



Walsall Council

# Home to School Transport



A guide for passengers and their parents.

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## **Introduction**

Your Home to School transport team is made up of:

**Andrea Cooke – Transport Manager**

**Ashley Thomas – Assistant Transport Officer**

**Nichola Pemberton – Assistant Transport Officer**

We are responsible for the Home to School Transport arrangements for your children.

Our aim is to provide a high quality transport service with minimum delay and maximum care and attention. We are committed to providing the best possible service and welcome any suggestions you may have.

Our office is open between 08:00 and 16:45 Monday – Friday and we can be contacted in the following ways:

Telephone 01922 653761 or 01922 653762

Email: [sentransport@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:sentransport@walsall.gov.uk)

A member of the team should always be on hand between these hours to answer your queries or deal with your request.

Whilst we make every effort to answer your call immediately sometimes this is not possible. For instance during September we are at our busiest and you may find the telephones engaged. Please leave a message on our answer phone and we will call you back within 24 hours.

## **Information for parents**

**Walsall Children Services in partnership with parents, carers, schools and contractors aims to provide a high quality transport service to pupils who live in Walsall.**

We want you to feel happy about the transport arrangements made for your child. This information sheet tells you about how we make those arrangements and how you can help us make sure they work smoothly.

### **Transport Arrangements:**

- Are made by the Transport Team once a start date has been agreed.
- Are usually made within 7 to 10 working days, but it may be a little longer if specialist arrangements are required.
- May be for a taxi, minibus or coach.

If your child starts school before transport arrangements can be made, you may choose to transport your child temporarily.

### **The Transport Team will inform you of:**

- The pick up time
- The pick up point, which will be within reasonable walking distance from the child's home
- Details of the contractor, including telephone contact details.

It may be necessary for pick up times and points to change when other pupils are added or taken off the vehicle and on some occasions for the contractor to change. We will notify you of any changes.

Journey times will generally not exceed one hour in each direction for pupils attending schools within the borough of Walsall.

Transport arrangements are made around the child and existing routes. These cannot be varied to suit domestic or work arrangements.

### **Pupil Attendants:**

- Are provided through the contractor as required
- Are responsible for your child's safety while on the vehicle
- Will welcome your child onto the vehicle
- Will check that your child is seated comfortably and securely before the vehicle moves off
- Will ensure the safety of your child throughout the journey

Pupil attendants are not responsible for taking children to or from the vehicle.

### **Behaviour on the Vehicle:**

For the health and safety of all pupils, children must remain seated with the seatbelt fastened throughout the whole journey.

Parents / carers are responsible for any damage caused to the vehicle by their child.

Walsall Children Services reserves the right to stop providing transport on a temporary or permanent basis to pupils who persistently misbehave on the vehicle or jeopardise safety on the vehicle.

## **What can passengers expect?**

### **What can you expect from Drivers and Attendants when you are transported?**

Your safety will remain their responsibility until you are handed over to a responsible adult.

- Meet with you and your parents / carers prior to the start your school year / term.
- A polite greeting and friendly relationship – never using their horn unless it is an emergency.
- They will report unsafe behaviour to parents, school and Transport Team.
- They will ensure all passengers remain seated in a 3-point seat belt while in the vehicle.
- They will have your details and route schedule which will be kept confidential.
- Your Driver and Attendant will be dressed in smart appearance with identification and Hi-Vis vest.
- They will always secure you and your wheelchair and all doors and windows with safety locks.
- They will not use a mobile phone while the vehicle is moving and no one is allowed to smoke.
- You can expect no unauthorised passengers to be in your vehicle unless it is an emergency.
- They will not discuss any issues / complaints / concerns in front of you.
- You will be assisted safely to enter and exit the vehicle and must not occupy a front seat.
- They will wait 3 minutes for you to arrive at your stop and then proceed to other children.
- They will communicate clearly and calm you if you become agitated or unhappy.

### **What happens when there is an emergency or if I am unwell during the journey?**

In the event of a **medical emergency** your driver / attendant will immediately contact the **Emergency Services on 999 (or 112 mobile)** and follow the instructions they are given.

If you become unwell:

#### **Outward Journey (to school)**

- If you become unwell, the driver will telephone your parent / carer to decide if you should return home or proceed to school / journey.

#### **Return journey (from school)**

- If you become unwell on a journey home, the driver will divert to take you directly to the home address. Once you are home safely, the driver will continue to take the remaining passengers home.

In the event of a minor accident involving the vehicle, the Council Assisted Transport Team immediately informed and, if necessary, the emergency services called to check that the passengers are unharmed.

In the event of a breakdown, the driver will immediately contact their base, your parent / carers and the Transport Team and arrange for another suitable vehicle to arrive within one hour of the reported breakdown to carry you on to your destination.

## **What parents/carers can expect from the transport company:**

All drivers/passenger assistants will:

- Wear identification badges
- Have an enhanced DBS check
- Have a reasonable grasp of the English language
- Have read and understood the Passenger Safety Plan
- Contact the parents/carers to arrange a convenient time for a home visit to take place prior to the operation of a new contract
- Be presentable and have a clean appearance
- Treat students/parents/carers in a respectful and courteous manner
- The vehicle provided will be fit for purpose and the company will make a replacement vehicle available should this be required
- The vehicle provided is always operated to a high standard of cleanliness
- All seats in vehicles have a working seatbelt, and passenger restraints and wheelchair securing devices are provided as required
- Drivers/passenger assistants are fully trained in operating any ancillary equipment fitted to a vehicle e.g. tail lift, wheelchair securing equipment, passenger harnesses etc.
- Drivers provide a high standard of driving
- Drivers/passenger assistants are aware of their duties and responsibilities, particularly in the event of an emergency
- Drivers/passenger assistants do not smoke during the performance of the contract
- Upon arrival at the agreed collection or drop-off time, drivers wait for up to three minutes
- Drivers/passenger assistants keep parents/carers informed of any significant delay to transport
- Transport companies notify the SEN Transport Team of any incident or accident affecting the students
- Transport companies avoid, where possible, changes in drivers/passenger assistants.

## **What parents/carers can do to help transport to run smoothly?**

Ensure that your child is ready five minutes before the company is due to arrive. Drivers are only able to wait for a maximum of three minutes after the agreed pick up time for each student. However, drivers should not be made to wait for three minutes on a regular basis because if waiting is repeated along the route, all students will be late for school. If a vehicle arrives on time but your child is not ready or is not ready after the three minute waiting time, transport to school becomes the responsibility of the parents/carers.

Take your child to the vehicle (the driver/passenger assistant is not expected to escort them from the house to the vehicle).

Be at home in time to receive your child on their return from school.

Informing the transport company/driver/passenger assistant as soon as possible if your child is not attending school for any reason (e.g. illness). In addition, do not forget to inform the school.

Informing the transport company/driver/passenger assistant if your child does not use transport in the morning (for whatever reason) and you take your child to school later that day, but you would like the transport company to bring the child home in the afternoon.

Informing the transport company/driver/passenger assistant if you collect your child from school during the day (e.g. to take him/her to a medical appointment) meaning they do not need transport home at the end of the school day.

Ensuring the passenger assistant/driver is aware of anything affecting your child on a particular day.

Ensuring, where possible, your child is aware of appropriate behaviour whilst travelling to and from school.

Ensuring your child does not leave personal belongings on the vehicle. If this does occur, parents/carers should contact the transport company/driver/passenger assistant.

Providing us (on the application form) with the name, telephone number and relationship to your child of at least one adult who can take responsibility for your child in an emergency if you are not available.

Informing us of any changes that might affect the transport arrangements, including but not limited to: changes to your address; changes to your contact details or those of your emergency contact(s); allergies or medication (please note that drivers and passenger assistants are not authorised to administer medication or undertake any form of medical intervention); or if your child is getting a new wheelchair.

Notifying us of any problems with the transport so that these can be addressed in a timely and appropriate way.

Providing positive feedback on transport companies so that this can be fed back to them and good practice can be shared with other transport companies.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Are there any journeys for which you cannot provide transport?**

If your child is entitled to transport assistance, we can only provide transport between their permanent home address and school, and at the usual school start and finish times. It is not possible for us to provide transport:

Between one school and another

For work experience placements

For activity weeks

To medical appointments (e.g. dentist, hospital)

If your child is ill and needs to be collected from school (or returned mid-week/mid-term if they are a weekly or termly boarder)

To or from a location that is not your normal home address (e.g. childminder, grandparents) unless there are exceptional circumstances

To or from induction/enrolment days at colleges

Respite

### **How can I be sure the transport is safe?**

We take every precaution to ensure your child's safety when travelling on the vehicle. In particular we ensure that:

All drivers and passenger assistants have an enhanced DBS check undertaken by Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

All students joining the transport network have a Passenger Travel Plan so that drivers/passenger assistants understand each child or young person's needs; these are sent out to parents to be updated on an annual basis.

All transport companies arrange a home visit at a time that is convenient to the family to ensure the driver/passenger assistant can meet the student, prior to the transport commencing

Site visits take place to check: the roadworthiness of vehicles (e.g. inspecting tyres); that contract terms are being met (e.g. if we have asked the transport company to supply a passenger assistant, there is one being provided); the safety of the site, traffic flow and, drivers and passenger assistants use of equipment (e.g. tail lifts for wheelchairs)

Any concerns raised by parents/carers, schools or anyone else supporting children and young people and their families (e.g. Social Worker) are fully investigated in a timely way

From time to time, special schools may provide training for drivers/passenger assistants on topics that relate specifically to the students they are transporting.

### **What happens if my child requires medication on board transport?**

Drivers and passenger assistants are not authorised to administer medication or to undertake any form of medical intervention. However, we can still transport students with medical needs and these will be included on the Passenger Safety Plan. In the event of an emergency, the vehicle will stop in a safe place and a member of staff will call 999. If a parent/carer does not want their child travel on board transport because no medication can be administered, the authority can offer mileage reimbursement as an alternative.

### **What should I do if the transport arrangements are not working well?**

If parents/carers have any concerns regarding the safety and appropriateness of the transport being provided for their child, they should contact us immediately. We can discuss the issue and where necessary take follow-up action with the transport company concerned.

We are aware that some parents/carers are reluctant to contact us when problems arise because they are concerned that transport may be removed from their child or the driver/passenger assistant will find out that they have reported an issue. However, we do not withdraw assistance because a parent/carer has raised concerns and we can investigate most issues in a way that does not identify the source of the information.

**We would encourage parents/carers to report problems as they arise, as this allows us to address them at an early stage in case the issue escalates and more significant action needs to be taken.**

The types of concerns that parents/carers contact us to discuss include:

Frequent changes of driver or passenger assistant, particularly if there is no notice (over and above changes due to sickness, annual leave, training courses etc.)

Early or late running (although when a new contract begins, there will be a settling in period within which the timings may vary as the driver gets used to the route)

Lack of understanding of a student's needs

Unsafe practices (for example, students exiting a minibus from a side door facing into the road, not providing a booster seat for a child under 12 years old / 135 cm in height)

Poor communication (for example, not contacting parents/carers to advise about changes to collection or drop off times, or changes to drivers/passenger assistants)

Where a breach of contract is identified, we can take various forms of action against the transport company.

#### **Is it possible to change the collection/drop-off time?**

The transport company will inform the parents/carers of the collection and drop-off times that are necessary to ensure their child and other passengers arrive at school on time and that journey times are minimised at both ends of the day. As the timings need to support the efficient operation of the route, family circumstances (e.g. work commitments, siblings attending different schools) cannot be taken into account. If parents/carers contact us to raise this as an issue, we will check the route order with the transport company to see if any alterations can be made, but unfortunately this is usually not possible. In addition, due to changes to the transport network (for example, students joining or leaving a vehicle due to school moves or changes of address), the collection and drop-off times may change over time, but every effort will be made to provide parents/carers with notice at any alterations.

#### **What happens if I cannot meet my child at the designated drop-off time?**

A responsible adult must be at home to receive the child or young person at the agreed time they are returned from school. Transport staff cannot wait for an adult to arrive as this not only makes other students late home, but it places an inappropriate level of responsibility on drivers and passenger assistants. To ensure your child's safety, if there is no-one available at home to meet your child, we will take the child to our safe house where they will await your collection. The address is:

**My Place  
60 Walstead Road West  
Walsall  
WS5 4PE**

In the event that an adult is unavailable to receive the student, the parents/carers will be advised of their responsibility to ensure someone is available in the future. If this recurs the transport may be withdrawn until officers are satisfied that proper arrangements are in place.

### **What happens in bad weather?**

In severe weather conditions (e.g. snow, storms, floods) it may be necessary to either change or cancel transport arrangements for safety reasons. It is an individual driver's decision as to whether they can operate or take a certain route, as they are the only responsible party who is aware of all the facts. It is vital that they put the safety of the students first and this means that we cannot insist that the transport runs, or that a child or young person is taken directly to their home if there is no safe route available. If you are advised by the transport company that your child's morning journey has been cancelled, you should assume that the afternoon journey will also be cancelled, unless you hear otherwise.

Parents/carers who have chosen to take their children to school during bad weather should ensure they have confirmed return transport arrangements for their child before leaving them at school. Transport is arranged to run at set times and therefore if a school decides to close early due to adverse weather, it may not be possible for transport companies to arrive earlier than normal. Therefore the school will need to ensure that students are supervised until they are collected. If a parent/carer does not want their child to attend school during bad weather (perhaps due to concerns that they could get stranded at the school or during the journey) they should contact the transport company to inform them at the earliest opportunity.

In bad weather conditions, parents/carers are advised to regularly check the Walsall Council's website [www.walsall.gov.uk](http://www.walsall.gov.uk) and to listen to local radio. If parents/carers suspect that the school is closed but there is nothing on the website or the radio, they should contact the school directly before travelling. Parents/carers should also contact the school if they are unable to travel due to bad weather but the school is open.

### **What happens if my child is ill and cannot go to school?**

If your child is unwell and unable to attend school, you should contact the transport company the night prior to travel. If your child only shows signs of being ill on the morning of travel, parents/carers must call the transport company as soon as possible before the transport is due to arrive. Parents/carers should provide the transport company with an estimated return date and contact them again when their child has recovered and transport needs reinstating.

### **The transport has not turned up. What should I do?**

Usually the transport company would contact the parent/carers to let them know there has been a delay. However, if you do not receive a call, contact them to ask for an update. If the vehicle is often late, parents/carers should contact us so that this can be investigated.

### **What can be done if the transport company keeps changing the driver/passenger assistant, as my child is having difficulty coping with this?**

We recognise that for some students with special educational needs, change can be very unsettling. Where consistency of staffing has been recognised as being important to a child or young person, this is included in the Passenger Safety Plan. However, some changes are inevitable (for example, due to sickness, holiday entitlement, course attendance, staff turnover) and alterations may need to be made from time to time to ensure the most efficient use of the available resources.

When changes are made, the transport company should notify the parents/carers in advance (where possible) and provide an opportunity for the new member of staff to meet the student before any journeys are undertaken. Any changes made by the local authority (such as through school reviews which are necessary to ensure arrangements continue to reflect student's needs and that public sector procurement regulations are met), will be communicated to parents/carers as far in advance as possible.

**My child is now transported by a different transport company but we preferred the old one. Can this be changed back?**

The local authority has to ensure that transport arrangements are safe and appropriate for all students and that contracts are managed in line with public sector procurement regulations. Therefore the periodic review and retendering of contracts is unavoidable due to our legal obligations and these can result in a change to the type of vehicle, the route or the transport company.

However, officers will always notify parents/carers of any changes in advance and the new transport company should arrange for the driver/passenger assistant to undertake a home visit prior to the new transport starting. We have carried out checks on all the transport companies being used to ensure they meet our standards and they are all expected to maintain the same level of service. However, if parents/carers have any concerns, they should report these to us immediately so that they can be fully investigated.

**What can be done to help if my child is struggling to use the school bus?**

We aim to support students to travel on buses with their peers whenever it is safe and appropriate for them to do so. However, we recognise that some students with special educational needs and/or a disability can find this challenging. Therefore parents/carers should contact us to discuss their child's transport needs so that officers can work with the school and travel training experts to identify and overcome the barriers they are facing.

**What happens if we move house?**

If you are planning to move house, you must contact us to discuss this as a change in circumstances may affect your child's eligibility for transport assistance. We can advise on the type of form you will need to complete and the evidence we will require (e.g. a copy of the exchange of contracts for a mortgage or the tenancy agreement for a rental). In general, parents/carers need to allow five working days for entitlement to be re-assessed and if the student remains entitled to assistance, another five working days to put new arrangements in place (this can take longer if there are no spare seats and transport has to be procured).