

Dear Parents/Carers,

Covid-19 – School Transport from 2 September 2020

Following guidance issued by the Department for Education (DfE) on 2 July 2020 and the Department for Transport (DfT) on 3 July 2020, we wanted to write to you before schools break up for the Summer holidays to outline our plans for school transport arrangements from 2 September 2020.

Briefly, the DfE has said that the rules now in force for passengers on public transport (local bus services) will not apply on dedicated (contracted) school transport from the Autumn term 2020, and hence social distancing will not apply to these buses/taxis. The DfT has outlined concerns about loading capacities on public buses and is therefore looking, wherever possible, to minimise the number of pupils using public transport by using alternative ways of getting to and from school, including walking, cycling or by parents transporting them.

We require schools to conduct an urgent survey among with their parents/carers who use public transport to get their children to school – more details, including a template letter, are provided below.

Shropshire School Transport for September 2020

Shropshire Council's approach to school transport from September 2020 is geared to meeting the principles underpinning the system of controls and guidance set out by the DfE and DfT. The Shropshire's school transport network will be geared as follows:

1. Dedicated/contracted school transport buses/taxis will return to 100% passenger loading capacity from 2 September 2020 – **no social distancing**.
2. Where possible, we will encourage pupils to be seated to reflect **Year Group 'bubbles'**, with the eldest Year Group 'bubble' sitting at the rear, progressing to the youngest at the front in age order (please see bus schematics appended to the letter)
3. Pupils over the age of 11 should wear **face coverings** whilst on the bus/taxi (note that on public transport this is mandatory). This may not always be possible for SEND pupils (and Adult Services Transport). Schools and parents also need to evaluate risks and consider if there are specific reasons why a child may not be able to travel on school transport at any time.

NB: Schools should have a process for removing face coverings when pupils and staff who use them arrive at school and communicate it clearly to them. Pupils must be instructed not to touch the front of their face covering during use or when removing them. They must wash their hands immediately on arrival (as is the case for all pupils), dispose of temporary face coverings in a covered bin or place reusable face coverings in a plastic bag they can take home with them, and then wash their hands again before heading to their classroom.

4. Operators will provide **hand sanitiser** for pupils upon boarding buses.
5. We expect pupils to be socially distanced whilst **queuing** and boarding buses where possible – schools will be required to support operators in managing this at the school site.
6. Whilst travelling, pupils should always **stay seated**, avoid physical contact, face forwards and away from others, and not shout or raise their voices.
7. School transport will operate as per its pre-Covid-19 **vehicle sizes, times and routes** but we'll look to provide separate transport for pupils of different schools where they currently share one bus.

8. Where **non-entitled pupils travel** on public transport (local bus services) also used by the public, parents should be encouraged to find alternative ways of getting their children to school – if they live in the same town/community as the school, active travel (walking/cycling) should be the first choice. The second choice should be travel by car. Only if none of these options are available to parents should they use public transport. Once the Covid-19 emergency eases, we will want to encourage pupils back onto public buses from cars as soon as we can.
9. Where public buses are operating and **dedicated to non-entitled pupils** only, with no adult fare payers, we are working with operators to see if 100% loading capacities can be applied.
10. We assume that pupils will **wash/sanitise** their hands as they enter school from the bus/taxi.
11. Transport operators have since April 2020 provided additional **cleaning of vehicles** to protect against Coronavirus.
12. Government (DfT) **Covid-19 travel advice** should be adhered to and can be found using the following link.
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers>
13. The Council's '**Guidance for School Transport Provision**' should also be followed and this is published on the Council's internet site and will be updated to reflect the new plans for September 2020.
<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/school-transport/guidance-for-school-transport-provision-from-1-june-2020/>

Safety Rules

It should be noted that the safety rules on public transport will be different from those on dedicated school transport routes, as mentioned above. The key differences are that Face coverings are mandatory and social distancing is required on public transport.

Transport Actions for Schools

Below are the actions that Shropshire Transport would like us to take and I would appreciate parents support with this:

It is recognised that schools are incredibly busy with the range of measures and arrangements for September 2020, but we would like schools to support the school transport plan with the following actions please:

1. Advise parents of all your entitled transported pupils what we are planning, including the new Year Group 'Bubble' seating arrangements, new Covid-19 safety rules for travelling on buses, **hand sanitisation on boarding, the requirement for face coverings and the need for their children to obey the on-bus safety rules.**
2. We will make arrangements for pupils arriving off school transport re hand washing/sanitising, safe disposal or retention of face coverings and social distanced queuing for the return journey.

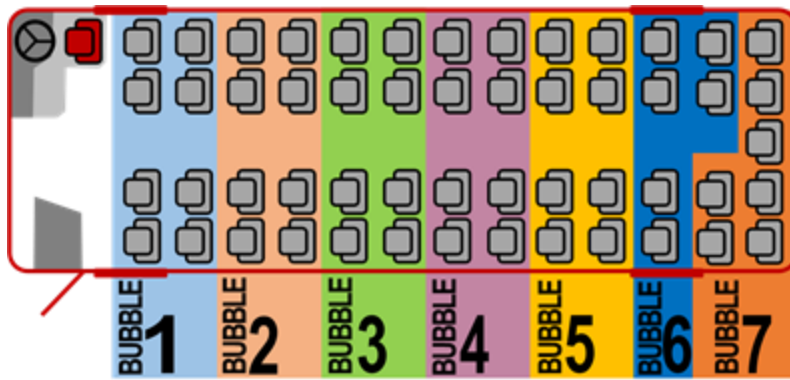
Clearly, between now and 2 September 2020 there are likely to be more developments, and if any affect our transport plans, we will let you know.

Finally, thank you for all your support and you can be assured that we will continue working to make safe and satisfactory arrangements for school transport from September 2020.

If you have any queries or suggestions, please let us know.

School Transport Bus 'Bubble' Seating Schematics

Seven 'Bubbles' seating example:



NB Eldest pupils in Bubble 7, progressing in age reduction order to youngest in Bubble 1

Yours faithfully,

Passenger Transport Group
Shropshire Council
107 Longden Road
Shrewsbury
SY3 9DS

Telephone: 01743 253031
Email responses to: passtrans@shropshire.gov.uk

Dear Parent,

Transport to School from September 2020 – Public Buses

The Department for Transport have written to local authorities about loading pressures on public transport buses due to Covid-19 social distancing.

They say that whilst only a proportion of children use public transport to get to school, continuing to provide sufficient capacity – while maintaining social distancing – will be enormously challenging. At a national level they estimate that only around a third of children in England, outside London, using public buses to travel to school before the crisis, can be safely accommodated when schools resume, as a result of likely demand from other passengers on services that are open to the wider public, and maintaining social distancing of 1 metre. In Shropshire, public buses are operating at no more than 50% capacity and unfortunately, they will drive by waiting passengers without stopping when they are full.

So, the DfT advise that in particular, for journeys to school of two miles or less, which are currently undertaken by public bus, pupils switch to cycling or walking. For children living further away travel by car may be an option. They add that pupils arriving at school by other modes should be encouraged to complete the last part of their journey on foot in order to manage congestion and safe access to schools by active travel.

One exception to this is where public buses are carrying only school pupils on the bus (i.e. with no adult fare payers) – in these circumstances, the Council are working with operators to see if these buses can operate with 100% loading capacities, thereby removing the need for alternative parental transport solutions. Often these buses are those that travel from out of the school's catchment area and bus operators will know which buses these are.

For pupils entitled to free school transport and issued with season tickets, Shropshire Council will be liaising with bus operators and making alternative arrangements if needs be. Pupils will still be provided with a place on a bus to school.

Clearly, once the Covid-19 emergency eases, we will want to encourage non-entitled pupils travelling by car back onto public buses as soon as we can; for those walking or cycling, that may be a preferred option in the longer term, as it is a healthier and more environmentally friendly travel solution.

If your child normally travels to and from school by public bus, please could you let us know by emailing Peter Neale at pn@thomasadams.net at the bus service number they use and as best as you can, what you will now be planning from September 2020. Will your child:

- a. Walk or cycle instead
- b. Travel by car instead
- c. Remain on the public bus

Yours sincerely,

Thomas Adams School

Date 14th July 2020