



Schoolchildren 'devastated' by World Cup ticket failure (19/06/06)

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Schoolchildren spoke today of their disappointment at missing out on seeing a World Cup match in Germany because an agency failed to provide them with tickets.

About 450 youngsters aged between 11 and 15 from across the UK travelled to Germany to watch matches in the tournament but were unable to get in to the games when their tickets failed to materialise.

Teachers who have returned to the UK said today they believed a scam might have been involved, depriving the youngsters of the "once in a lifetime" opportunity to see a World Cup match.

A group of 23 boys from Mayville High School in Portsmouth, Hants, travelled to Cologne to see the Czech Republic v Ghana match at the weekend but were told by tour company Activ4 that the tickets were not available. They were then told to travel to Frankfurt for the Portugal v Iran match, but before they departed they were told there were no tickets for this match either.

Headteacher Linda Owens said: "The children have been looking forward to this a great deal and it's a huge disappointment for them. The whole point of the trip was to see a World Cup match, to get the flavour of what it would be like, the excitement of it. But the boys have been amazingly good, despite how devastated they obviously are."

Joshua Hunter, 12, from Hayling Island, said: "I was just really annoyed. I can't believe someone would do that to children. We had seen the World Cup on TV, we had been talking about it with friends before going and we had been waiting a long time for this trip, but when this happened, it was so disappointing."

His mother Linda said: "We are just devastated because we can't believe people would target children at schools and they were all so looking forward to it. There was nothing we could do to comfort our children because they were a long way away at the time."

Nathan Sked, 13, from Southsea, said: "I felt gutted. We had been looking forward to it for ages. It was the main thing we were going for and we hadn't expected that to happen." His mother Jane added: "It's really disappointing. It's what they were looking forward to. The teachers have been brilliant."

PE teacher James Collins said he understood that the schools from across the country had paid a total of £64,000 to Activ4, which had paid a ticket agency to provide the tickets for the match.

He said it was not clear whether the tickets had been stolen from this agency or whether it was a scam and the tickets had never been available. He said: "We just don't know what happened but we understand that it is being treated as a crime and is being investigated."

Portchester Boys School in Bournemouth, Dorset, was another school which sent 30 boys on the £410-a-head tour to Germany and were unable to watch the Portugal v Iran match. Headteacher Christopher Bradey said: "They were not able to go to the match as it appears the tickets were from a doubtful source."

Drayton School in Banbury, Oxfordshire, said its 11 children - one girl and 10 boys - never got any tickets. Headteacher Richard Sutton said the tour company went to pick them up but they were not there.

Originally they were supposed to see the Czech Republic v Ghana match but this was changed to Iran v Portugal. He explained that German police were now investigating what happened.

"The children were very disappointed indeed and staff did their best to organise other activities." Mr Sutton said. "It was a once-in-a-lifetime thing for them but they were great about it."

Fifa spokesman Andreas Herren said: "This is absolutely regrettable for the young kids because they have been deprived of a great opportunity to watch World Cup action."

A spokeswoman for Activ4 said an emergency meeting was being held to establish what happened.

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