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Ticket scam pupils can watch game

Hundreds of schoolchildren caught up in an alleged World Cup ticket fraud will get to watch a game after government talks with Fifa, Downing Street said.

Nearly 400 disappointed pupils returned home from Germany after tickets for games on Saturday failed to turn up.

Pupils from Worcs, Oxfordshire, Dorset, Hants, Lincs and Suffolk were affected.

A 38-year-old man and a woman in her 40s, both of Slough, who were arrested on Wednesday on suspicion of deception have been released on police bail.

'Generous response'

Thames Valley Police said the deception being investigated involved a total sum of about £60,000 and that several other lines of inquiry were still being pursued.

The children, aged between 11 and 16, were on a £410-a-head tour and returned home on Monday.

Prime Minister Tony Blair originally hinted at helping the children to get tickets for another game during a phone-in on Radio Five Live on Monday, when he said it was "something we need to work on".

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) warned it would be difficult to source enough tickets, but on Wednesday Downing Street said personal talks between sports minister Richard Caborn and Fifa president Sepp Blatter had led to a deal being struck.

Mr Caborn said he was extremely grateful to Mr Blatter "for his swift and generous response".

Some of the children will be going to this Sunday's England v Ecuador game, while Fifa has offered others free tickets for a quarter-final match.

The spokesman said World Cup sponsors were paying for travel and accommodation for the children, with British Airways agreeing to fly most of the children to Germany.



Some pupils will get tickets for England's game against Ecuador



Some pupils thought they would be watching Ghana v Czech Republic

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Forty pupils from North Bromsgrove High School thought they were seeing Saturday's game between Ghana and the Czech Republic in Cologne, but had to watch it on the city's big screen when the tickets failed to materialise.

“ To see a match is good, but to see England is so amazing that I can't comprehend it ”

Jay Francis, 14, from Portsmouth

Deputy head Andrew Mackereth said: "It is absolutely fantastic news. We believe we will be going to a quarter final game which could even be England's if they go through."

At another affected school, Mayville High School in Portsmouth, 23 boys who came home disappointed on Monday were told they would be going to the England v Ecuador second round game on Sunday - courtesy of Portsmouth Football Club and its co-owner Alexandre Gaydamak.

Jay Francis, 14, said: "We can't believe it.

'A real high'

"To see a match is good but to see England is so amazing that I can't comprehend it."

Richard Sprake, also 14, said: "When we got to Germany and found we weren't going to the match it was so upsetting, but now we've gone from a real low to a real high now we are going to see our team play."

Head teacher Linda Owens said Mr Gaydamak and Portsmouth Football Club were paying the boys' accommodation and transport costs and had played a part in arranging the tickets.

Mr Gaydamak said: "I heard about the situation on the news and I was very moved, especially as these children attend a school just a stone's throw away from Fratton Park.

"These were unfortunate circumstances. I do believe that it is important for children to be involved in sports and it is great for them to now have the opportunity to go to the World Cup.

"I'm delighted my colleagues and I at the club have been able to make the trip happen for them."

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