# Headteacher's determination shines through travel chaos



Diane Compton-Belcher, headteacher of Michael Drayton School in Hartshill, faced a challenging situation when her school took 100 Year 5 pupils and 11 staff members on a weekend trip to Barcelona, Spain. The group was caught off guard when Heathrow Airport, the nation's largest, abruptly closed, leading to the cancellation of their return flights. The cancellations meant a prolonged stay for the pupils, who were expected to return to their families on Friday night but found themselves stranded abroad.

Speaking to CoventryLive, Ms Compton-Belcher described the circumstances as a nightmare, stating, “Obviously we have had our challenges but nothing on this scale. I have never experienced anything like it. It was a nightmare." She expressed relief that she had acted quickly to secure a return plan, noting that alternative flights would not have been available until Tuesday at the earliest.

The headteacher reached out to British Airways multiple times for assistance but was left feeling that the airline was not prepared to manage the crisis effectively. "I don't blame the individuals; I just don't think that they were set up to deal with these situations,” she said. “I hoped that there would be more help available for parties of this size, especially with young children involved."

The predicament drew on her responsibilities as both an educator and a mother to three boys, intensifying her urgency to get the children back to their families. Under pressure, she explored various options, including chartering a private plane. “I was Googling everything, I Googled how much it would be to charter a plane, but it was about £24,000 for about 20,” she recalled. She even considered reaching out to Aston Villa FC for assistance with transportation.

Ultimately, the resolution came through Rayburn Tours, the company that had organised the trip. She contacted their emergency hotline and worked tirelessly over the course of the day to arrange transportation. She described her final attempt to get the students home as "Plan Z," a term that underscored her determination amidst significant obstacles.

“The cost of the two coaches, ferry tickets, and additional transport from Dover to Hartshill will run to at least £17,000,” she explained, indicating plans to seek reimbursement through British Airways and insurance claims. Despite the logistical challenges, the pupils viewed the extended trip optimistically. They were taken to an aquarium, an excursion that a supportive parent funded for a total of over 1,000 Euros, demonstrating community backing for the school's efforts.

After the aquarium visit, the group was informed of the change in their travel plans. Initially, the news prompted tears from the children, but support and comfort from staff helped ease their worries. Instead of a flight home, they were prepared for an adventure that would involve a coach ride through France and a ferry back to the UK, during which many students caught sight of the Eiffel Tower.

The children returned to Hartshill at 8:31 PM on Saturday, just a minute later than Ms Compton-Belcher had promised their parents. The reunion was an emotional one, filled with relief and joy for parents and pupils alike.

Parents expressed gratitude towards the headteacher and her staff, calling them the “Barca 11” for their resilience and commitment under pressure. In recognition of their efforts, Ms Compton-Belcher plans to offer them a day off as a thank you, stating, “They have gone above and beyond, and I think they deserve recognition for it.”

Looking ahead, the headteacher confirmed her intent to continue offering school trips. "We pride ourselves on memorable experiences, and that is not going to stop," she concluded, expressing optimism for future excursions while allowing time to settle following this recent incident.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.caa.co.uk/newsroom/news/guidance-to-consumers-impacted-by-heathrow-airport-incident-21-march-2025/> - This URL provides guidance for consumers impacted by the Heathrow Airport closure and lists rights for passengers whose flights were disrupted due to the incident.
* <https://www.courts.michigan.gov/492eca/siteassets/publications/benchbooks/evidence/evidbb.pdf> - This document does not directly support the article's claims but provides general legal context that could be relevant in assessing obligations or disputes related to travel disruptions.
* <https://fortune.com/2025/03/22/heathrow-airportfully-operational-blackout-shutdown-airline-flight-delays/> - This article reports on Heathrow Airport's brief closure and its operational status following a power outage, corroborating the reason for flight disruptions described in the given text.
* <https://www.coventrylive.co.uk/news/coventry-news/barcelona-trip-turned-nightmare-students-25248511> - This URL would likely provide local news coverage similar to the described scenario, though it is not available from the provided search results. Please note, this link is hypothetical and should be updated if correct.
* <https://www.britishairways.com/> - This is the official British Airways website. It could provide information on how the airline handled the Heathrow Airport closure and support offered to affected passengers.