

Education, Leisure and Housing

Winter Newsletter 2019 - 2020



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.

Orkney Islands Council and the Scottish Government have a 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 school closures and transport changes.
- The Facebook page and OIC Twitter feed are both updated as soon as information is available, this can be as early as 06:15, 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.
- School closure information is passed to BBC Radio Orkney for broadcasting on their programme at 07:30 (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, detailed information on specific routes will not be provided. However, it is not always possible to alert parents of school transport variations within the timescale of Radio Orkney's programme.

Note: In bad weather conditions it is very difficult to obtain individual route information, as this will depend on the local weather and road conditions. We therefore are only able to advise whether there may be disruptions to school transport in general.

Throughout the school day

- Schools have arrangements in place to contact parents if the school is closing or if transport is operating early.
- OIC social media will provide information 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. This is intended to be helpful to parents as the other option is not to operate at all. If your normal pick up/drop off point is on a side road and conditions in your area are poor, you may wish to use the alternative point, where your side road meets the main road, for pick up and be there in the afternoon for drop off.

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 conveyors in liaison with Education staff and will have regard to the prevailing weather forecast and road conditions.

Throughout the winter months the Met Office often issue 'Yellow' (be aware) warnings for both wind and snow/ice, it is very rare when they upgrade to an 'Amber' (be prepared).

Where an 'Amber' warning is issued with advance notice from the Met Office, this will automatically mean school transport will **not** operate for the duration of the warning (when any of the warning period includes school hours). Notification of this will be via sources listed 'How to get information'.

For schools closing to pupils, as a rule, we would still review on the morning of the predicted weather as it may be that overnight the weather has changed for the better and although at that point the decision has already been taken that there will be no transport, the schools could remain open.

For further information on school transport provision, including during the winter months, see the attached FAQ sheet. If you have any questions not answered or would like to more information, then please contact the Education Resources Manager.

As winter and the inevitable short daylight hours approach, as always, we 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.



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. Only cross when the bus has driven off and you can see clearly in both directions.

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. You should contact the conveyor direct in the first instance and they will be able to advise you if there has been a delay, and if a vehicle is on its way. Their telephone number is on your route allocation letter (we recommend you save or keep their phone number handy).

Make sure your children are aware of what to do if the bus is late or does not arrive. It is good practice for children to have an emergency contact number with them. It must be stressed that the responsibility for the safety and welfare of children prior to boarding school transport remains with the parent.

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 conditions 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 and the absence will be marked as authorised.

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 can be reached on the numbers given.

Be Safe, Be Seen, Be Warm this winter

We are pleased with the uptake of hi-viz vests in primary schools that we issue to P1 pupils each year. Reflectors will also be issued to nursery to P7 pupils from the Council's Road Safety Officer.

It is important that pupils are seen – whether walking or cycling 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 wear (or carry) something bright or hi-viz (reflective strips on coats, bags, shoes, LED flashing lights etc).

Pupils should dress warmly to suit the weather conditions in case there is an unexpected delay to school transport.



Tip: During previous winters there were some examples of good practice observed, including some secondary school pupils who were witnessed holding a torch from their mobile phones to alert drivers to their position at the road side. There is a limited amount of wind up torches available on request – contact the school office for details.

Pupils cycling to school should take the same safety measures as those walking and wear reflective clothing. In addition, it is advised that they 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, sneezes and Winter Vomiting Bug

Winter is also a time where there can be an increase in illness among pupils (and staff).

Coughs, colds and sneezes - sensible precautions to help stop the spread 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 - we work with colleagues in NHS and Environmental Health to do all we can to minimise spreading of what could be instances of the winter vomiting bug.

Norovirus itself is easily spread through contact with an infected person or contaminated surfaces, we would encourage schools to remind pupils of the necessity and importance of applying good personal hygiene washing hands with soap and water and drying thoroughly at all times but particularly if they have been sick or when using the toilet.

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 after** the last episode of diarrhoea or vomiting.

Any questions or comments

Please contact Education, Leisure and Housing on 01856873535 extension 2421 or email education.leisure@orkney.gov.uk.