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Ticket 'scam' ruins pupils' World Cup dream

By **Richard Savill and Stewart Payne**

(Filed: 20/06/2006)

Hundreds of children were left bitterly disappointed after they travelled to Germany but missed seeing a World Cup match because of an alleged ticket scam.

About 350 pupils aged 11 to 15 and 30 teachers spent between £379 and £399 a head for the trip, which included tickets for the Czech Republic v Ghana match in Cologne on Saturday.

But they were told on their arrival in Germany that they could not see the game because their travel agent had allegedly been defrauded by a ticketing agency. Police are investigating.



Parents said the children had been looking forward to the trip for months. One child had bought an England strip with his own money for the occasion.

A party of 23 boys from Mayville High School, Southsea, Hants, returned home disappointed yesterday.

James Collins, the head of physical education at the independent school, said: "We got to Cologne where we were told there were no tickets. We were totally shocked. There were one or two tears but I think we were mostly just too stunned to react."

Ben Southgate, 11, said: "We got to Cologne and it seemed really nice. Then we were told there were no tickets and no chance of getting in. We were all upset."

Tom Scutt, from Hayling Island, Hants, who is 13 today, said: "It would have been the perfect birthday present. I

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had been looking forward to the game so much since we were first told about the trip last September. We had been saving all our pocket money."

His friend, 12-year-old Joshua Hunter, also from Hayling Island, said: "When they got us all together on Saturday morning and told us we couldn't see the match we were devastated.

"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."

Pupils from Portchester School, in Bournemouth, North Bromsgrove High School, Worcs, and Drayton School, Banbury, Oxon, were also on the trip.

Jazz Gritt, 11, of Portchester School, said: "When we were told, nobody said much but it hurt us in our stomachs."

After the tour company Activ4 told the school parties that there were no tickets the children went shopping in Belgium to spend their euros.

Richard Sutton, the head teacher of Drayton School, said: "Staff did their best to organise other activities. It was a once in a lifetime thing for the pupils but they were great about it."

Activ4 said it had been a victim of an "international ticket scam". A company statement said that late on Friday afternoon it was made aware of the "scam" allegedly involving Tickets For All (www.tickets-for-all.co.uk), one of its ticket suppliers. Activ4's bank notified the firm that there had been "fraudulent activity", it added.

Activ4 said: "Police in both the UK and Germany were immediately notified." It said: "Activ4 is outraged by this callous act of fraud and will continue to offer the police our full co-operation."

The statement said: "We are acutely aware of the need to address the issue of refunds and we will do all we can to make arrangements."

The Tickets For All website offers tickets for World Cup matches, including some for the final priced at £2,900.

But the firm's address in Swanley, Kent, given on the website, does not exist and it has no Companies House listing. Its telephone number led to an answering machine. Calls by The Daily Telegraph were not returned.

A spokesman for Kent police said: "We are investigating an allegation of obtaining property by deception."

Last night the Premiership club Portsmouth came to the rescue of the Mayville High School fans by asking the Football Association for tickets for a forthcoming World Cup match. Milan Mandaric, the club chairman, promised to pay for travel and accommodation.

Tony Blair also weighed in with an offer of help. "It's something we need to work on to make sure they can get out there," he said as he co-hosted Radio Five Live's 606 show.

"I think the sports minister, Richard Caborn, is trying to sort something out. I don't know what exactly can be done but obviously for them it's terrible and it's something we need to work on."

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