

Frequently Asked Questions

The Learning Programme at STEAM

1. What does STEAM Education offer?

Details of all the Discovery Sessions on offer for school groups, which include the Victorian era and WW2, can be found on the Key Stage pages of the website.

Discovery Sessions run every day of school term time, with the exception of two weeks in both October and March, when we offer only our special WW2 themed days: We'll Meet Again.

More information about We'll Meet Again can be found on the [We'll Meet Again](#) page of the website. This event happens twice each year for two weeks during the autumn and spring.

Schools are also welcome to explore the Museum on a self-guided visit. However, there may be restrictions on available dates for this type of visit because of the amount of teaching that happens every day amongst the Museum displays.

2. What happens during a Discovery Session?

All of our Discovery Sessions promote cross-curricular learning through handling original objects and ephemera and storytelling using characters, costume, drama and role-play.

Each Discovery Session has a clear learning outcome and links to both the previous and the 2014 National Curriculum.

Most of all, we want the children to enjoy themselves and use their imaginations to explore possibilities and be inspired to learn more.

All Discovery Sessions are delivered by Education Officers, who are qualified teachers with enhanced DBS clearance, experienced at all Key Stages and in Special Needs.

2. What happens during We'll Meet Again and when does it happen?

We'll Meet Again is a whole day living history experience for you and your pupils. More details about We'll Meet Again can be found on the [We'll Meet Again](#) page of the website and in the [We'll Meet Again Support Materials](#) on the [Planning Your School Visit](#) page.

This event happens twice each year for two weeks during the autumn and spring (usually during early March and early October).

Forthcoming dates for We'll Meet Again can be found on the [We'll Meet Again](#) page, once they have been scheduled.

3. When do Discovery Sessions run?

A Discovery Session lasts one hour. Standard session times are 10.15 - 11.15am, 11.30am - 12.30pm and 12.45 - 1.45pm.

All Discovery Sessions are sold as pre-allocated, timed slots, which are not negotiable. Your slots will be confirmed by email on an attached timetable. These timings must be adhered to because of the high volume of schools using STEAM each day

Each school group will also be allocated a 30 minute slot in our school lunchroom, which is dependent on the timing and number of Discovery Sessions allocated.

4. What is the maximum group size for a Discovery Session?

The maximum group size for all of our Discovery Sessions is 34 pupils. Groups larger than 34 will be divided in to smaller groups and will incur slightly higher costs per pupil.

6. How many classes can I bring on the same day to do Discovery Sessions?

We can accommodate up to three classes a day for our programme of Discovery Sessions.

The maximum group size is 34 pupils, so if you have 102 pupils or fewer, they can all visit together on one day, as long as there is availability.

7. How many classes can I bring on the same day to experience We'll Meet Again?

During the two weeks of We'll Meet Again in autumn and spring, we have 5 available slots each day. Each slot accommodates between 25 (minimum) and 34 (maximum) pupils. If you have 170 pupils or fewer, they can all visit together on one day, as long as there is availability.

The children follow a carousel of 5 different half hour WW2 workshops plus a half hour for lunch. Further details about We'll Meet Again can be found on the [We'll Meet Again](#) page of the website or in the [We'll Meet Again Support Materials](#) on the [Planning Your School Visit](#) page.

8. How many Discovery Sessions can my class do in one day?

You are able to book a combination of two Discovery Sessions in any one day. Two sessions leaves enough time during a standard day of 10am to 2pm

for you to look around the Museum, as well as for a half hour slot in our dedicated school lunchroom.

Our most popular WW2 combination of Discovery Sessions is Air Raid Experience with Evacuation Experience.

Please contact our team to find out which combinations of sessions we can offer and which would be best for your learning focus. Do remember that STEAM is a Victorian Social History Museum, so the Museum itself is a wonderful resource for children.

9. What do I do when my pupils are not involved in Education Officer led Discovery Sessions?

Children need to have something to focus on in the Museum when they are not taking part in Discovery Sessions. We ask our visiting teachers to provide additional learning resources on the day of the visit to engage pupils during their periods of free time in the Museum.

The Museum supplies clipboards and pencils on the day of your visit. These can be requested at and should be returned to the STEAM Ticket Desk.

STEAM is a Victorian Social History Museum and is a fabulous resource for children with lots of interactive things to see and do. Pupils need at least an hour, preferably two, to do it justice.

Additional learning resources for the history of the Great Western Railway and around the Museum displays

[The story of the GWR](#) and a range of [activity sheets](#) to use around the Museum displays can be found on the [Planning Your School Visit](#) page. These are suitable for EYFS, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, and can be adapted for older children. They can also be used before and after your visit.

Please photocopy a selection suitable for your class and bring these resources along on the day of your visit. Alternatively, if you do not wish to use our learning resources, please devise your own activities for your class/es during your Familiarisation Visit.

Additional learning resources for Swindon's Railway Village

If you are visiting during the summer months and are studying something that links with the social history of Swindon, you might like to use the map and notes supplied in [Swindon's Railway Village](#) to plan and conduct a self-guided tour around Swindon's Railway Village, which is located a five minute walk from STEAM. This tour takes about an hour. There is also a Risk Assessment supplied for this tour in [Risk Assessments and Health and Safety requirements](#).

The Railway Village is a unique, planned and preserved Victorian community built to house the workers of the new GWR. The tour might include terraced

housing, the GWR School and Park, the Medical Fund Society buildings, St Mark's Church and the Mechanics' Institute.

Additional learning resources for a World War Two visit

There are links between our displays and WW2 if you know where to look and a simple trail for accompanying adults is provided to help adults encourage children to make these links. A detailed document which outlines the role that the railways in general and the GWR in particular played during WW2 is also provided. If the children are well prepared beforehand through discussion of some of these functions, this also helps them to make more sense of what they see in the Museum.

These materials can be found in [WW2 Support Materials](#) on the [Planning Your School Visit](#) page, along with suggestions for dressing up 1940s style and templates for making props for your wartime day.

We find that when children engage in two WW2 Discovery Sessions, by the time they have had a half hour for lunch and a shop visit, there is just enough time for them to do a whistle stop tour of the Museum.

Booking a Visit

1. When can I visit?

STEAM welcomes c. 20,000 school visitors a year. Availability changes all the time and our programme is highly oversubscribed.

The best approach is for you to pre-agree a range of dates within school that would suit you for a visit, check your potential travel arrangements and costs and then contact us.

We will initially make a provisional booking for your visit and will hold your booking for one week. Once we have received your Booking Request Form, we will send your Booking Confirmation.

2. Are there cancellation charges?

Yes. Details of our Cancellation Charges can be found on our [Terms and Conditions](#), which will be sent to you when you make your initial enquiry.

Cancellation charges for visits with booked Discovery Sessions and for We'll Meet Again will be applied as follows:

0 - 3 weeks prior to the visit: 100% i.e. the full price per pupil for the number of pupils stated on the invoice and confirmed by the venue.

3 - 6 weeks prior to the visit: 50% i.e. half of the full price per pupil for the number of pupils stated on the invoice and confirmed by the venue.

The notification period above counts backwards from 10am on the morning of the booked visit. The above charges will be invoiced.

Please ensure that you have fully costed the visit, including transport charges, before making a booking.

1. What's the best way to contact the Learning Team?

The Learning Team have wide-ranging responsibilities including teaching the Programme for Schools.

When our phone lines are busy, or there is no one available to speak with you, you will go through to voicemail. Please leave one message only with a clear return telephone number and a best general time to call you back. Messages will be responded to in date received order.

The best way to contact the Learning Team is by email to steameducation@swindon.gov.uk. This is usually checked at least once a day.

Alternatively, you can fill out a [Learning Enquiry Form](#).

During the first week of each term and throughout the whole of September and October, we receive an extremely high volume of telephone calls from schools, so please be patient. We will get back to you!

2. What happens if I need to change the date of my booking?

If urgent circumstances mean that you need to change the date of your booking, we will do our best to accommodate you, if our capacity allows. Otherwise, cancellation charges could apply, as above.

3. What if my numbers decrease after I have received booking confirmation?

We can make changes to pupil numbers until we send out the invoice for your booking. Once we have sent your invoice, we will not be able to issue a second invoice. Invoices are sent out either at the end of the half term prior to your visit, or at the start of the half term when the visit will take place. Please let us know if there are any changes in pupil numbers as soon as possible at steameducation@swindon.gov.uk.

Costs

1. How much does it cost for pupils?

Single Discovery Session - 60 minutes

£8.50 per pupil

Double Discovery Sessions – 60 minutes + 60 minutes

£11.50 per pupil

The prices quoted above include admission to the Museum, and are for a standard class of between 25 and 34 pupils. Groups with fewer than 25 pupils will incur higher charges per pupil.

If you wish to book Discovery Sessions for a group of **fewer than 15 pupils**, there is a minimum charge per session booked.

Please email us on steameducation@swindon.gov.uk to confirm final costs for your visit.

Self-guided visits to the Museum (with no Discovery Session)

£5.50 per pupil.

We'll Meet Again

£13.50 per pupil

There is a minimum group charge of 25 pupils per slot booked for We'll Meet Again.

Swindon Cards and STEAM Season Tickets cannot be used on organised school visits.

2. How much does it cost for adults?

Adults are free at the ratio of 1 to 6 at Key Stage 1, 1 to 10 at Key Stage 2 and 1 to 12 at Key Stage 3 and above, which is the minimum supervision ratio required at STEAM.

One to one supports for individual pupils with Special Needs also go free on top of this ratio. Any further additional adults will be charged the current full adult admission charge for STEAM and must be declared at the time of booking.

3. How much does it cost for pre schools and nurseries?

For family visitors, 3s and under go free at STEAM. For our Learning Programme, we charge 3s and under our standard school pupil admission of £5.50 per pupil.

An educational visit involves additional services. These include meeting and greeting, the collection and storage of bags, coats and lunches, free slots in the school lunchroom, delivery and collection of lunches to and from the lunchroom, provision of additional learning resources and Risk Assessments, as well as booking and administration time etc.

On the other hand, we apply the principal of not charging for the number of adults required to supervise the children. As this number is usually high for pre

school children, the visit works out cheaper for the organisation by paying for the children rather than the accompanying adults.

Health and Safety

1. Is there a Risk Assessment for educational activities?

Yes. We have detailed Risk Assessments and Safe Systems of Work for all educational activities. Please see [Risk Assessments and Health and Safety requirements](#) on the [Planning Your School Visit](#) page of the website.

Please ensure you fully familiarise yourself with all STEAM's Risk Assessments for school visitors before your visit. The Group Leader should thoroughly brief all accompanying adults and, where applicable, the children in advance of the visit.

Please note that these Risk Assessments are written from the Museum's perspective and especially from the perspective of the Learning Team at STEAM. We recommend that all Group Leaders also conduct their own additional Risk Assessment during a Familiarisation Visit and use the materials we provide to complement your own.

2. What about Health and Safety, supervision and behaviour of pupils?

The [Risk Assessments and Health and Safety requirements](#) also include Standard Conditions for School Groups visiting STEAM. These detail the behaviour we expect from school children on a visit to the Museum, and what the Health and Safety responsibilities of Group Leaders and other accompanying adults are, including minimum supervision ratios and maximum group walkabout numbers.

Also included are procedures for Fire and Emergency Evacuation of the building and for Children becoming Lost or Separated.

Again, please ensure you fully familiarise yourself with these documents so that you are aware of your responsibilities whilst at STEAM. The Group Leader should thoroughly brief all accompanying adults and, where applicable, the children in advance of the visit.

3. What about Safeguarding?

STEAM – Museum of the Great western Railway is strongly committed to protecting and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff, volunteers and visitors to embrace this commitment.

Please contact us if you would like a copy of our Safeguarding Policy and Procedure.

Preparation for the Visit

1. What do I do about a preliminary or Familiarisation Visit?

Because of the high volume of schools using STEAM, it is not necessary to book a Familiarisation Visit or to tell us you are coming. Simply bring along a copy of your Booking Confirmation email to show at the Ticket Desk on arrival, and you will be let into the Museum free of charge.

STEAM is open 7 days a week except Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day. Our standard opening times are 10am to 5pm Monday to Saturday (last admission 4pm), and 11am to 4pm on Sundays (last admission 3pm).

Please always check the website before visiting STEAM for any unscheduled closures, and be aware that free entry does not apply on special event days e.g. The Brick Show, Comicon, STEAM Punk etc., nor for individuals who are not school staff members.

We are happy for any school staff that will be accompanying the children on the day of the actual visit to attend the Familiarisation Visit, so that everyone feels fully confident about planning for their visit.

2. How do I pay for our visit?

An invoice will be generated and emailed directly to the finance contact you supply on the Booking Request Form. Invoices are sent out either at the end of the half term prior to your visit, or at the start of the half term when the visit will take place. If the booking and visit dates fall within the same half term, you will receive an invoice as soon as your booking is confirmed.

Payment is expected within 30 days of the date of the invoice being issued. The invoice will be for the number of pupils confirmed by the venue in a Booking Confirmation email.

Details about Payment options can be found on the invoice.

All visits taking place towards the end of the financial year, must be paid before 31st March.

Please make sure that any remittance advice is sent directly to steameducation@swindon.gov.uk rather than to Swindon Borough Council.

STEAM does not issues refunds for any pupils absent on the day of your visit. If more pupils attend than stated on your invoice and confirmed by the venue, you will receive an additional invoice for the full price per additional participant.

3. Is VAT charged on educational activities?

No. Educational activities at the Museum are VAT exempt.

4. Do you supply clipboards and pencils?

Yes. The Museum supplies clipboards and pencils on the day of your visit. These can be requested at and should be returned to the STEAM Ticket Desk.

Please ensure that pupils do not have clipboards and pencils during their Discovery Sessions with Education Officers, as they are a huge distraction.

5. Do you have a shop?

Yes. The STEAM Gift Shop is stocked with a range of child friendly and pocket money priced items. We recommend at least £2 per pupil for a shop visit.

Pre-ordered Goody Bags (to pick up on the day of your visit) are also available from £5 per bag, but must be ordered at least 2 weeks in advance of your visit. Please email adminsteam@swindon.gov.uk or call 01793 466637.

Please be aware that Standard Conditions still apply during a shop visit i.e. minimum supervision ratios need to be adhered to and behaviour of pupils closely monitored.

The maximum group walkabout number also still applies i.e. at KS1, the group needs to be divided into smaller groups of no more than 5 (under the supervision of an adult) and at KS2, the group needs to be divided into smaller groups of no larger than 8 (under the supervision of an adult).

PLEASE NOTE: During busy periods, the number of children allowed in the Shop at one time may be limited to 8 pupils. Please build this into your planning on the day.

During our 'We'll Meet Again' event, which runs twice a year, there is very limited opportunity to visit the Shop until after the event has finished at 1.50pm. Because of problems relating to 165 school children unavoidably all needing to access the Shop at this time, **we strongly suggest that you pre-order Goody Bags (see above)**, unless you are planning to stay at the Museum beyond 2.15pm with your class.

6. Do you have a lunchroom for school groups?

Yes. We have a purpose built lunchroom on the second floor of the Museum with toilets. It is also accessible by lift.

30 minute lunchroom slots are allocated at the time of booking.

Your lunches will be collected from you on arrival at the Museum, and delivered to the lunchroom, so please ensure that no valuables are left with lunches.

Please note that the lunchroom accommodates up to two classes simultaneously, so it is very likely that you will be sharing the lunchroom with a group from another school. If you enter the lunchroom and it is empty, please arrange your class over one half of the tables so that space remains for the second group.

7. Can I choose the lunchtime for my class(es)?

No. The Programme for Schools has been developed operationally to enable us to deliver the maximum number of sessions in different locations at the same time on a school visit of standard duration (usually from 10am to 2pm). There is no negotiation over allocated lunchtimes.

Each Session/combination of Sessions has its own pre-determined lunchtime slot to enable us to deliver the maximum number of Sessions per day. Depending on the combination of Sessions you choose and pre-existing bookings on that day, you may be allocated an early lunch (11am -11.30am) or a late lunch (1.05pm -1.35pm).

Your slot/s will be confirmed by email on an attached timetable. These timings must be adhered to because of the high volume of schools using STEAM each day, and the venue's responsibility to safely evacuate visitors from the Museum if necessary.

If you are bringing more than one class, it is very unlikely that the different classes will eat at the same time.

8. Is the Museum accessible for wheelchair users?

Most areas within the Museum (including some toilets) have wheel chair access, and lifts and ramps connect all floors. One toilet in the Museum is equipped with an adult changing table.

Our Air Raid Shelter has wheelchair access. Our Evacuation carriage can be fitted with a ramp for standard, manual wheel chairs but we apologise that this Victorian carriage does not have a wide enough turning circle for motorised wheel chairs.

We also apologise that wheel chair access to the footplate and tender of Caerphilly Castle Locomotive during We'll Meet Again is not possible. Alternative interactive activities will be provided.

Please always make us aware of any wheelchair users at the time of booking or before the day of your visit, as arrangements need to be made in advance for Evacuation Experience and aspects of We'll Meet Again.

On the Day of the Visit

1. Where do we park?

If you are coming by coach or minibus, you can park directly in front of the Museum. Directions are in [Visiting Steam](#) on the [Planning Your School Visit](#) page of the website.

If you are coming by car or people carrier, you will need to follow the brown signs to the Designer Outlet Centre or Outlet Centre North Car Park. You will need to retain your car parking ticket and exchange it for a 'one free exit' ticket at the Ticket Desk of the Museum on arrival.

If you are arriving by car and you are a Blue Badge holder, you can call 01793 466626 and request disabled parking. There is currently a small area providing disabled parking alongside the Museum.

2. What do we do with lunches, coats and bags?

STEAM staff will meet and greet your group/s and supervise while coats and bags are collected and locked in a secure cloakroom. The cloakroom will be available to the group/s again only at lunchtime and on departure. Please take any essential medicines that pupils may need into the Museum with you.

Lunches are collected separately and will be taken to the school lunchroom, so please ensure no valuables are left with the lunches.

3. What do we do with children's money?

Where a school has planned a visit to the STEAM Gift Shop, we find that the Group Leader usually takes charge of the pupils' money and takes this into the Museum with the class/es.

This is what we prefer, as money can become a distraction to individual pupils during their Discovery Session/s. Parents can be asked to provide a named purse containing spending money, which is easier for the Group Leader to manage.

4. Will the number of children be checked?

Yes. STEAM staff will count the number of children in each group and ask the Group Leader to sign to confirm the number of children attending on the day.

Minimum supervision ratios will also be checked on arrival at the Museum. You may be refused entry if you do not meet STEAM's minimum supervision ratios for school groups.

This is 1 to 6 at KS1, 1 to 10 at KS2 and 1 to 12 at KS3 and above. This is also our maximum group walkabout number.

5. Where are the toilets?

Please refer to [Visiting STEAM](#) on the [Planning Your School Visit](#) page of the website (map for teachers and adult helpers).

The main toilet block is located in the Museum foyer (for general use). There is an additional single male and single female toilet on the Station Platform (for general use) and further toilets alongside the school lunchroom on the second floor (school groups only). There is an accessible toilet in each location.

6. What is our programme for the day?

You will receive a Booking Confirmation Email with a timetable for your day once you have booked. The groupings for your pupils, timings of Discovery Sessions, locations of Discovery Sessions and timings of lunchroom slots will all be included.

Please make sure that the children are pre-divided into their groups for Discovery Sessions before arrival at STEAM. Also ensure that all of your accompanying adults are aware of the timings for the day to avoid difficulties for other groups using STEAM Education on the day of your visit.

It is also helpful if the children are pre-divided into maximum group walkabout numbers prior to arrival at the Museum, and have an adult pre-designated for their supervision for the duration of the visit.

7. What else do we need to bring?

As well as the children, their lunches and essential medicines, please bring along enough copies of your timetable for the day for all of your accompanying adults. If every adult has a record of the timings and location/s of your Discovery Session/s and of lunchroom slots, this avoids difficulties for other groups using STEAM Education on the day of your visit.

You might also find it useful for every adult to have a copy of the map for teachers and adult helpers, which you will find in [Visiting STEAM](#) on the [Planning Your School Visit](#) page of the website.

Children need to have something to focus on in the Museum when they are not taking part in Discovery Sessions. We ask our visiting teachers to provide additional learning resources on the day of the visit to engage pupils during their periods of free time in the Museum.

Additional learning resources can be downloaded from the Planning Your School visit page of the website. Please photocopy a selection suitable for your class and bring these resources along on the day of your visit. Alternatively, please devise your own activities for your class/es during your Familiarisation Visit.

The Museum supplies clipboards and pencils on the day of your visit. These can be requested at and should be returned to the STEAM Ticket Desk. Please ensure that pupils do not have clipboards during Discovery Sessions with Education Officers, as they are a huge distraction.

8. Can the children bring original gas masks to the Museum?

No. Children should under no circumstances bring original or vintage gas masks to the Museum as part of their World War Two visit. Templates for making replicas are provided in STEAM's additional learning resources for World War Two on the [Planning Your School Visit](#) page.

9. Can the children take water into the Museum?

We are aware that children need regular access to drinking water through their working day at school. If you feel it is necessary on the day of your visit, school children (unlike the rest of our visitors) are permitted to take a small bottle of still water with a screw top into the Museum with them.

Please respect this privilege by ensuring ONLY still water is taken into the Museum, as this rule is in place to protect the Museum Collections in general and the handling collections, historical reconstructions and displays used with school children.

Please also ensure that water bottles do not cause a distraction during Discovery Sessions with Education Officers.

10. Will there be a first aider on site?

Yes. There is always a first aider on site when STEAM is open to the public.

11. Can we take photographs?

STEAM currently operates a policy whereby photography and filming of school children on organised school visits by general visitors are not permitted in the Museum.

Visitors and other members of the public who appear to be taking photographs in inappropriate circumstances should be challenged.

Whilst we are happy for you to take photographs of the children in your own school, at points that the Education Officer will stage for you, we do not permit filming of any Education Officer or volunteer led session.

12. How can we give feedback on our day?

We hope that you have a great day at STEAM and would love to hear from you after your visit. Evaluation Forms are available on the day from the Ticket Desk. They are also available from the Education Officer teaching your Discovery Session. Please return them to the Ticket Desk when you have completed them.