

Home to School Transport Autumn 2020

Dear parent or carer,

I am writing to you because your child is eligible for free Home to School transport in the school year 2020/21. A separate letter containing your child's travel pass accompanies this one.

Despite the difficulties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic Staffordshire County Council remains committed to providing this service and has initially set aside an additional £1 million to support operators with any necessary special arrangements and expenditure on things such as hand sanitiser.

It is important to state now that arrangements in September will not be a return to pre-pandemic normality, but a step towards it. Accordingly, the council has taken recently issued Government guidance and has already been liaising with schools and transport operators about what is possible when term begins, and I would like to share the following with you.

For children who catch dedicated school buses

The county council operates transport for 8,000 pupils on approximately 800 routes to 150 schools. Bus and coach operators do not have enough vehicles and qualified, DBS-checked drivers to run a staggered service with multiple daily trips.

Government guidance says that each coach or bus can be its own 'bubble' and that social distancing need not apply on dedicated Home to School transport, as the overall risk from Covid-19 to children and young people is very low. Therefore, the council will continue to provide one return journey on vehicles on school days, commencing on the first day of term. It has also suspended the 'vacant seats' scheme to increase spacing on buses.

Pupils will board on the basis of distance from school – so those who live furthest will board first and sit at the back, while those who live closest will board last and sit at the front. There is no requirement to sit in year or age groupings and pupils must only travel on the bus they are allocated to.

Vehicles will be ventilated, and operators will be undertaking additional daily cleaning. Parents are asked to provide children with face coverings to be worn during the journey, pupils to use the hand sanitiser provided at the entrance to the vehicle and to use the same seat each time. It is also recommended that pupils wash hands after arriving at school and before and after their journey home.

And, of course, I would ask that pupil's queue, board and disembark in an orderly manner.

For children who catch public service buses

Currently, face coverings are required on all public transport.

On some routes, where passenger numbers are particularly high, we will aim to separate pupils from the public temporarily. In those circumstances, we are asking bus companies to arrange separate buses that will operate as dedicated school transport. New timetables will be provided by the operators, which may be quite different to last year. Please be patient, the new timetable information will be published in late August at <https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/schooltransporttimetables>.

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For children who catch public service trains

No changes are proposed to current arrangements. Face coverings are essential on trains.

If a child feels unwell

Pupils must not board home to school transport if they or a member of their household has symptoms of Covid-19.

If a pupil develops symptoms whilst at school or their educational setting, they will be sent home. They must not travel on home to school transport. The school or educational setting should contact the parent who should arrange for the pupil's journey home.

In conclusion, all those involved in this process are doing their utmost to provide a safe, reliable service for your child in the most challenging circumstances. The situation will be kept under review and changes made where appropriate. Information and updates can be found at the Staffordshire County Council website – www.staffordshire.gov.uk - and search 'school transport'.

Staffordshire County Council

School Transport Team