

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 guardians most frequently ask about.

During times of severe weather, Education, Leisure and Housing will:

- Where it is safe to do so, endeavour to keep our schools open to provide parents the option of transporting their children to school themselves if school transport is not operating.
- 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 about School Closures

Morning Closures:

- The OIC School Transport Facebook page is available; this will be your first stop for information on 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 6.15 am, which should assist daily isles travellers in planning their travel.
- Information about, and links to the OIC Facebook and Twitter pages are available at: <http://www.orkney.gov.uk/Council/O/OIC-Updates.htm>
- School closure information is passed to BBC Radio Orkney which they then broadcast on their programme at 7.30 am (on 93.7 FM) and also posted on their Facebook page. Radio Orkney will be notified if there is disruption to transport, however detailed information on specific routes will not be provided.
- Information on school closures and transport disruption is also provided on the OIC answer phone (01856 873535).

Note: In bad weather conditions it is very difficult to obtain individual route information to advise parents whether the school bus on their route is running that morning, as this will depend on the local weather and road conditions. We therefore are only able to advise whether there will be disruptions to school transport in general. Parents are best placed to know the road conditions in their area and this will guide their decision whether to put their child out for school transport.

Throughout the school day

- Schools have arrangements in place to contact parents if the school is closing or if transport is running early.
- OIC social media (and Radio Orkney wherever possible) will provide updates 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.

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 operators in liaison with Education staff and will have regard to the prevailing weather forecast and road conditions along with advice from Police Scotland.

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/drop-off takes place.

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. Make sure your children are aware of what to do if the bus is late or does not arrive.

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 condition of roads 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.

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 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 that parents can be reached on the numbers given - eg. ensure that mobile phones are switched on.

Be Prepared: Be Bright, Seen and Warm this winter

As winter and the inevitable short daylight hours approach, as always, Education, Leisure and Housing would like to urge parents and guardians to relay to their children the importance of crossing the road in a safe manner and being seen in the dark.

We are pleased with the uptake of hi-visibility vests in Primary Schools but we note that Secondary pupils also need to be seen – whether walking to school or waiting for the school bus. We would also like to emphasise the importance of all pupils wearing suitable clothing for the weather conditions (the journey may take longer or even be halted at points).

Pupils cycling to school should take the same safety measures as those walking and wear reflective clothing. In addition, they should 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.

Any questions or comments

Please contact Karen Walter on 01856 873535 ext. 2421 or education.leisure@orkney.gov.uk