

## Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

### Ysgol Gymraeg Casnewydd - Safer School Transport Campaign

#### 1 School Profile

1.1 Ysgol Gymraeg Casnewydd is a Welsh medium primary school (with nursery class). The school has places for up to 420 children. The catchment area is the whole of Newport plus areas of Monmouthshire. The school is located to the east of the city on the edge of Newport. Children travel from as far away as Rogerstone, Marshfield and Caldicot, and journey times for some of these children (many of whom are as young as four years old) can be as long as two hours per day round trip on buses with no toilet provision.

1.2 As parents we have actively campaigned for about 18 months for safer school transport, to include provision of adult supervision which previously was not in place. We have attempted to work in partnership with all parties (LEAs, transport providers, school and governors) but sadly have not always received the level of support and co-operation which could have been provided.

1.3 Although many of the issues on which we campaign are applicable to all children regardless of age, several are more relevant for primary age children.

#### 2 Adult Supervision

2.1 Provision of adult supervision on transport to/from school should be a requirement in law (regardless of the age of the children but especially for primary age children). The need for adult supervision relates to issues of health and safety (medical or other emergencies) as well as to discipline and general supervision. This also ensures the driver is free to do his/her job – to drive the bus.

2.2 We feel very strongly that escorts should be employed by the LEA. There are several reasons for our belief: employment through the LEA offers continuity of employment so there would be no gap in provision should transport contractors change ; there would be benefits from using experienced staff; economies of scale with regard to training; it would assist in staff recruitment and retention as longer term contracts of employment could be offered; escorts would be familiar to children and parents and more importantly familiar with children and parents; Local Authorities can use existing discipline/grievance procedures thus offering better conditions of service than might otherwise be the case,

again aiding with staff recruitment and retention; comparability with other LEA employed adult supervision such as school patrol staff ("lollipop ladies") or "dinner ladies".

2.3 There should be a standard job description/person specification for escorts according to the age of children to be supervised. This would not preclude inclusion of additional tasks or requirements as necessary for local circumstances.

2.4 Provision of escorts should be underpinned by provision of training focussed on the practicalities of dealing with medical or other emergencies; child protection issues; bullying/harassment; communication skills, first aid, confidentiality and an awareness of any relevant protocols in place.

2.5 Information should also be provided for escorts about the children entitled to travel on the bus; relevant medical details as appropriate; emergency contact details for each child or any other relevant information such as when injunctions are issued against individual parents.

2.7 Escorts should be provided with a mobile phone as a tool of their trade!

### **3 Bus Registers**

3.1 Each bus should have a register (kept by the escort) detailing the children entitled to travel on the bus; emergency contact details; medical information if applicable and more importantly as a record of who is on the bus at any given time. Not only would this ensure a complete record of who was on the bus in the event of an accident but it would also enable LEAs to monitor useage patterns which might lead to cost savings in the longer term.

### **4 Protocols**

4.1 Provision of good practice guidelines and protocols in the following areas should be developed as standard across all LEAs:

- Dealing with medical emergencies (issues to consider include what information to gather; how to gather it; how to disseminate it and to whom; confidentiality; who does what and when; when to call emergency services etc).
- Dealing with a road traffic accident or or other emergency such as a bus breaking down (how/ whether to evacuate children; who to contact and so on).
- Dealing with children who are not met by parents (to include child protection issues).
- Dealing with bullying.
- Use of on board entertainment (there have been instances of videos being shown which some parents might object to).

4.2 These protocols should be made available to parents either in their full format or in an abbreviated, more readable version. In drafting such protocols the training needs of all parties involved and those responsible for providing training should be clearly identified.

## **5 Drivers**

5.1 Driving young children is different to driving adults. Drivers need training to reinforce the needs of young children and safe driving practice, for example, that they are not to pull off until the children are seated and belted; that they should not use mobile phones when driving nor go through red lights. They could also benefit from training on communication skills for young children.

5.2 It would be helpful if drivers had a uniform, to aid the very young children in identifying them.

5.3 Drivers (and escorts) should carry identity cards which indicate clearly that they have been police checked and the date when the next police check is due.

## **6 Contracts**

6.1 Although we appreciate the very real difficulties in availability of good quality coaches and the cost to transport providers of vandalism from children travelling, we feel contracts should be more specific with regard to age, standard and type (no double deckers and provision of seatbelts) of buses and also regarding maintenance procedures and schedules.

6.2 Monitoring of compliance should be proactive and lack of compliance must be penalised (again a proactive approach is required).

6.3 Longer term contracts might enable transport providers to plan/budget more effectively and might ultimately lead to better quality of buses.

## **7 Role of Schools and Governors**

7.1 Although transport is arranged by the local authority and buses provided by transport companies we believe that both governors and schools also have a role to play in ensuring safer school transport.

7.2 We have suggested for example, that our school includes transport issues in the curriculum. This would include discussions with children about safe behaviour when travelling; the need to wear seatbelts and the implications if not worn; also evacuation

procedures in the event of an emergency should be practised. This would be relevant not only for the journey to/from home to school but also for school trips.

7.3 Schools and governors also have a role to play in ensuring the safe transition from school premises to the bus at the beginning and end of the day.

## **8 Journey Length and Quality**

8.1 The length and quality of the journey to and from school impacts on a child's academic attainment and social life. We recommend journey times of no more than 45 minutes and preferably even less for primary age children.

8.2 Planners and LEAs should employ some joined up thinking when planning location of schools to ensure that wherever possible travel to school times/methods within the catchment area are considered.

## **9 Information for parents**

9.3 As parents we have been provided with little information about the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved in transporting our children. Neither have we been provided with information regarding who to contact in the event of an emergency or the bus not turning up on time nor who to complain to when things go wrong. No one has advised us (despite requesting this information) regarding any risks assessed for our individual routes nor of the protocols in place to deal with different eventualities.

9.4 As responsible parents we need this information to enable us to make an informed decision regarding our child's education and to help us decide whether to use school transport.

## **10 Consultation With Parents**

10.1 Parents and children are not actively canvassed for their opinion with regard to the standard of service provision - we feel this should change and that parents and children i.e. service users, should be proactively involved. This might take the form of regular questionnaires about the quality of the service provided, and could provide an opportunity for comment on more general suggestions for change or improvement such as the appropriateness of the location of the chosen bus stop/route.

10.2 We also believe it would aid understanding and enhance communication if there was a more formal mechanism to look at transport issues within each local authority area, involving all parties (including a parent representative) and meeting on a regular basis.

## 11 Recommendations

11.1 From our personal experience in campaigning for safer school transport we feel clarification is needed as a matter of priority regarding the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in school transport This will help with acceptance of responsibility and accountability.

11.2 Acknowledgement and clarification is needed regarding who is acting in loco parentis and at what stage of the journey from home to arrival on the school premises.

11.3 Regulation and guidance is required regarding minimum standards to be included in contracts (such as age of buses; avoiding use of double deckers; mandatory provision of self adjusting/tension seatbelts; provision of adult supervision; development of protocols etc).

11.4 LEAs should be audited to check the extent to which they monitor and act on transport providers non compliance .

11.5 The undertaking of risk assessments must be mandatory and compliance audited.

11.6 Guidance and regulations must be open to consultation.

11.7 In putting forward a case for greater "regulation" for school transport we make the comparison with the guidelines on travel for school trips.

11.7 After school provision with registered providers who pick up to/from school should also be subject to these guidelines/regulation as there is scope for better provision in this context also.

Caryl Davies

Chair

Parents Group for Safer School Transport

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