



**BALLYOWEN MEADOWS SPECIAL SCHOOL**

**SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY**



## **CONTENTS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

### **CHARACTERISTIC SPIRIT OF THE SCHOOL**

### **AIMS**

### **PROVISION OF SCHOOL TRANSPORT**

### **SCHOOL TRANSPORT ARRANGEMENTS OFR NEW AND EXISTING PUPILS**

### **EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

### **RECRUITMENT OF BUS ESCORTS**

### **PROCEDURES FOR BUS ESCORT ABSENCES**

### **PROCEDURES FOR BUS ESCORT ABSENCES**

### **ROLE OF BUS ESCORTS**

### **STAFF TRAINING**

### **GUIDELINES FOR TRAVELLING ON SCHOOL TRANSPORT**

### **MANAGEMENT OF PUPIL BEHAVIOUR WHEN TRAVELLING BY BUS**



**PROCEDURES FOR MANAGEING HIGH-LEVEL BEHAVIOUR INCIDENTS ON SCHOOL TRANSPORT**

**RESUMPTION OF TRAVELLING ON SCHOOL TRANSPORT FOLLOWING A HIGH-LEVEL BEHAVIOUR INCIDENT**

**IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW OF POLICY**

**RATIFICATION OF POLICY**



## **INTRODUCTION**

This policy document has been drawn up by staff, parents and Board of Management of Ballyowen Meadows Special School to provide clarity to all stakeholders of the school community regarding how School Transport operates for the pupils of Ballyowen Meadows Special School.

## **CHARACTERISTIC SPIRIT OF THE SCHOOL**

The School Ethos of inclusion and appreciation of diversity permeates the content of all school policies in Ballyowen Meadows Special School. In the case of the School Transport Policy, it is the intention that this policy will provide a structure and guidelines to ensure that as many pupils as possible attending our school will have safe access to school transport.

## **AIMS**

- To ensure that the Board of Management maintains its duty of care to all pupils by providing safe School Transport.
- To provide open and transparent procedures for the whole school community in relation to the operation of School Transport in Ballyowen Meadows Special School
- To ensure that the School Ethos is maintained through an inclusive approach to the running of School Transport
- To provide procedures for parents and bus escorts relating to the day to day running of School Transport

## **PROVISION OF SCHOOL TRANSPORT**

Bus Escorts are provided by the Board of Management from a Department of Education and Skills grant to assist and supervise pupils using school transport. School transport itself is also funded by the Department of Education and Skills and it is Bus Eireann who are the providers of buses and drivers. Therefore, the Board of Management is only involved in the provision of Bus Escorts and plays no role in the provision of transport.



## **SCHOOL TRANSPORT ARRANGEMENTS FOR NEW AND EXISTING PUPILS**

Following formal acceptance of an offer of enrolment by letter from Parent/Guardians, the Principal applies for transport via the Special Educational Needs Officer (SENO). This application is then processed by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and forwarded for further sanction by the Department of Education and Skills (DES). Therefore, the sanction of School Transport for each applicant is solely the decision of the SENO and the DES and the school has no role in this process.

Parent(s)/Guardian(s) are advised that their child's Psychological report must have a recommendation for their child to attend a Special School in order to be eligible for School Transport.

Parents of new pupils are also advised that a period of transition will apply to School Transport for their child at the start of their first school year in Ballyowen Meadows Special School. Further details of this will be provided in the Transition Pack issued to all new parents.

Access to School Transport, once sanctioned by the Department of Education and Skills, continues from year to year. The allocation of routes, however, is decided by Bus Eireann on an annual basis, who notify the school in late August regarding the arrangements for the forth-coming year. The Board wishes to advise Parents that the School cannot provide any information in relation to School Transport routes prior to this time.

Once the school receives notification of the routes from Bus Eireann, Bus Escorts are recruited as soon as possible. The School endeavours to have Bus Escorts in place during the first week of the school year, for the duration of the school year and also to place the same Bus Escort on the same route, in as far as is practicable. However, this may not always be possible and the Board advises Parents that recruitment of new Bus Escorts may take up to four to six weeks. During this time, pupils are required to attend school and Parents must bring and collect their child.

## **EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

In the event of severe weather, i.e. when a **'Red alert'** is issued by Met Eireann for the area in which the Bus route follows, Bus Eireann will not provide School Transport services.

In such circumstances, Ballyowen Meadows Special School **may still remain open** and in the absence of any text notification from the School Principal, parents should assume that this is the case and may bring their child to and from school.

In the event of **an exceptional school closing** due to severe weather, Health and Safety issues or other extenuating circumstances relating to Ballyowen Meadows Special School the following will apply:

**The School Principal will contact all Parent(s)/Guardian(s) by text to notify them of an exceptional school closing.**



## **RECRUITMENT OF BUS ESCORTS**

### **Eligibility for appointment to the role of Bus Escort and Substitute Bus Escort**

Existing members of the school community are not permitted to work in the role of Bus Escort for the following reasons:

- Teachers

Teachers are required to be in class at 09.20 am to receive pupils from their allocated class as they arrive in school, as per the Teacher employment contract. Therefore, they are not able to fulfil the duties of Teacher and Bus Escort simultaneously and consequently, are not eligible for consideration for the role of Bus Escort.

- Special Needs Assistants (SNA)

Special Needs Assistants are required to be in class prior to the arrival of pupils from their allocated class, as per the SNA employment contract. Therefore, they are not able to fulfil the duties of SNA and Bus Escort simultaneously and consequently, are not eligible for consideration for the role of Bus Escort. Existing employment arrangements where SNAs/Bus Escorts who have held this dual role will continue to be honoured for the present.

- Other school staff

Similarly, other school staff, i.e. School Secretary and Care-taker, are not permitted to perform the role of Bus Escort as their working hours do not permit a dual role.

- Parents

Parents are not permitted to perform the role of Bus Escort for reasons of confidentiality of information relating to pupils other than their own child, who are travelling to and from school on the same bus/route as their child.

In addition, in the event of the reporting of incidents that occur in transit, the role of Bus Escort requires an independent witness account and as a parent is already a member of the school community, a conflict of interest may arise.

### **Recruitment Process**

Vacancies for the role of Bus Escort will be filled on a competitive basis. Vacancies will be advertised, applications shortlisted and then the most suitable applicants will be invited for interview. Interviews will be held in the school. An interview panel will be put in place consisting of the Chairperson of the Board, the School Principal and an Independent Assessor. Following interview, the successful candidate will be contacted and offered the job of Bus Escort conditional on the following:

- A satisfactory Garda vetting record
- A signed statutory declaration
- Signing of the Bus Escort contract



### **Relief/Substitute Bus Escorts**

Every effort is made to ensure that Bus Escorts travel on each vehicle in order to assist the pupils and safeguard their individual safety. In general, this system works very satisfactorily but there are rare occasions that the escort is not available to travel on the route and it can be difficult or impossible to arrange a substitute escort. This situation is unavoidable and despite our best efforts in the past there have been occasions where we simply cannot arrange for a substitute escort.

Parents/Guardians are also advised that for reasons of confidentiality of pupils and also in compliance with the requirements of Garda vetting requirements contained in DES Circular 0094/2006, Parents/Guardians or Third Parties are not permitted by the Board of Management to travel on School Transport.

Though the school has a comprehensive policy of insurance, the Board of Management is concerned that in the absence of the Bus Escort, the safety of pupils would be compromised. The Board does not wish to inconvenience Parents unduly by the withdrawing of transport in such circumstances, but the Board takes its duty of care to pupils very seriously and the first priority remains the safety, health and well-being of all pupils.

For the reasons outlined above, the Board has decided that in the absence of a Bus Escort and in instances where it is impossible to secure substitution cover, Parents are requested to bring and collect their child from school as, in the absence of School Transport, each pupil is still required to attend school. Parents are requested to bring their child to and collect their child from school in a timely manner and the Board reminds parents that supervision by school staff is not available before 09.20 or after 15.00 hrs.

In the event that a Bus Escort is unable to perform their duties and a substitute Bus Escort is unavailable, no additional funds are provided to the school by the Department of Education and Skills to refund parents any costs associated with transporting their child to and from school.

### **PROCEDURES FOR BUS ESCORT ABSENCES**

In the event that a Bus Escort is absent the following will apply:

- All Bus Escorts must text the Bus Driver to inform him/her of their absence and update the Bus Driver regarding further absences and/or return to work.
- All Bus Escorts must text all parents on their allocated bus route and update them regarding further absences and/or return to work.
- If the Bus Escort who is also an SNA in the school is absent they should arrange with a school colleague to provide substitute cover, if possible. In the event that this arrangement is made,



then the regular Bus Escort/SNA **must** inform the School Principal of the agreed substitute arrangements.

- If the Bus Escort/SNA is unable to arrange for a substitute they must text the parents of the pupils on their allocated bus and also notify the Bus Driver, as above.
- In all cases, if a Bus Escort is absent, they must formally notify the school by text to the School Mobile of the details of their absence. Please note, a text response will not usually be given. Please do not send messages by other media eg. email etc

The following information should be provided in your text:

- Your name
  - Date of any further absences, if known at this time
  - Date of return to work, if known at this time.
  - If the sick leave is certified or self-certified, as per DES School Transport Section directive, January 2013.
- 
- Absences of three days or more must be covered by a medical certificate.
  - Absences for any reason other than sick leave are not permitted, except in exceptional circumstances.
  - Applications for exceptional leave must be applied for in writing to the Chairperson, Board of Management six weeks prior to the commencement of the leave.

## **ROLE OF BUS ESCORTS**

In addition to the listed duties the Bus Escort will undertake other duties pertaining to the role as may be decided/directed by the School Principal and/or the Board of Management and/or as may be dictated by the needs of the Employer/School. It is expected that the Bus Escort will on his/her own initiative, identify tasks/duties that need to be carried out as part of the role subject to the authorisation of the School Principal/Board of Management as appropriate. The duties listed are not intended to be exhaustive or exclusive. The Bus Escort must:

- Ensure that s/he is on the school transport at the time of the first pick-up and last set down.
- Is responsible for the safety of children when opening and closing doors prior to “stop” and “move off”.
- Assist children to board and alight safely from the school transport.
- Ensure that all children are seated with appropriate straps and harnesses where provided.





- Ensure that each pupil is received by some responsible person at the set down point.
- Supervise the children travelling on the school transport and to and from the school transport into and out of the School/classrooms.
- Maintain a good working relationship with the driver of the school transport.
- Act as liaison between the School Principal and/or class teacher and parents when required i.e. conveyance of messages and letters to parents.
- Observe confidentiality in all aspects of work.
- Be aware of particular disabilities of children on the school transport and be briefed by the School Principal on how to deal with same i.e. epilepsy etc.
- Perform any other duties relevant to the position of escort which may be assigned by the School Principal from time to time.
- Not leave the school transport unless under exceptional circumstances.
- Ensure that his/her position on the school transport is where maximum control of the children is achieved.
- Report all concerns to the School Principal and/or Class Teacher.

## **STAFF TRAINING**

All existing Bus Escorts will be offered certified in-house Safety Intervention training in the School on an annual basis to assist them in their duties in relation to the management of challenging behaviour.

All new Bus Escorts will be required to attend certified in-house Safety Intervention training in the School on an annual basis to assist them in their duties in relation to the management of challenging behaviour.

All existing Bus Escorts will be offered certified First Aid training in the School on a bi-annual basis to assist them in their duties in relation to the Health and Safety of the pupils travelling on their allocated bus.

All new Bus Escorts will be required to attend certified First Aid training in the School on a bi-annual basis to assist them in their duties in relation to the Health and Safety of pupils travelling on their allocated bus.



In the event that a pupil has specific medical needs, the School will arrange training for the Bus Escort, as required.

## **GUIDELINES FOR TRAVEL ON SCHOOL TRANSPORT**

### **COLLECTION AND DROPPING OFF**

- To avoid delays in the morning, children should be ready in good time and waiting to board the bus when it arrives for collection as delays and periods of waiting can be stressful for children who are already on the bus. Bus Eireann also have a policy of waiting only a short time and only on an occasional basis.
- Bus Escorts are responsible for the safety of the children from the time they board the bus in the morning until they are dropped to school AND from the time they board the bus in the afternoon until they are met at their home by their parent/guardian.
- Bus Escorts are responsible for all pupils on the bus and to ensure that they can meet this duty of care, they must remain on the bus while parents/guardians take their children to the bus in the morning and welcome them home in the afternoon.
- All Parent(s)/Guardian(s) will be provided with the contact details/telephone numbers for drivers and escorts at the start of each school year. In the event that children are not travelling for any reason, Parents must inform the Bus Escort and Driver in advance, if possible. Parents are requested to ensure that any such calls/texts are made between the hours of 08.00 and 16.00 only Monday through Friday.
- Parents must provide the school with named persons to whom the children may be handed over in the evenings. It is the responsibility of Parents to ensure that the school receives prior and timely notification of any changes to these names.
- Parents must ensure that a Parent/Guardian or named carer is available at your child's home from 15.05 in the afternoon.
- Bus Escorts are not permitted to drop pupils off at empty houses.



- Parents are also advised that Bus Eireann are engaged to transport children to/from the child's home only and therefore, are not covered by insurance to pick up or deliver a child to any other address.

#### **MANAGEMENT OF PUPIL BEHAVIOUR WHEN TRAVELLING BY BUS**

- Pupil behaviour will be managed using positive behaviour approaches and School Staff will work together to assist pupils in coping with travelling to and from school.
- Any items in the possession of a pupil which may be regarded as a hazard to themselves or others will be removed.
- As per Bus Eireann policy, pupils are not permitted to consume food or drinks while travelling on the bus.
- Pupils are expected to remain seated at all times and to wear the seatbelts provided. In the event that this occurs, Bus Eireann Policy is to wait a short period before leaving. This is also to limit the distress to the other pupils. In such circumstances, parents will be required to bring and/or collect their child from School or Respite.
- Any concerns should be reported to the School Principal. Bus Escorts must complete the School Incident Report Form following any incidents that occur while pupils are under h/her supervision.
- In the event that a pupil refuses to remain seated and to wear a seatbelt, the Bus Escort is required to report the matter to the School Principal. This report must be made on arrival in school and a School Incident Report Form must be completed.
- For those pupils who are in receipt of Clinical Services, a referral will be made to Occupational Therapy, to provide support in the event that a pupil consistently refuses to wear their seatbelt. Parents are advised to also make a home referral to Clinical Services.
- In an instance when a belt clip is not working, the parent/guardian may wish to consider purchasing a harness to ensure that their child remains seated. Such a decision is solely that of the Parent/Guardian. Parents are advised that there may be health and safety implications for their child if h/she is wearing the harness in the event of a road accident.



- In the event that a child is not willing to wear a seatbelt and all supports to prevent h/her opening the seatbelt have been tried, then the decision not to permit the child to continue to travel on the school bus rests with the School Principal.
- Persistent disruptive or challenging behaviours, which might potentially affect the safety of others, must be reported and may also result in that pupil's removal from the bus service. This decision also rests with the School Principal.
- Full withdrawal on a temporary basis of School Transport pending application for 1.1 Bus Escort and or 1.1/2.1 Bus Escort(s) and 1.1 School Transport will occur when a pupil absconds from School Transport or engages in a serious physical attack on pupil(s), Bus Escort or Driver.
- The Principal will telephone and/or write to the Parents of the child concerned and inform them as to the reasons behind the decision. Parents who wish to appeal this decision can do so by using the procedures outlined in the Parent School Communication Policy.

#### **RESUMPTION OF TRAVELLING ON SCHOOL TRANSPORT FOLLOWING A HIGH-LEVEL CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR INCIDENT**

- An application may be made to the NCSE and DES for 1.1 Bus Escort before the child is permitted to resume travelling.
- An application to the NCSE and DES for 1.1 Bus Transport may be made before a child is permitted to resume travelling.
- Please be advised that a professional report is required as part of the application process to the NCSE for all school transport and 1.1 Bus Escorts.
- In the event that the child is not permitted to travel on School Transport, the child is still required to attend school and parents must bring their child to and from School.

#### **IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW OF POLICY**

- This policy is available to School Staff and parents on the School website [www.bmss.ie](http://www.bmss.ie).
- All existing Bus Escorts have been provided with a hard-copy of this policy.
- All new Bus Escorts will receive a copy of this policy on appointment.
- All new parents will receive a copy in the School Information Pack for New Pupils.
- A hard-copy of this policy is available to existing parents from the School Office, on request.

This policy will be reviewed as deemed necessary by the Board of Management (typically every five years) and also in the event of any future DES circulars or legislation.



## **RATIFICATION OF POLICY**

This policy was first ratified by the Board of Management on Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> November 2015, was reviewed and ratified on Monday 21 February 2022.