

Education, Leisure and Housing

Winter Newsletter 2022 - 2023



Weather disruption to schools

There will inevitably be days during the winter where the weather causes disruption to both schools and school transport. This newsletter contains the information most frequently requested by parents and carers.

Orkney Islands Council and the Scottish Government share the same clear objective of keeping schools open, wherever practicable, to minimise both the impact on education provision, and the wider community.

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

- Work to keep our schools open wherever possible.
- Provide a good educational experience during times of disruption.
- Enable as many pupils as possible to access work from home.
- Provide pupils with specific work for home study.
- Provide opportunities for pupils to 'catch up' with work where necessary.

Where to find up-to-date information

Mornings

- The OIC School Transport Facebook account should be your first stop for information regarding school closures and changes to school transport.
- The Facebook page and OIC Twitter feed are both updated as soon as information is available, this can be as early as 06:15.
- Information about, and links to, the OIC Facebook and Twitter pages are available at: <https://www.orkney.gov.uk/Council/O/OIC-Updates.htm>.
- School closure information is passed to BBC Radio Orkney, for broadcast on their programme at 07:30 (on 93.7 FM), and is also posted via their Facebook account.

Note: In bad weather conditions it is often challenging to obtain specific 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 early, or if scheduled transport times are brought forward.
- OIC social media will continue to provide information on any disruption during the day.

School Transport and Parental Responsibilities

During periods of adverse weather, it is possible that some or all school transport may be cancelled or required to operate a curtailed service (for example main roads only) depending on local road conditions. If your regular 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, bus drivers and other road users. These decisions are taken by conveyors in liaison with Education staff and will consider the prevailing weather forecast and road conditions.

Throughout the winter months the Met Office often issues 'Yellow' (be aware) warnings for both wind and snow/ice. On rare occasions these are upgraded to 'Amber' (be prepared) warnings.

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 above.

In deciding whether a school will be closed, as a rule, we will still review on the morning of the predicted severe weather, as it may be that the weather has since changed for the better and, whilst there will be no transport, the schools could remain open.

As the inevitable short daylight hours of Winter approach, as always, we urge parents and carers to remind children of the importance of crossing the road safely, and of being seen in the dark. Please remind children that they must **never** take a signal from **any** driver to cross – as the driver 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 point. Pedestrians should 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, we advise that parents agree a length of time, such as 20 minutes, that children will wait for transport at their designated pick-up point before returning or contacting home if it has not arrived. Parents should then contact the conveyor direct in the first instance so they may advise 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, parents must decide whether it is safe to transport their children to school. We expect parents to base this decision on the conditions in their area. We do not expect that all parents will be able to transport their children. Should a parent decide that it is not safe to put their child to school, then they must 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 as the operator will not be 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 issued to P1 pupils each year. Reflectors will also be issued to pupils from nursery to P7 by 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 also dress warmly to suit the weather conditions in case there is an unexpected delay to school transport.



Tip: Pupils may wish to use the torch function on their mobile phones to alert drivers to their position at the roadside. There are also a limited number of wind-up torches available on request – please contact your school office for details.

After completing cycle training, pupils cycling to school should take the same safety measures as those walking and wear reflective clothing. In addition, it is strongly 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, COVID and Winter Vomiting Bug

Winter is a time where there will be an increase in illness among pupils (and staff) and, this year, we must all face the additional challenge of COVID-19.

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. The emergence of **COVID-19** places greater importance on good hygiene and all pupils travelling on school transport are asked to sanitize hands before joining the vehicle, and to wear a face covering whilst travelling on the vehicle.

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 always drying thoroughly 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.

COVID-19 – parents and carers are asked to evaluate the health of their children each morning and ensure that no child displaying symptoms of COVID attends school or uses school transport.

As you will be aware, the symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- a high temperature – *this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature)*
- a new, continuous cough – *this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual)*
- a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste – *this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal*

To protect others, do not go to places like a GP surgery, pharmacy, or hospital if your child has any of these symptoms. Arrange for a test and follow NHS guidance

Get advice from NHS (tel 111) if you are worried about your child or not sure what to do.

Any questions or comments

Further details of various aspects of school transport provision, including the school transport policy, frequently asked questions, and advice to and the responsibilities of parents/carers, is available at <https://www.orkney.gov.uk>.

Alternatively, please contact Education, Leisure and Housing on 01856 873535 extension 2433 or email education.leisure@orkney.gov.uk.