in smart casual attire with closed in shoes when attending court buildings. Students and teachers are not to wear hats or clothing that has inappropriate logos or words printed on it.

EMERGENCY EVACUATION

Courts are security controlled buildings and visitors are subject to the direction of Sheriff's Officers and court staff at all times. Teachers should liaise with Sheriff's officers regarding any safety concerns and follow the directions of Sheriff's officers or court staff during any emergency or evacuation. Exits are clearly indicated and fire control mechanisms are in place.

Evacuation plans are on the walls in the vicinity of lifts or exits in most court buildings. Teachers should familiarise themselves with these maps on entering the building with students.

Teachers must have a pre-determined meeting place in the event of an emergency and students must be briefed on this prior to entry. The Rule of Law Institute may suggest a meeting point for teachers to advise students.

COURT PROCEEDINGS

Prior to visiting courtrooms, students must be reminded by their teacher on the rules contained in the Court Security Act 2005 – specifically, no taking of any photographs, no use of recording devices, ensuring phones are on silent while in court. Severe penalties can apply to anyone breaching the rules and these rules are in place for the safety of all court users and the smooth operation of the courts.

If advised by a Sheriff's Officer or court staff that students must not enter a particular court room, this must be adhered to, students must not enter court rooms if advised not to.

Prior to visiting courts, teachers must brief students that they may see and hear things that are distressing. The welfare of students is the responsibility of the teacher who must decide if the content of court proceedings is likely to cause distress for any student. For this reason, the supervising teacher will need to make a determination as to whether students should remain or leave during the conduct of court proceedings.

The welfare of students is the responsibility of the teacher. The Office of the Sheriff and Rule of Law Institute are not responsible for any adverse outcomes arising for students from the observation of any proceedings or from students observing any court proceedings.

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