

School Transport

Frequently Asked Questions - Winter

What is the procedure during adverse weather conditions?

Decisions to cancel or amend school transport routes are taken in the interests of the safety and welfare of pupils, school transport and other road users. These decisions are taken by operators in liaison with Education staff and will have regard to the prevailing weather forecast and road conditions, along with advice from the Roads Operation Team and, if necessary, Police Scotland.

In bad weather conditions it is very difficult to obtain and report on individual route information, as this will often depend on developing localised weather and road conditions (there are 70 routes in operation at any one time). Therefore, for the majority of the time we are only able to advise whether there will be disruptions to school transport in general.

During periods of adverse weather some or all school transport routes may not operate or alternatively operate a curtailed service, for example main roads only, depending on local road conditions. It is very difficult for us to report on the exact detail of what buses can and cannot cover.

What does it mean 'main roads' only?

There can be two scenarios here - the conveyor makes a decision first thing in the morning that they will cover main roads only; or once they are out on the roads the driver takes a decision, based on the road conditions ahead, that they cannot divert off the main road.

During periods of adverse weather, parents are best placed to know the conditions in their own area, if side roads are snowy/icy then it is highly likely that the route will have to change to main road only (where your side road meets the main road). Good advice would be for parents to be prepared to meet the bus at the main road. If the decision is taken to operate main roads only then this may result in a change to your usual pick up or drop off times.

If you are unsure about this contact your conveyor direct, ideally before the winter terms to discuss the approximate pick up /drop off times.

When a conveyor reports that it is main roads only, this is intended to be helpful to parents as the other option is not to operate at all. Parents who live on side roads may then judge whether or not to use the limited service.

School transport will not operate during an 'Amber warning from the Met Office', what does this mean?

The Met Office issues warnings for rain, snow, wind, fog and ice. These warnings are given a colour depending on a combination of the likelihood of the event happening and the impact the conditions may have. Yellow 'be aware' warnings are commonly issued throughout the winter months. They are rarely upgraded to an Amber 'be prepared' warning.

However, if an 'Amber' warning is issued from the Met Office, this will automatically mean school transport will not operate for the duration of the warning (when any of the period includes school hours).

How will this work for you? In practice we have three distinct timings for this:

- Throughout the school day – if transport has operated in the morning when an Amber warning is issued for later in the day, then depending on the time of the warning, we may ask that transport operates the home journey at an earlier time. Schools' own arrangements will be activated.
- Early in the morning (0600 onwards) - if a Yellow warning has changed to Amber throughout the night then this would mean no school transport.
- The day before – if an Amber warning is issued the day before then there will be no transport the following day.

Notification of these will be via sources listed at 'Where can I get information during periods of bad weather?'

What happens if there is no school transport and the school is open?

If there is no school transport due to bad weather, it is the parent's decision whether or not it is safe to transport your child to school. We expect that you base this decision on the conditions in your area – there is no expectation that all parents will be able to transport their child. If you decide it is not safe to put your child to school, then you still need to contact the school stating that the absence is weather related and it will be recorded as authorised absence.

If there is no transport in the mornings, there will be no transport home in the afternoon. If you decide to transport your child to school in the mornings, you must also arrange the afternoon transport, or earlier, if it becomes necessary to send pupils home or close the school due to worsening weather conditions.

What should I do if the bus does not arrive?

Please contact the conveyor direct and they will be able to advise you if there has been a delay, and if a vehicle is on its way. Their telephone number is on your route allocation letter (we recommend you save it or keep it handy).

It is advised that parents agree a length of time, such as 20 minutes, that children wait for transport at their designated pick up point before returning or contacting home. Make sure your child is aware of what to do if the bus is late or does not arrive. It is good practice for children to have an emergency contact number with them. Note: we would not expect pupils, especially primary, to be unaccompanied at a pick up point, particularly during periods of bad weather.

It is clearly important that parents retain a means of communication with their children should the school transport not operate, and it must be stressed that the responsibility for the safety and welfare of children prior to boarding school transport remains with the parent.

Where can I get information during periods of bad weather?

Mornings

- 'OIC School Transport' Facebook page should be your first stop for information regarding transport changes.
- The Facebook page is linked to Twitter '@OrkneyCouncil' and are both updated as soon as information is available, this can be as early as 0615, which should assist daily isles travellers in planning their travel.
- Information is passed to BBC Radio Orkney for broadcasting on their programme at 0730 (on 93.7 FM) and also posted on their Facebook page. Radio Orkney will also be notified if there is disruption to transport throughout their programme, however detailed information on specific routes will not be provided.

Please note during the period 0800 – 0830 limited information can be given out by OIC or school staff, until offices are manned, therefore parents should contact the conveyor direct if they are concerned about a possible delay.

Throughout the school day

- Schools have arrangements in place to contact parents if the school is closing or if transport is running early. Please ensure your contact details are up to date with the school.
- Orkney Islands Council social media (and Radio Orkney wherever possible) will provide updates of any disruption during the day.

What should I do if I am not able to meet the bus as usual?

It is the parent's responsibility to ensure a responsible adult is at the pick up and drop off point.

For whatever reason you are not available to meet the bus, this is a risk that all parents have to consider and plan for individually. If at any time for some exceptional reason you cannot make it home to meet your child, then an option would be to call the school to ask them not to put your child on the school transport, and they will keep your child at school until you can make alternative arrangements.

Frequently Asked Questions - General

Is my child entitled to free school transport?

In order to qualify for free home to school transport, pupils age 7 years old and under must reside over 2 miles, and pupils age 8 and over must reside more than 3 miles from their catchment school. These distances are measured via the shortest available walking route. In Orkney this reduces to 1.5 miles for all pupils during the winter terms. Entitlement to school transport is reviewed on an annual basis.

Where will my child be picked up and what time?

School transport is not provided 'door to door'. Therefore, parents can be expected to walk/transport their child up to the qualifying distance (as above) in order to reach the pick up/drop off point on the established route.

Please contact the conveyer, as detailed in your allocation letter if you are unsure of the pick up and drop off point and times.

You should ensure that your child is ready and at the pick up point before the notified time. Some vehicles can have up to 50 pupils on board and are therefore unable to wait, even for two or three minutes at each stop, as this would have a knock on effect to the timing of the route and arrival time at school.

Parents are responsible for getting their child to and from the pick up and drop off point. We encourage parents to accompany their child to the pick up point and be there for them in the afternoon wherever possible, especially during periods of bad weather.

What is expected of my child?

A certain standard of behaviour is expected of children whilst travelling on school transport. Pupils and parents must agree to adhere to the Code of Conduct before the Council can grant access to any mode of school transport.

If children are badly behaved, cause a disruption or jeopardise the safety of the passengers and other road users, the Council has the right to withdraw them from transport, either temporarily or permanently. Transport to school then becomes the responsibility of the parents. The cost of repair for any deliberate damage caused to the vehicle by pupils may be recovered from the parents.

If my child is being bullied on transport, what should I do?

Please report the incident(s) to the school in the first instance and then contact Karen Walter, Education Resources Manager on 01856873535 extension 2421 or email education.leisure@orkney.gov.uk. The Council will request an investigation to be carried out by the school and transport operator.

The Council will not tolerate anti social behaviour on school transport. Persistent misbehaviour will result in permanent withdrawal of school transport entitlement. If a pupil is withdrawn from school transport, it is the parent's responsibility to make alternative arrangements to ensure their child's attendance at school.

What happens in the event of an accident or breakdown?

In the event of a breakdown, accident or the vehicle becoming immobilised, passengers will be instructed to stay in the vehicle until alternative transport can be organised. If the circumstances are deemed dangerous, children will be guided in an orderly manner by the driver to a place of safety. Drivers will have access to a mobile phone or radio so that they can endeavour to maintain contact with their base.

My child has to cross the road, what should we do?

It would always be our preference for children to never have to cross a road for their school transport, however with approximately 1300 children accessing school transport daily this is not always possible.

It is advisable that parents wait at their children's pick up or drop off point and accompany them across the road if necessary; school bus drivers are not required to help children cross roads. If you need to cross the road in the afternoon, only do so once the bus has moved off and the road is clear in both directions so you can see other vehicles. Do NOT cross in front of the bus.

Never take a signal from any driver to cross – they may not be able to see if the road is clear in both directions.

Who should I contact if I have any concerns regarding my child's transport?

Please contact Karen Walter, Education Resources Manager on 01856873535 extension 2421 or email education.leisure@orkney.gov.uk if you are worried or concerned about any aspect of your child's journey, including the behaviour of the other passengers or the safety or reliability of the vehicle. The sooner we are made aware of a problem, the quicker we can act to rectify it.

Further details of various aspects of school transport provision, including the School Transport Policy, application form, newsletters, including an important one for winter, and advice to and the responsibilities of parents/carers is available at www.orkney.gov.uk