

Thurrock Council

School Transport

Code of Good Practice

September 2019

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Introduction

This Code of Practice document has been designed to provide Parents/Pupils with advice on transport to School.

The document explains how we expect pupils to behave when travelling to and from their school. It advises parents of ways in which they can help to make their child's journey safer and more pleasant. Finally it advises schools, drivers, passenger assistants and operators of their responsibilities.

The council is committed to providing a service that meets the requirements of pupils, parents and schools. We work with others to ensure that what we provide is operated in a safe and efficient manner.

We work with the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA, formerly the Vehicle Inspectorate) to ensure that all vehicles meet strict Government safety and maintenance requirements.

We work with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and the Police to ensure that all drivers and passenger assistants on school contracts are suitable for working with children.

We work with operators and schools to deal with pupil misconduct. We will assist operators in identifying pupils who damage or deface vehicles and support any reasonable action taken against a pupil who is found to be behaving in this way. Equally we will support pupils, parents and schools if they have justifiable complaints against operators or drivers.

Home-to-school transport in Thurrock is the responsibility of the Directorate of Children's Services. Every day we arrange and manage transport and contracts for some 1,400 pupils. The Passenger Transport Unit is responsible for the day to day operations of these contracts.

Eligibility for free transport

Some pupils are eligible to free home-to-school transport. Advice and information concerning eligibility for free travel can be obtained from the Directorate of Children's Services (see contacts section below). An application form will need to be completed to apply for transport.

The Passenger Transport Unit will make the travel arrangements when an application has been approved. The pupil will be allocated to a contracted vehicle (bus or taxi) or a pass will be issued for use on a public (local) bus or rail service.

For pupils not eligible to free transport, a concessionary seat may be available on payment of a fee. There is no obligation on the Council to provide a concessionary seat and pupils eligible for free transport will always be given priority in the allocation of seats. If you wish to apply for a concessionary seat please contact the Awards and Benefits Section (see contacts section).

The Passenger Transport Unit acknowledges the assistance of the Directorate of Children's Services, schools, colleges, VOSA (Vehicle Operating Services Agency formerly the vehicle Inspectorate), operators and others in helping to draw up these guidelines. Please note that the booklet is intended to provide guidance only. It cannot cover every eventuality or circumstance. It does not attempt to describe all statutory requirements relating to school transport.

Please look through this document. You will see it contains advice. Whether you are a pupil, parent, driver or a member of a school's staff, try to follow the advice given. If you have any further queries, please contact the Passenger Transport Unit, the Directorate of Children's Services, or the relevant school/college – see contacts section at the end of this document for contact details.

Pupils

1. Pupils may be requested to walk up to a mile to a pick-up point and must arrive at the pick-up point at least 10 minutes before the transport is actually due.
2. If you have been given a pass please ensure you always carry it with you. Always show your pass to the driver: if you fail to show it your right to travel may be withdrawn. Please also remember that the Passenger Transport Unit operate a no pass, no ride system to ensure that vehicles do not become overloaded. Students who try to board a vehicle without a valid pass or a letter (issued at the beginning of the autumn term – see below) may be refused travel. If you lose your pass or it is stolen please contact your parents, the school/college, or the Passenger Transport Unit for a replacement. If the pass becomes illegible it should be replaced. Please note a charge is likely to be made.
3. If you have successfully applied for a school transport pass, letters will be issued at the beginning of the autumn term and must be used every day until your pass has been delivered. Please do not embarrass the driver by trying to get on the vehicle without the letter or pass. If you lose it please contact the Passenger Transport Unit for a replacement as soon as possible. A charge is likely to be made.
4. If the transport is late, then you should wait for up to 20 minutes before returning home or contacting your parents, the school or the Passenger Transport Unit by phone if you have one. Do not go near the road whilst waiting for the transport and stand well back from the edge of the pavement.
5. Do not try to get on (or off) the vehicle until it has completely stopped. Find a seat quickly and quietly without rushing or pushing. Please ensure that your coats, bags or scarves are not caught in the doors when getting on (or off) the vehicle.
6. Do not stand up out of your seat until the vehicle has come to a complete standstill.
7. If seatbelts are supplied then you should wear them. Seatbelts must be worn in all taxis, minibuses, coaches and buses where supplied. All primary school children are supplied with seatbelts. Legally Double Decker buses are not required to have seatbelts.
8. Do not eat or drink on the vehicle. Please take all your litter with you when you get off the vehicle. Also take all your belongings with you. Remember, these vehicles may go onto other contracts and need to be kept as clean and tidy as possible.
9. On leaving the vehicle at your drop-off point, do not cross any road until the vehicle has moved away. You must be able to see clearly in both directions. Where possible, use a pedestrian crossing. For primary school pupils only: a responsible adult should be there to meet you. If you cannot see anyone, please tell the driver and he will complete the route and then return to your drop off point to see if someone is there for you.
10. Behave properly at all times. It is an offence for anyone to misbehave on one of the school vehicles, or do anything which would put the driver, other road users or other passengers at risk. If you make a nuisance or cause any damage on a vehicle, then your right to travel may be withdrawn, and/or your parents may be fined. Remember, if you have a free pass, your parents have signed the transport form to say that they will take responsibility for you if you do misbehave.

11. The driver is responsible for his/her vehicle and the passengers on board; therefore you must observe any instructions which are given.

Parents and carers of mainstream school pupils

Make sure that your child knows what to do if the vehicle is more than 20 minutes late. You or your child should contact the operator or the Passenger Transport Unit (see contacts section) as soon as possible, so that we can find out what has happened.

If your child should have a school transport pass letters will be issued at the beginning of the autumn term and must be used every day until the pass has been delivered. Please ask your child not to embarrass the driver by trying to get on the vehicle without the letter or pass. If they lose the letter or pass please contact the Passenger Transport Unit for a replacement as soon as possible. Students who try to board a vehicle without a pass or a letter at the beginning of the autumn term may be refused travel. Please also remember that the Passenger Transport Unit operate a no pass, no ride system to ensure that vehicles do not become overloaded.

Please ensure that your child carries his/her bus pass if they have one. Try to keep a check on the condition of the pass in case it needs replacing. Remember, the driver may refuse entry to the vehicle if he/she is unable to read it. Obtain a replacement from the Passenger Transport Unit before this happens (a fee may be charged).

Please do not provide your child/children with a letter to travel if they have lost their pass. Operators are on strict instructions not to accept any alternative requests.

Please make sure that alternative travel arrangements are available if a student is unable to board the vehicle. We appreciate that there may not be anyone at home, to cover this eventuality parents/guardians should make sure their child is aware of who they should contact in the event they are refused access to the bus or for any other emergency.

Make sure that your child understands that he/she must behave properly in and out of school. The operator may refuse to take a child who causes a persistent nuisance or risks the safety of others. Remember, you will be responsible for any vandalism, soiling or damage to a vehicle if it has been proven that your child was involved in any incident.

Companies may seek prosecution of offenders. Where free transport is offered, it should be regarded as a privilege and it could be taken away if it is abused.

Ensure your child listens and understands the safety rules. Remind them that playing about on a vehicle or by the pick-up point can cause accidents or injuries. Make sure your child does not:

- wear clothing that could be dangerous – for example, hanging belts or bags with loose straps that may get stuck in the doors
- does not try to get on (or off) the vehicle until it has completely stopped – they should find a seat quickly and quietly without rushing or pushing, and ensure that coats, bags or scarves are not caught in the doors when getting on (or off) the vehicle
- does not stand up out of their seat until the vehicle has come to a complete standstill

If you have queries about seatbelt issues, please refer to the section below on 'Seatbelt requirements'.

Notify the Directorate of Children's Services of any changes to your circumstances or address. If you move address you will need to reapply for transport it is not automatically given. This may take up to 10 working days to arrange after it is approved. If free transport is no longer required, then

please notify the Passenger Transport Unit immediately as there may be another pupil waiting for a seat.

Please be mindful that all students are the responsibility of their parents until they have boarded the vehicle.

If you have any concerns about school transport, you should contact either the school if it relates to discipline, the Directorate of Children's Services if it relates to eligibility for free travel, or the Passenger Transport Unit if it relates to any other operational matter (see contact details). You will be required to reapply for transport if you move, it is not automatically given. If any application is approved this may take up to 10 working days to arrange. In general, we request that you do not speak to the driver direct, as this may exacerbate the situation. In the case of complaints which cannot be resolved through a telephone call, they should be submitted in writing with as much detail as possible.

For primary school children only: please ensure that they are taken to the pick-up points in the morning and are looked after until the vehicle arrives, and also met again in the afternoon by a responsible known adult.

A responsible adult must take and collect the child from the vehicle, whether or not the transport picks up at the home address or a designated pick up point. Where possible please supply your emergency telephone number to the driver and passenger assistants if applicable, as well as the Passenger Transport Unit, in case of any delays by either party. Wherever possible someone will contact you if the afternoon journey is extremely late. If you are delayed the driver will drop off the other children first and then return to drop off your child.

If any pupil does not turn up to a designated pick up point, the driver should only wait for 2 to 3 minutes before proceeding to the next pick up point. It will then be your responsibility to get your child to school. **We will be able to take them back home if you do take them in to school but please notify the Passenger Transport Team as we will not know they are there and would not wish to leave them at school in error.**

Hopefully you will be home or at the drop off point by then. However, this procedure is carried out on an emergency basis only and must not be taken advantage of. If after returning to the home address or drop off point, whichever is applicable, there is still no responsible adult there, the child will either be returned to school or alternatively we may have to seek assistance of the Duty Officer for Social Care at the Council Offices or in extreme cases when there is no one available Essex Police. This is purely for the safety and well-being of the child concerned. **Please contact the Passenger Transport Unit if you will be delayed by more than 10 minutes.**

Parents and carers of special educational needs pupils

On receiving your child's school transport details at the beginning of each academic year please be aware of the pick-up time and pick up point (if applicable), and try to have your child ready at least 10 minutes beforehand.

If the taxi or minibus fails to arrive after ten minutes, please call the operator to ascertain the reason for the delay. If the vehicle still does not arrive after a further ten minutes or you are not satisfied with the operator's answer then please contact the Passenger Transport Unit (see contacts section).

Parents should take their child to the pick-up point in the morning and collect them from the drop off point in the afternoon (if applicable). Please note the passenger assistants are not allowed to leave other children unsupervised on the vehicle at any time. If you do need assistance then you may ask the driver for their help but in an emergency only. It is imperative that the passenger assistants remain on the vehicle.

Please ensure that your child goes to the toilet before they get on the vehicle, just in case of any delays, e.g. due to heavy traffic.

Where possible please supply emergency telephone numbers to the driver and passenger assistants if applicable, as well as the Passenger Transport Unit, just in case of any delays by either party. Wherever possible someone will contact you if the afternoon journey is extremely late. Repeat occurrences of any delay may require a suspension of transport until confirmation that an appropriate adult **will** be available to collect the student.

Regular delays may require a suspension of transport until confirmation that an appropriate adult **will** be available to collect the student

If you are delayed the driver will drop off the other children and then return to drop off your child. Hopefully you' will be home or at the drop off point by then. However, this procedure is only carried out on an emergency basis and must not be taken advantage of. If after returning to the home address or drop off point, whichever is applicable, there is still no responsible adult there, the child will have to be taken back to school or brought into the Civic Offices and delivered into the hands of the Duty Officer for Social Care and if no one is available Essex Police. This is purely for the safety and well-being of the child concerned.

Please do not ask the driver or passenger assistants to collect your child from, or take them to, a different address than their home (where applicable). They are only employed to take each child from home to school and vice versa.

No unauthorised persons (adult or child) should request to travel on the vehicle. They are not covered by insurance and the authority will not accept any responsibility for them being there.

Any medication (including travel sickness tablets) that may be necessary for your child should be administered before they get onto the vehicle or at school by a designated member of staff. The passenger assistants or driver will not be allowed to administer medication, but if you would like them to take the medication to school on your behalf then please ask the passenger assistants to carry it in a sealed bag. The parent /guardian should notify the Special Education Needs Department of any medical conditions or seating requirements (see contacts section).

Advise the driver and passenger assistants if there is any particular difficulty with your child in general or on any particular day. If your child is not well, please do not allow them to travel on the vehicle. They could be very ill and the vehicle may have to turn back to return your child to you, making the rest of the children on board late for school.

Please do not give your child any food or drink for the trip as this is strictly prohibited. The major concern here is choking and the health and safety of the pupils is important. However, on extremely long journeys outside of the borough a drink may be acceptable, although we do not recommend cans or glass bottles.

Notify the Special Educational Needs Department of any changes to your circumstances or address. If your free transport is no longer required, then notify the Passenger Transport Unit as soon as possible as there may be another pupil waiting for his/her seat.

If you have a problem with the transport, speak to the driver or passenger assistants first followed by the operator, and then if you are not satisfied with the outcome please contact the Passenger Transport Unit. In the case of complaints which cannot be resolved through a telephone call, they should be submitted to the council's Complaints team in writing, with as much detail as possible.

Schools

Please ensure that parents and pupils understand when applying to attend your school that they may not necessarily be eligible for free transport. They will need to make an application (see contacts section). Concessionary seats may be available for a fee – they can be applied for via the Awards and Benefits Section. Concessionary seats can be withdrawn at any time.

If a pass is offered please ensure that pupils understand the consequences of unacceptable behaviour on buses, at bus stops and at pick up points. They may lose their right to travel on contract buses and their parents may be fined.

Each academic year the Passenger Transport Unit will provide every school with a list of students on each contract, which company is operating the service, their contact number and a timetable.

If there are a large number of students at a particular school, then the school will also be sent their passes to be distributed. Please inform the Passenger Transport Unit of any changes to a student's circumstances.

Please work closely with the bus or taxis operators, the Passenger Transport Unit, and parents, to resolve problems caused by bad behaviour. If possible appoint a school transport officer who can liaise with parents, pupils, operators and the Passenger Transport Unit.

Provide adequate supervision at bus set down and pick up points and inform operators of any special parking arrangements at your school. Wherever possible, discourage car drivers from obstructing bus stops and dangerous zones outside your school.

Set out a contingency plan in case of bad weather or other emergencies. Remember it is usually better to keep to normal school closing times when there is bad weather. Buses may be in use elsewhere and not be able to divert at short notice.

Should a bus fail to arrive, please phone the operator and then notify the Passenger Transport Unit. If this is in the afternoon please wherever possible keep the pupils together.

It is the school's duty to inform the Passenger Transport Unit in advance, independent of the Directorate of Adults, Health and Commissioning, of the term dates and any inset days. Failure to inform operators, via the Passenger Transport Unit, leads to considerable wasted journeys and of course expenditure and you shall be charged for this.

Schools must be aware that contractual obligations make it difficult to terminate contracts without a substantive reason, and you should report all shortcomings in service. Reports should, where possible, be put in writing to the Passenger Transport Unit.

Please note that the Passenger Transport Unit is only responsible for arranging home-to-school transport. However if your school is organising trips etc. the Approved Operator List for those companies that transport your students to your school is available from the Passenger Transport Unit who can guarantee that the drivers are checked. Operators will not be able to wait for pupils who are returning late from a trip unless the school agrees to cover the additional waiting costs.

Please do not provide a pupil with a letter to travel if they have lost their pass. Operators are on strict instructions not to accept any alternative requests.

If any child is absent from school for more than two weeks please email the Passenger Transport Unit with the full details at passengertransport@thurrock.gov.uk

Operators

Please ensure that you and your staff are familiar with the requirements in the Conditions of Contract, which are distributed annually along with the tenders. These guidance notes compliment the Conditions of Contract.

Ensure that the vehicles are not only in a good roadworthy condition, but are always cleanly presented inside and out.

It is imperative that every driver and passenger assistants has been vetted by the Disclosure and Barring Service. If it is found that either a driver or passenger assistants has been used on one of the school contracts and without clearance, then this will be seen as a very serious breach of the Conditions of Contract, which will result in the contract being withdrawn.

Make sure that the telephone numbers of the people who should be contacted in an emergency are carried – that is, phone numbers for you, the school, the Passenger Transport Unit and in the case of special needs pupils the parents. The loading list should also be on the vehicle, at all times during the journey, so that eligibility can be checked. Please be mindful that when the journey is in operation all details **must** be removed from the vehicle due to General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) requirements.

Establish contingency plans for dealing with vehicle failures and other emergencies. If, in the case of a mechanical breakdown which cannot be fixed and you do not have another vehicle then you can contact another operator, details of which can be obtained from the Passenger Transport Unit (Approved Operator List). They can be requested to service the contract on your behalf and any payment must be sorted out by you. The Passenger Transport Unit will not make a payment to a third party.

Please ensure that your drivers carry a mobile phone at all times for emergencies/delays.

Be mindful that they must not use the phone whilst driving but pull over safely.

If your contract has school transport passes, letters will be issued at the beginning of the autumn term and must be used every day until the pass has been delivered. Do not allow any pupils on board without a letter or pass but report it to the Passenger Transport Unit.

Report recurrent problems such as pupil discipline, vandalism etc. to the school and the Passenger Transport Unit, and in extreme cases, the police. Record the names of pupils who fail to carry a pass (where applicable), and report them to the Passenger Transport Unit. Once the "no pass, no ride" policy is in place do not allow students to travel without passes. A letter from the school or parent/guardian is **not** acceptable. Persistent offenders will be dealt with. Drivers should not refuse travel except in certain circumstances (see drivers section).

Ensure that all routes are operated according to the agreed route and schedule. If changes to the timings are necessary, please put this in writing to the Passenger Transport Unit so that we can change the timetable and also inform every parent of the changes concerned.

Operators must report to the Passenger Transport Unit if any child has not been travelling on any vehicle for more than two weeks.

Ensure that all drivers carry either their taxi badge or Passenger Transport Unit ID badge plus their driving licences at all times. Passenger assistants should also carry their ID badges.

Please ensure that you check that each driver holds the relevant driving licence for the vehicle that is being driven – grandfather rights will not be acceptable.

Please remind **all** drivers and passenger assistants that they must, at the first sign of misbehaviour, report this to you, so that you can bring this to the attention of the Passenger Transport Unit.

Please ensure that ALL drivers and passenger assistants do **not** carry out or promise favours for parents without the approval from the Passenger Transport Unit as this can cause issues and maybe outside of Policy.

Drivers

All drivers must comply with our Contract. This includes the provision that they must be vetted by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) before they are entitled to work on school contracts.

Drivers should behave professionally and politely at all times. Avoid inappropriate physical contact with pupils and never use language or behaviour which is offensive or threatening. Treat all pupils in a manner suited to their age and abilities.

Where a passenger assistant is carried, you should always work as a team to ensure pupils' journeys are as safe and comfortable as possible. The passenger transport's role is to ensure the safety and well-being of the passengers, so that the driver can concentrate on driving.

An appropriate adult is responsible for accompanying their children (where appropriate) to the vehicle in the mornings and collecting them in the evenings. The driver should not generally leave the vehicle. Please report any parent to your employer who does not collect any Primary school child or child with Special Educational Needs.

However, if there is a passenger assistant the driver may leave the vehicle to investigate (with the passenger assistants staying with the pupils), but this is not to be a regular occurrence.

If the pupil does not turn up the driver should only wait for 2 to 3 minutes before proceeding to the next pick-up point. It will then be the parent's responsibility to get their child to school. You will of course be able to take them back home if the parents do take them in to school.

Also, for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) contracts only, once the vehicle is at school then the driver (and passenger assistants) may help the child into and out of the school premises. It is your responsibility to ensure you comply with the procedures for handing over pupils on arrival at the school.

Your role is particularly valuable to your passengers if they are SEND pupils, and you have the opportunity to contribute positively to their lives. Be aware that although pupils you are carrying may have special needs and may encounter difficulties, they are not necessarily helpless. Do not patronise or talk down to pupils who may in fact understand a lot more than they seem to.

You must not smoke at any time just before or during the operation of a School Transport Contract it is illegal to smoke in a business vehicle. The misuse of alcohol, drugs and other substances is also prohibited.

The use of any form of camera, video equipment or mobile phone camera for take of photographic images of pupils is strictly prohibited. Exemptions are given to those vehicles that are authorised to have CCTV cameras fitted.

Please ensure that there is a hands-free facility within the vehicle for use during emergencies and/or delays. Do **not** use the phone whilst driving but pull over safely before answering or returning the call.

If you have an identity badge, please ensure you wear it at all times. You may be asked for your driving licence and evidence of identity at any time by a member of the Passenger Transport Unit, Taxis Licensing Department or the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency, where relevant.

Be prepared to co-operate with members of the Passenger Transport Unit, teachers and parents to resolve problems. Drivers who have operated the same contract for a while get to know their

pupils quite well, and are often able to assist teachers and parents by keeping them informed of any concerns.

Always treat any information about pupils as confidential, and do not discuss it with anyone except the child's parents, the school staff or other officials who may need to know. In certain cases, information will be on a need to know basis and you should always check with the Passenger Transport Unit as it may assist in the safety of the child. Do not discuss pupils with anyone in the presence of the pupils themselves, or other passengers.

If you find parents are not at home when you drop off their children on more than two occasions, please report this to the operator.

It is your responsibility to check the vehicle is fit and in good order – inside and out – before taking it out on the road, and that it is displaying its valid licences and has a tank full of petrol/diesel. You must report any vehicle faults to your employer.

On vehicles of 8 passengers or more, **ensure** the regulation yellow School Bus signs are clearly displayed at the front and rear of the vehicle. When stopped on the road to allow children to board or alight, you must use the Hazard Warning Flashers to alert other vehicles. Also ensure the contract number is displayed.

Approach each stop slowly and with care, and avoid sharp braking. Unless otherwise instructed, always pick up and drop off pupils at the school on the correct side of the road; never stop on the offside of the road or allow children to alight into the roadway this includes pick up points.

Make sure the pupils board and alight safely and only at the appropriate stop; keep doors closed until the vehicle is at a standstill, and do not allow pupils to open the doors themselves. Before moving off, check carefully that all doors are closed, and all pupils are well clear of the vehicle. Some taxis and minibuses, particularly those who transport Special Educational Needs pupils should be picked up at their home address and they should never be dropped off at any other address. In emergencies only, an alternative address may be requested by the Passenger Transport Unit. Please note that all drivers should not take any alternative address requests from parents.

Ensure that children in wheelchairs, and special seats, are secure, with the wheelchair /seat and the occupant both separately restrained.

Check passes/letters, if issued, or names against the loading list (for Primary school children only), as pupils board. If students should have a school transport pass, letters will be issued at the beginning of the autumn term and must be used every day until the pass has been delivered. Once the Passenger Transport Unit has issued the no pass, no ride instruction pupils should be refused travel unless they have a valid pass or a letter which is issued at the beginning of the autumn term. A letter from the school or parent is **not** sufficient.

If a pupil has lost his/her pass or it has become illegible then please ask them to get another one as soon as possible. Do not refuse any student who may be in their examination year, but check their details against the loading list.

Do not refuse to take a child home if you took them into school in the morning. In specific cases the Passenger Transport Unit may give an instruction to refuse travel – for example, for persistent failure to show a valid pass – when you must refuse travel.

In the event of bad behaviour by pupil(s) on the journey, please report this to the head teacher concerned as soon as possible, through your employer if necessary.

Provide full details of any bad behaviour, including names. You should not eject a pupil from your vehicle before the end of his/her journey, however, except in the most extreme circumstances, and then only if it is into the charge of his/her parent, a police officer or a teacher or social worker. Please report all incidents promptly. Never tell the children you will be reporting them and then fail to do so, this only encourages repeat bad behaviour. Only in specific cases where the Passenger Transport Unit has given an instruction to refuse travel – for example, for serious bad behaviour – may you refuse travel.

On vehicles with less than 9 passenger seats which are fitted with childproof rear door locks, you must ensure these locks are engaged on all appropriate doors of the vehicles when carrying children under the age of 14.

All students are issued with a seat, so passengers need not stand. If this happens, check the loading list, and if necessary please ask your employer to notify the Passenger Transport Unit.

Ensure that all pupils are seated before the vehicle moves off, and never allow children to stand at the front of the vehicle, or talk to you whilst moving, except in an emergency.

Make sure that any equipment or luggage is safely stowed, and that the gangways and emergency exits are kept clear at all times.

At the end of the journey you should check for any items of lost property left on the vehicle and hand them in to your employer, who will make arrangements for the item/s to be returned to their owners.

The school is responsible for the safety of the pupils within the school grounds, and there should be a member of staff on duty to supervise school transport and give you instructions relating to parking and departure particularly with special needs pupils. You may be asked to wait until the majority of the crowding has died down before you are able to move, and we ask you to co-operate accordingly. However, for mainstream pupils, vehicles need not enter the school grounds but you should ensure that you watch the pupils walk through the school gates. Please report any pupil who does not walk into school.

There is a speed limit of 10 mph within school grounds, unless any school imposes a lower limit.

In the afternoon vehicles are required to be at school at least five minutes before the end of school day, unless you are on a journey which covers more than one school. This means that you will be in position, stationary, with your engine stopped, before the children start moving around.

If you are informed that one of the pupils you usually carry is not attending school for some reason, you should not try to deviate from the timetable in any way; this is necessary so that the contract does not arrive at the school far too early.

If you feel that the timetable needs adjusting because you are regularly arriving too early/late at school, then please inform your employer who should alter the timetable and send it in to the Passenger Transport Unit in writing for agreement.

For emergency procedures, please see the 'Emergency procedures' section below.

Please be aware that although some of the pupils you may carry have special needs and may encounter difficulties, they are not necessarily helpless. Do not patronise or talk down to pupils who may in fact understand a lot more than they seem to.

Behave professionally and politely at all times. Avoid inappropriate physical / verbal contact with pupils and never use bad language or behaviour, which is offensive or threatening. Always treat pupils in a manner suited to their age and abilities.

Drivers and passenger assistants should always work as a team to ensure the pupils' journeys are as comfortable and as safe as possible. The passenger assistant's role is to ensure the safety and well-being of the passengers, and deal with any problems, so that the driver can concentrate on driving and is not distracted.

Drivers should **not** reverse when schoolchildren are on board or when they are in close proximity of the school. In times of emergency, this will be over-ruled if the school or emergency services stipulate otherwise.

Drivers of both taxi and PCVs vehicles **must** wear their seatbelts at all times during the contract.

Passenger assistants (PAs)

All PAs must comply with the Conditions of Contract. This includes the provision that they must be vetted by the Criminal Records Bureau before they are entitled to work on school contracts.

PAs may be expected to attend a training course which will be arranged (by the Passenger Transport Unit) as soon as possible after vetting. Please carry your ID card at all times.

Please be aware that although some of the pupils you may carry have special needs and may encounter difficulties, they are not necessarily helpless. Do not patronise or talk down to pupils who may in fact understand a lot more than they seem to.

Behave professionally and politely at all times. Avoid inappropriate physical / verbal contact with pupils and never use bad language or behaviour, which is offensive or threatening. Always treat pupils in a manner suited to their age and abilities.

Drivers and PAs should always work as a team to ensure the pupils' journeys are as comfortable and as safe as possible. The PA's role is to ensure the safety and well-being of the passengers, and deal with any problems, so that the driver can concentrate on driving and is not distracted.

You must not smoke at least 30 minutes prior to or during the operation of a school transport contract. It is illegal to smoke in a business vehicle. The misuse of alcohol, drugs and other substances is also prohibited.

The use of any form of camera, video equipment or mobile phone camera for taking of photographic images of pupils is strictly prohibited. Exemptions are given to those vehicles that are authorised to have CCTV cameras fitted.

PAs should not generally leave the vehicle. Parents are responsible for escorting their children to and from the vehicle at all times. The PAs must not leave other children unattended if a child does not come out of their house on time, if it is a home pick up point (although the driver may investigate – see drivers section). For special needs contracts only, however, when the vehicle is at school then the PA (and driver) may help the pupils into and out of the school premises. It is your responsibility to ensure you comply with the procedures for handing over pupils on arrival at the school. Please report any parent to your employer who does not collect any primary school child or child with special educational needs.

Do not take any requests from parents to deviate from the home address. Please note that the Council provides home-to-school transport only, we do not take into consideration child minders, grandparents or breakfast/after schools clubs as an alternative address. In emergencies only, however the Passenger Transport Unit may request an alternative address.

Be prepared to co-operate with members of the Passenger Transport Unit, teachers and parents to resolve problems. PAs who have operated the same contract for a while get to know their pupils quite well, and are often able to assist teachers and parents by keeping them informed of any concerns.

Always treat any information about pupils as confidential, and do not discuss it with anyone except the children's parents, the school staff or other officials who need to know it. In certain cases, information will be on a need to know basis and you should always check with the Passenger Transport Unit as it may assist in the safety of the child. Do not discuss pupils with anyone in the presence of the pupils themselves, or other passengers.

Ensure that pupils in wheelchairs, buggy's, harnesses, and special seats, are secure, with the wheelchair /seat and the occupant both separately secured.

On vehicles with less than 9 passenger seats which are fitted with childproof rear door locks, you must ensure these locks are engaged on all appropriate doors of the vehicles when carrying children under the age of 14. You should check seatbelts regularly for wear and tear, and report any defects to your employer.

Ensure that all children are seated before the vehicle moves off, and never allow children to stand at the front of the vehicle, or talk to the driver whilst the vehicle is moving. Make sure that any equipment or luggage is safely stowed, and that the gangways and emergency exits are kept clear at all times. If you are escorting children on a vehicle of over 19 seats you should take a seat in the middle seat at the rear of the vehicle, to supervise the pupils and attend to their needs during the journey.

In the event of bad behaviour by pupil(s) on the journey, please report this to the Head Teacher concerned as soon as possible, through your employer if necessary.

From time to time you may be asked to pass on messages or medication between home and school. These should be labelled with the child's name and preferably carried in a sealed envelope or container. Make sure they are handed over to the school secretary or teaching staff on arrival. Under no circumstances should any passenger assistant administer medication to pupils. Also do not allow pupils to either eat or drink on the transport as choking may occur.

PAs should **not** pass on verbal messages as these may be misconstrued.

For emergency procedures, please see the 'Emergency procedures' section below.

Emergency procedures for drivers and passenger assistants

Do not allow any pupils to help push a vehicle or make their own way home, it is far safer to keep the pupils together.

If you do have to leave the vehicle in an emergency, you must switch off the engine, apply the handbrake, put the vehicle in gear and remove the keys.

If you are involved in an accident, you should always contact the relevant emergency service/services, irrelevant of the how minor the damage may be.

Passenger Transport **must** be contacted within 60 minutes by phone and given details followed by written statements within 24 hours.

Make sure you are familiar with the position and use of all safety equipment, including the first aid kit and fire extinguisher. Also ensure that you know how to use the emergency exits and can evacuate your passengers, including wheelchair users, quickly and safely. Manually lower any wheelchair lifts in case of power failure. If your journey is going to be severely delayed – that is, by more than 15 minutes – inform the school/ parents/employer/Passenger Transport Unit as soon as possible. Do not speed for any reason if you are late.

Most contracts, especially those using large vehicles, drop off pupils at designated points. If, however, they are primary schoolchildren they should be met by a responsible adult. They must never be allowed to walk home from a stop on their own. There may be an exception though, when a letter has been sent in by the parent to the Passenger Transport Unit stating that the child can be allowed to walk home from the drop off stop and that the parent will take responsibility for this to happen.

You should be familiar with your employer's procedures for dealing with accidents, breakdowns and bad weather. Please ensure that either the PAs/driver always carries a mobile phone with them at all times. However, they are not to be used whilst the vehicle is in motion, as this is both dangerous and against the law.

In the event of a breakdown or an accident clearly explain to the pupils that it is safer for them to stay in the vehicle whilst the problem is sorted out. However, if it is unsafe for them to stay on the vehicle (e.g. there is a risk of fire or collision from other vehicles), assemble them in one safe place off the roadside and instruct them to stay there. Do not leave passengers unattended during an emergency – particularly pupils with special educational needs as they may become confused or frightened.

Contact your employer immediately, or the Passenger Transport Unit, or the parents, or all three, whichever is necessary, depending on the emergency concerned.

If you are required to deliver a pupil to their home, or a primary schoolchild to a point, and there is nobody there to receive them, you should continue the route and return after dropping off all of the other pupils. If there is still no one there, and it is a home, please put a note through the door. Immediately contact the Passenger Transport Unit with the contract number and child's details and we will endeavour to contact the parent on your behalf. If this is not possible, we will request that you transport them either back to school or into the council hoping that they will be placed in the hands of the Duty Officer for Social Care. In the event that the Duty Officer is not available, the Passenger Transport Unit will request the child be taken to the local Police Station. This is a last resort, however, as we have no alternative option.

Please try to compile a list of emergency numbers from each parent as this is good practice. Do not leave the child with anyone else unless you have spoken to the parent and have been given permission for someone else to act as a responsible adult. Please ask the parent to try and introduce the adult to you first.

In inclement weather, operators should not take any unnecessary risks in transporting pupils. If in doubt, as to the safest course of action, contact the local police. In the event that a driver is unable to complete a journey due to exceptional conditions – for example, flooding – and if no alternative route is available, he/she should return the pupils to the school or contact the Passenger Transport Unit for advice. A list of schools closed is normally posted on the Essex Live news website: www.essexlive.news

Seatbelt requirements

Does the law require that all buses, coaches and minibuses are fitted with seat belts?

No. Only minibuses and certain types of coach must be fitted with seat belts. However, it does not prohibit their fitment to any other vehicles, such as buses.

How does this affect Thurrock school children who are eligible to school transport?

Those children travelling on school contracts will have a seat belt if they are travelling on the following vehicles:

- all taxis or private hire vehicles
- all small minibuses up to 8 passenger seats
- all minibuses seating up to 16 passengers
- all coaches registered after October 1988
- all single decker buses

Please note that the law states that for any organised school trips – for example, swimming lessons or day trips – the vehicle should have seatbelts. This should be kept in mind by schools when asking operators for quotes. Seatbelts are not required on full-sized buses used for school contracts, or on public (local) bus services.

What sort of seat belt will be fitted to minibus and coaches?

The law states that a minimum of a lap belt is fitted. However, the Council's Conditions of Contract require vehicles with a maximum of 16 passenger seats to be fitted with 3 point seat belts to all seats.

Where seat belts are fitted the vehicle must not be used unless the installation has been inspected and certified at a Department for Transport testing station.

Why can't all school children be carried to school on coaches, rather than buses?

At present if the council made it a condition of contract that all operators of larger vehicles used only coaches on school contracts, there would not be enough vehicles to operate all of the contracts in the area. The council has specified that all vehicles must comply with all relevant legislation and the provision of seat belts will depend upon the type of vehicle provided by the contractor.

Must the seat belts be worn?

The law treats minibuses and larger vehicles differently. In minibuses all children must use the seat belts and it is the driver's legal duty to see that all children under 14 years old do so. In coaches (not buses), the requirement is that children should have access to a forward facing seat fitted with a seat belt – there is no legal requirement to wear the belt.

Will the driver make sure that all the children on coaches wear their seat belts?

No. The law has acknowledged that the driver is not responsible for ensuring that passengers use the seat belts in coaches.

Will the PA, provided on contracts carrying primary age children, make sure that if a seat belt is provided it is worn?

PAs have been asked to help this younger age group with their seat belts. However, a number of problems have arisen. There are some parents who have specifically stated that they do not want their child wearing a seat belt. However, this is against the law and transport will be suspended until the parents/guardians agree to this condition. Drivers have a duty to ensure the safety of their passengers and the location of some pick up points does mean that it is safest to pull away immediately, and for the PA to complete the adjustment and fitment of seat belts at a safer place. It is important to remember that some children can undo their own seat belt.

Due to the legal requirements, if a child refuses to wear a seat belt in a minibus or constantly undoes it, then it may not be possible to continue to provide the transport.

Will the council stop the practice of sitting three primary age children on a double seat?

Yes. Although it is still legally possible to sit three primary age pupils on a double seat, if the vehicle does not have seat belts fitted, the council will no longer allow this and specifies the provision of one seat per child. This also means that no standing passengers will be carried and all children must remain seated at all times, except when boarding or alighting. Each child will be allocated a seat.

Contacts

For general enquiries regarding children's transport contact:

Passenger Transport Unit

Thurrock Council, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, RM17 6SL

Phone: 01375 413 883

Email: passengertransport@thurrock.gov.uk

If your enquiry is not an emergency then please email in the first instance between 9:30am and 2:30pm.

For enquiries regarding eligibility for free travel for mainstream pupils contact:

Awards and Benefits Section, Children's Services

Thurrock Council, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, RM17 6SL

Phone: 01375 652 511

Email: awards@thurrock.gov.uk

For enquiries regarding eligibility for free travel for pupils with special educational needs contact:

Special Educational Needs Department, Children's Services

Thurrock Council, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, RM17 6SL

Phone: 01375 652 555

Email: sen@thurrock.gov.uk