



FEEL GOOD FIELD TRIPS

Lead: Dave Savage, Community Rail Lancashire

Total budget: £141,335

Fund: Avanti West Coast



CONCEPT AND AIMS

Launched in March 2022, the Feel Good Field Trips initiative by Avanti West Coast aimed to provide free, enriching, and educational days out for up to 5,000 school children aged 4-18 across the West Coast Mainline during 2023 and 2024. Each fully funded trip included return train travel on an Avanti West Coast service, lunch for students and staff, and a unique educational experience. The focus was on immersive, hands-on learning experiences reflecting modern Britain's diverse culture while bringing joy to children impacted by the pandemic.

The project targeted schools with a high pupil premium rate (above 24%) to help disadvantaged pupils access field trips. Since the Covid pandemic, rising transport costs, tighter school budgets, and staffing shortages have caused a decline in field trips, especially in disadvantaged areas. For example, English Heritage reports a 28% drop in school visits and a 63% increase in trip costs over three years. The project aimed to offer free trips and encourage schools to use trains, helping reintroduce valuable field trip experiences.

Field trips are essential to education, providing opportunities for children to explore beyond their communities, ignite curiosity, and build confidence while creating lasting memories. Additionally, these trips will educate pupils on railway safety, sustainability through green travel, public interaction, and potential careers in the rail industry—many experiencing rail travel for the first time.

Dave Savage or another community rail officer will assist with as many trips as possible, supporting teachers and educating children on railway safety, sustainability, and career opportunities in the rail industry.



BUDGET

Community Rail Partners across Britain submitted funding applications which Avanti West Coast approved to cover the cost of sending thousands of school children on Feel Good Field Trips.

- Community Rail Lancashire - £101,400
- Heart of England - £22,255 (Soho Sonic Studio, Herbert Gallery and other trips based in the Midlands)
- SE Manchester - £9,100 (Food Sorcery Trips)
- Community Rail Cumbria - £8,980 (Fell Foodie Trips)

DELIVERY PERSONNEL

Avanti West Coast partnered with Community Rail Lancashire to deliver the project, appointing Dave Savage as the project lead in September 2022. Key responsibilities included:

- **School Liaison:** Engaging schools in the Avanti Schools Program, confirming interest, availability, group sizes, and dietary/accessibility requirements.
- **Experience Host Coordination:** Booking venues, confirming logistics, and dietary/accessibility needs.
- **Travel Arrangements:** Booking Avanti train travel and coordinating coach/minibus transfers when necessary.
- **Lunch Arrangements:** Organising lunches through venues or third-party providers
- **Community Rail Partners:** Notifying partners of trips and discussing learning sessions on rail safety.
- **Avanti West Coast PR and Community Teams:** Providing updates, stories, and photos.
- **Trip Attendance:** Attending trips when possible to observe and address logistical issues, particularly for new experiences.

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

- Initially, no trips were booked until the December 2022 timetable was released due to reduced services post-COVID.
- Expanded beyond Avanti's 25 School Partnerships to engage additional eligible schools.
- Dave Savage engaged with Community Rail Partners along the West Coast Mainline for support, trip ideas, and school recommendations.
- Three established experiences in London, Manchester, and Coventry were prioritised for bookings.

TRIP PLANNING PROCESS

- Engage with schools to determine preferred trips and confirm participant details.
- Make seat reservations and provide Authority To Travel Tickets (ATT).
- Assist with risk assessments.
- Prepare and share detailed itineraries, including dietary needs with the lunch provider.

WHAT WAS INCLUDED?

- Return travel on an Avanti West Coast service with seat reservations.
- Rail safety talk.
- Unique educational experience at a West Coast Mainline destination.
- Feel Good Field Trip activity booklet and pen.

OUTCOMES

Community Rail Lancashire were delighted we were able to deliver over 200 trips for 5289 students surpassing the target of 5000 set at the beginning of the project. 105 different schools benefited from trips during this project. Dave Savage attended 120 of these trips with other community rail officers of Avanti West Coast staff attending a further 40 trips.

Feel Good Field Trip facts January 2023 – January 2025

5289 students been on a Feel Good Field Trip

877 staff to support the students

215 trips at **45** different venues

455 Avanti West Coast train journeys

50,000+ miles covered on the WCML



DESTINATIONS

This project aimed to deliver Feel Good Field Trips at various venues along the West Coast Mainline, providing educational and enriching experiences for schoolchildren. Despite logistical challenges, such as the lack of morning train services to North Wales on the Avanti West Coast timetable, we managed to cover a wide range of places along the West Coast Mainline.

Where possible, local companies and suppliers were engaged to enhance the experience and support local communities. Highlights included partnerships with Fell Foodie in the Lake District, The Dukes in Lancaster, and Warrington Wolves Foundation, among others. Over the course of the project, more than 50 unique locations were visited, offering children a wide variety of exciting and educational opportunities.

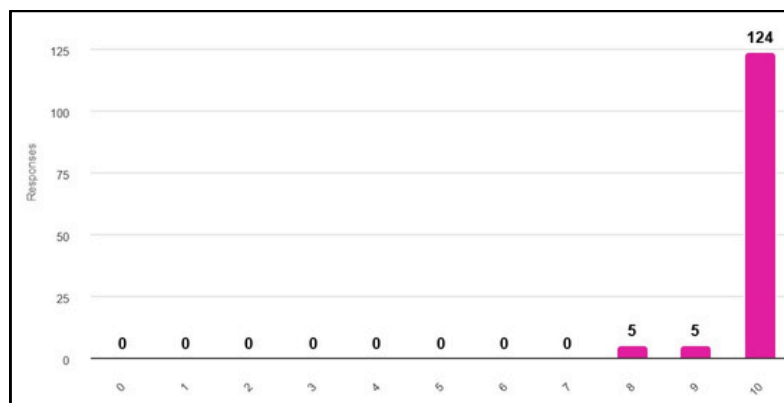
The initiative concluded on a high note with a final trip to the Tower of London on January 9, 2025, hosting 59 Year 5/6 pupils from Rochdale.



RESPONSES

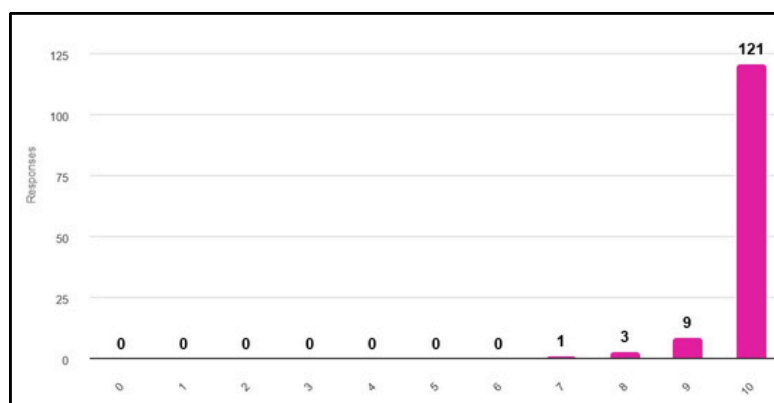
After each trip, the lead teacher was sent an online feedback form using the Impact software. We had 134 responses.

How much did you enjoy your field trip?



93% surveyed gave their Feel Good Field Trip a 10/10 rating with no responses lower than a 8/10 rating.

How easy was it to book your field trip?



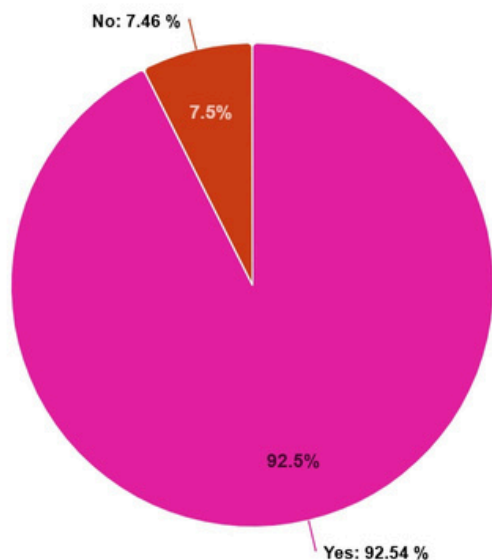
93% of those surveyed had given their Feel Good Field Trip a 10/10 rating, with no responses lower than a 7/10. As a former teacher, I had understood how much work was required to organise a successful field trip. My goal had been to minimise the burden on teachers by taking care of as many details as possible.

Here's what was provided to ensure a seamless experience:

- **Risk Assessments:** Supplied upon request to ensure safety and compliance.
- **Detailed Itineraries:** Designed to keep the day structured and hassle-free.
- **Logistics Coordination:** Train travel, venue activities, and lunches were all pre-arranged.

Schools were responsible for securing approval through Evolve, gaining authorisation from their headteachers and local councils. They also provided additional staff for supervision and managed student.

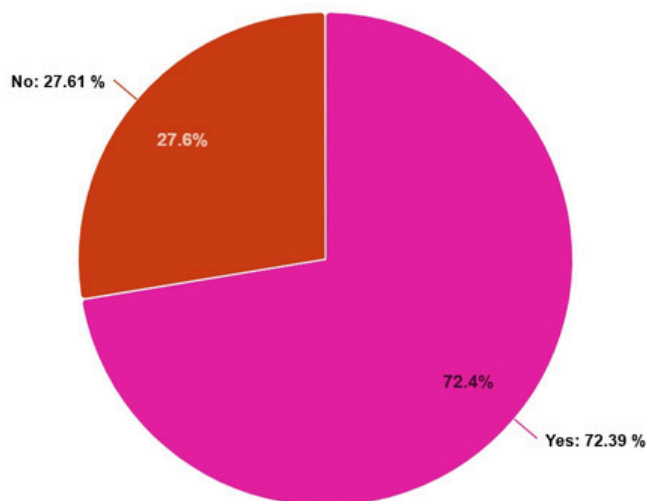
Was this the first time travelling by train for some of your students



On the majority of trips (92.5%), at least one student had never travelled by train before. The results showed that there were often multiple students experiencing train travel for the first time. In fact, on some trips, over a quarter of the pupils were new to train travel.

Interestingly, almost all the schools surveyed had never used train travel for a school trip before.

Did the train run on time?



Around 73% of the trains booked from the schools that returned the survey arrived on time.

During the project, **450 Avanti West Coast train services were booked** to accommodate school groups. Despite the high volume of travel, only **15 trains (3.3%) were cancelled**. When cancellations occurred:

- The group booking team worked to reserve seats on the next available train.
- At London Euston, the pre-boarding team ensured school groups could board the next available train in an unreserved carriage, minimising disruption.
- The school group could board the next available train using their Authority To Travel (ATT).

FEEDBACK

How was your experience using Avanti West Coast trains?

The majority of the feedback for the Avanti West Coast train services was very positive, with schools praising the support and friendliness of the staff, as well as the comfort and smooth operation of the trains. Here are some direct quotes:

"Brilliant! All staff were very friendly, helping the trip go smoothly. They were very welcoming to the children. We even got a shout-out over the tannoy from the station manager at Stockport - the children loved that, and we appreciated it."

"Apart from the delay, the experience was excellent. Waving to drivers, helpful guards, and the early boarding onto trains at Euston was a real bonus."

"A great experience, extremely well looked after by all staff. Very friendly staff too! The organisation was exceptional—I have never been on a school trip that was so seamlessly organised from start to finish."

"Excellent—the train was so fast, the resources for the pupils were great, and David Savage was amazing with the pupils and so well-informed."

Word bank based on experience using Avanti West Coast trains?



ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

While the majority of experiences were positive, a few areas for improvement were noted:

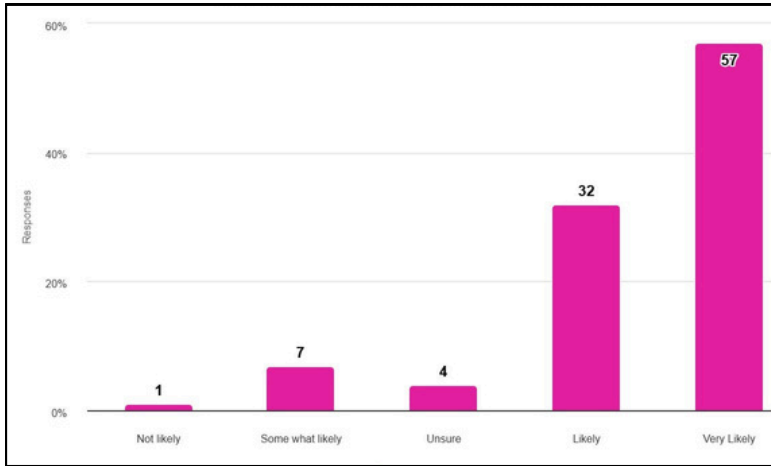
- **Double-Booked Seats:** Several teachers commented on issues with passengers sitting in reserved seats or seats being double-booked.
- **Train Delays:** Although delays were rare and minor, they were mentioned in some feedback.

HIGHLIGHTS OF SUPPORT

Teachers consistently praised the Avanti staff for their professionalism and care:

- Staff were described as “very friendly” and “extremely helpful.”
- Early boarding at stations like London Euston and the presence of a pre-boarding team minimised disruption.
- Communication from staff, particularly from coordinators like David Savage, ensured that even cancellations were managed smoothly.

How likely are you to use a train for a school trip in the future?



Almost 90% of schools said they are likely or very likely to use trains for a school trip in the future. Most of the groups that went out had never been on a school trip using a train previously. Many of the teachers commented on how easy it can be especially having support of platform staff at the station and how quick train travel can be. Cost would play a big part in whether schools would use a train or coach in the future for school trips.

Feedback from online surveys

'The concept of the Feel good trips" is exceptional. It has provided our children with a truly unique experience that I know they will remember for along time to come. The vast majority of our children will never get the opportunity to ride on a train and particularly with their peers. I can't praise Avanti enough for this innovative project. Well done Avanti!'

'This is such a fantastic project. It is so difficult to find the time and money to get pupils on trips now, but this makes it easy and provides experiences our pupils will remember for the rest of their lives.'

'David has been fantastic. His communication regarding the planning and delivery of the trips was excellent and his leadership on the day was great. He was knowledgeable about the places that we visited and kept the children engaged throughout the day. Thankyou for a wonderful experience for our pupils!'

'Students thoroughly enjoyed the trip and benefited greatly from the experience. Many of these students were either Mental well-being ambassadors, young leaders or students that have been struggling with their mental health and their reflections show that they were able to see and understand the benefits of the outdoors/cooking (picking up hobbies) to help with their own mental well-being.'

'Dave was a brilliant guide throughout the day and both children and staff had a great time during the trip. The day was extremely well organised, Dave was able to provide plenty of insightful information and the children got to experience lots of events for the very first time. It was great listening to the children at the end of the day discuss all their favourite parts of the trip. It was certainly one of the best trips that I have been on and I would highly recommend it to others.'

'The trip was one of the best I have had in my teaching career and a lot of the kids said it was their best ever trip in primary school. Dave was so knowledgeable with the trains and rail safety, all of the pupils were engaged throughout. The staff at Bolton FC were first class and it was the first time that many of our kids have been in such a great football stadium. The trip really helped our kids improve their geographical knowledge.'

'The 'Feel Good' trips provide invaluable experiences that some of our pupils may never have the chance to do with their own families. Additionally they have made us think as a school about the possibility of using rail services as parents have very much engaged with dropping and collecting their children from the station.'

Word cloud based on feedback from the online surveys



KEY STRENGTHS

1. Positive Impact on Students:

- Many students experienced unique opportunities, such as their first train ride or visiting iconic locations, which broadened their horizons.
- Students gained insights into mental well-being, rail safety, and even career opportunities, which added educational value.
- Pupils felt inspired and engaged, with some describing it as the best trip of their lives.

2. Exceptional Organisation:

- Teachers praised the clarity of the trip's purpose and the seamless organisation.
- David Savage and other staff were commended for their leadership, knowledge, and effective communication.
- The booking process and support from Avanti staff made the experience stress-free.

3. Inclusivity and Accessibility:

- These trips offered valuable experiences for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those in high-pupil-premium schools.
- SEN pupils received special attention, making the experience meaningful and memorable for all.

4. Memorable Experiences:

- Teachers noted that the trips were well-rounded, including visits to exciting destinations, informative sessions, and fun activities.
- The interaction with staff, such as train managers, added a personal touch that enhanced the overall experience.

COST CONCERNS

A small number of schools expressed concerns about the affordability of train travel for future trips, indicating a need for more cost-effective solutions or subsidies.

CHALLENGES

Group Booking Delays: Unable to make group bookings on Avanti West Coast until January 2023, disrupting early planning.

Train Cancellations & Seat Reservation Issues: Occasional cancellations and missing seat reservations caused confusion when boarding large groups. The group booking team were very good at booking new seats at short notice but this was not always possible. Passengers often sitting in some of the reserved seats caused some delays in getting the children sat down.

Strikes: Rail and teacher strikes throughout the project led to rescheduled trips.

Slow Communication with Schools: Difficulty getting timely responses from teachers regarding dietary requirements and trip details due to their busy schedules.

Low Survey Response Rate: Only 134 out of 215 surveys were completed, despite offering free trips.

Community Rail Partners: Some areas had much more engagement with the project than others. It was a challenge to get many schools from London, Glasgow and Edinburgh to engage with the project.

Timetable: The Avanti West Coast timetable meant we could not get school groups to have a FGFT into North Wales as the trains leave Wales in the morning and return in the afternoon.

Transport: Coach/mini bus was sometimes needed to transport groups to and from stations. This has a significant cost implication to the project.



COLLABORATION

The success of the Feel Good Field Trip project was built on strong collaboration between Avanti West Coast, Community Rail Lancashire, other train operating companies, Community Rail Officers, venue hosts, and various stakeholders.

Several train operators, including Northern, Merseyrail, West Midlands Trains, and Scotrail, provided free travel for groups participating in the trips. The group booking team at Avanti West Coast facilitated approximately 450 train reservations, ensuring groups were seated together in the same carriage. The pre-boarding team at London Euston offered early boarding to groups, helping the trips run smoothly, while Avanti staff at other stations also supported by assisting groups with boarding.

Dave Savage personally attended 115 trips during the project. Additional support came from Community Rail Officers, with Community Rail Lancashire attending six trips, Heart of England CRP supporting twelve trips, North Staffordshire three trips, Community Rail Cumbria three trips, Conwy Valley and North Wales CRP two trips, and SE Manchester CRP two trips.

While most experiences were paid for, several hosts generously provided complimentary activities. Alstom depots at Longsight, Oxley, and Polmadie offered tours, activities, and lunch. At Wembley Theatre, Starlight Express included a workshop and sixty tickets to the show, while King's Theatre Glasgow provided a workshop and thirty tickets for a performance. These contributions added significant value to the project and enhanced the overall experience for participants.

CONCLUSION

The Feel Good Field Trip project, launched by Avanti West Coast in partnership with Community Rail Lancashire, has been a resounding success, achieving its aim of providing free, enriching, and educational experiences for school children across the West Coast Mainline. Over two years, the project offered transformative opportunities to more than 5,000 students, many of whom experienced train travel, iconic destinations, and hands-on learning for the first time.

The initiative's careful planning led by Dave Savage and supported by numerous collaborators, ensured a stress-free and impactful experience for both students and teachers. Feedback consistently highlighted the positive impact on students' confidence, understanding of rail safety, and appreciation for new environments.

Despite some challenges such as occasional train cancellations, issues with seat reservations and regional engagement disparities, the project demonstrated the effectiveness of strong collaboration and clear communication in overcoming obstacles. With the support of dedicated community rail partners, other train operators and host venues, the Feel Good Field Trips have left a lasting impression on participants, inspiring schools to consider rail travel as a viable option for future educational outings.