

# Education, Leisure and Housing



## Winter Newsletter 2016/17

### Weather disruption to schools

There can be quite a number of days during the winter where the weather can cause disruption to both schools and school transport. This newsletter contains information that parents and carers most frequently ask about.

In severe conditions, it is ultimately your decision whether you believe it is safe for your children to attend school. We will help as much as possible by providing relevant information.

Orkney Islands Council and the Scottish Government have clear and shared presumption in favour of keeping schools open, wherever practicable, in order to minimise the impact on education provision as well as the mitigating wider community impacts.

During times of severe weather, Education, Leisure and Housing will:

- Endeavour to keep our schools open.
- Provide a good educational experience during times of disruption.
- Provide a mechanism by which as many pupils as possible can access work from home through GLOW or on school websites.
- Provide pupils with specific work for home study.
- Put in place 'catch up' work where feasible.

### How to get information

#### Mornings

- The OIC School Transport Facebook page is available; this will be your first stop for information regarding transport changes.
- The Facebook page and OIC Twitter feed are both updated as soon as information is available, this can be as early as 6.15 am, which should assist daily isles travellers in planning their travel.
- Information about, and links to the OIC Facebook and Twitter pages are available at: [www.orkney.gov.uk/Council/O/OIC-Updates.htm](http://www.orkney.gov.uk/Council/O/OIC-Updates.htm)
- Information is passed to BBC Radio Orkney for broadcasting on their programme at 07:30am (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.
- Information is also provided on the OIC answer phone, 01856873535.

**Note:** In bad weather conditions it is very difficult to obtain individual route information to advise parents whether the school bus on their route is running that morning, as this will depend on the local weather and road conditions. We therefore are only able to advise whether there will be disruptions to school transport in general. Parents are best placed to know the road conditions in their area and this will guide their decision whether to put their child out for school transport.

#### Throughout the school day

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

## School Transport and Parental Responsibilities

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.

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 Police Scotland.

Parents are responsible for their children until they have boarded school transport each morning and from the moment they alight from the afternoon journey. To minimise the risk of accidents it is advised that parents stand on the same side of the road as the pick-up and drop-off takes place.

Over the winter months when conditions of severe weather can arise, 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 if their transport has not arrived. Make sure your children are aware of what to do if the bus is late or does not arrive. It is very important that parents / carers have a means of communication with their children should the school transport service not operate.

If there is no school transport due to bad weather, it is the parent's decision whether or not it is safe to transport their children to school. We expect that parents base this decision on the condition of roads in their area – there is no expectation that all parents will be able to transport their children. If a parent decides it is not safe to put their child to school, then they should contact the school stating that the absence is weather related.

If school transport is cancelled in the morning by the operator and parents make the decision to transport their children to school, they must also arrange their afternoon transport; the operator will not be responsible for conveying their children home. This applies even if the weather has greatly improved throughout the day. Parents also need to be available to pick up their children earlier if conditions deteriorate and an earlier closure is needed.

It is therefore essential that parents provide the school with up-to-date emergency contact details. In the event of an early closure schools will contact parents. It is important that parents are familiar with the emergency closure procedures and that parents can be reached on the numbers given - e.g. ensure that mobile phones are switched on.

## Be Safe, Be Seen, Be Warm this winter

As winter and the inevitable short daylight hours approach, as always, Education, Leisure and Housing would like to urge parents and carers to relay to their children the importance of crossing the road in a safe manner and being seen in the dark. **Never** take a signal from **any** driver to cross – they may not be able to see if the road is clear in both directions.



We are pleased with the uptake of hi-viz vests in primary schools but we note that secondary pupils also need to be seen – whether walking to school or waiting for the school bus. Pupils should understand the difference it makes in terms of motorists being able to see them in plenty of time and therefore wear (or carry) something bright or hi-viz. During last winter there were some examples of good practice observed, including some secondary school pupils who were witnessed shining a torch from their mobile phones to alert drivers to their position at the road side. It is important to dress warmly to suit the weather conditions in case there is an unexpected delay.

Pupils cycling to school should take the same safety measures as those walking and wear reflective clothing. In addition, they should wear a cycle helmet and have fully operational lights – red at the back and white at the front. Red rear reflectors and spoke reflectors will also help ensure that cyclists are seen in the dark.

## Coughs, colds and sneezes

Winter is also a time where there can be an increase in illness among pupils (and staff). This can be for many reasons but could include for example norovirus, also known as the “winter vomiting bug”.

Sensible precautions to help stop the spread of all coughs, colds and sneezes at this time of year would be in line with the ‘**catch it, bin it, kill it**’ campaign – this refers to using tissues, putting these in a bin and maintaining good hygiene through hand washing.

Norovirus itself is easily spread through contact with an infected person or contaminated surfaces. While appreciating that it may cause inconvenience for some, children and staff displaying symptoms should stay at home until free of symptoms for a full 48 hours.

## School Crossing Patrol Officers (SCPOs)

There are 10 School Crossing Patrol Officer sites in Kirkwall, 2 in Stromness, 1 in Finstown and 1 in St Margaret’s Hope. They are positioned to help children to cross the road at particularly busy or dangerous roads. Parents / carers are reminded that they remain responsible at all times to ensure that their children make it to school safely, even with the SCPOs being on duty. During the winter months, there may be occasions when the SCPOs are unable to use their lollipop stick due to strong winds – they will however continue to work and drivers must still be prepared to stop. A reminder of the signals made by the SCPOs is shown below.



## Any questions or comments

Please contact Karen Walter on 01856873535 extension 2421 or email [education.leisure@orkney.gov.uk](mailto:education.leisure@orkney.gov.uk)