



# TRANSPORT POLICY



## **Transport Policy Jonah Special School**

### **Introduction**

Jonah Special School is a Special School for students with Autism and Complex Needs providing primary and post primary education to students from ages 4 to 18 years.

This policy has been adopted by the Board of Management of Jonah Special School, in order to offer clarity to all stakeholders in our school community, including staff, parents, students and transport providers on how our school transport operates. Ensuring safe and reliable transport to and from school supports our students in accessing education, which is their fundamental right.

### **Eligibility for School Transport**

Students enrolled in Jonah Special School may be eligible for school transport, as determined by the Department of Education, under the School Transport Scheme for Children with SEN arising from a Diagnosed Disability. Eligibility is determined following consultation with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) through its network of Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs). Decisions regarding transport eligibility are based on the prevailing circumstances at the time of first enrolment. Eligible children will retain their eligibility while they remain enrolled in the school.

### **Applications for School Transport**

Applications for transport provision, under the terms of this scheme, should only be completed in circumstances where children are not in a position to avail of standard school transport services. An application form should be completed and signed by the Parents/Guardians, School Principal and the SENO prior to or at the time of first enrolment. Completed application forms are forwarded by the SENO to School Transport Section of the Department of Education. Sanctioning School Transport for each applicant is solely the decision of the Department of Education and the school has no role in this process. The Department of Education also determine the provision of specific/individual transport arrangements, in circumstances where travel in the company of other children is not deemed feasible and if they may require a Bus Escort.

A Special Transport Grant (STG) towards the cost of private transport arrangements may be provided at the discretion of the Department in situations where –

- Bus Éireann is not in a position to provide a transport service;
- A child's age, behavioural difficulties or medical needs are such as to make the provision of a transport service impracticable;
- An escort is considered necessary and the provision of such support is not feasible;
- The cost of establishing/maintaining a service is considered prohibitive.

Grants are considered for the school year in which an application for transport is received.



## **Provision of School Transport**

Bus Éireann is responsible for the planning and timetabling of school transport routes and must ensure that each eligible child has a reasonable level of school transport service. The allocation of routes is decided upon by Bus Éireann on an annual basis, who notifies the school in late August regarding the arrangements for the next school year. The Board wishes to advise Parents that the School cannot provide any information in relation to School Transport routes prior to this time. These services will be subject to periodic review and may be withdrawn and/or replaced with an alternative service/grant where circumstances change. Examples of such changed circumstances, which are not exhaustive, include other children applying for transport or a child's independence increasing to the extent that an individual service is no longer necessary.

School transport services for eligible children will generally operate during the 'Standard School Year' and will facilitate a child's attendance during normal school opening and closing times.

## **Bus Escorts**

The SENO will advise the Department, where s/he is aware, by reference to Departments criteria, from relevant professional reports or through information supplied by the School Authorities that a child's care and safety needs are such as to require the support of a Bus Escort. The Department allocates funding to schools, for the employment of Bus Escorts to accompany these children. The continuing need for such escorts will be reviewed annually in the context of a child's ongoing needs, independence and maturity.

Once the school receives notification of the routes and hours from Bus Éireann, Bus Escorts are recruited as soon as possible. The School endeavours to have Bus Escorts in place during the first week of the school year, for the duration of the school year. However, this may not always be possible and at times, the recruitment of Bus Escorts may be subject to delay or, despite the best endeavours of the School, may not be successful. In those circumstances, it remains the responsibility of Parents to ensure that the student attends.

## **Recruitment of Bus Escorts –**

### **Eligibility for Appointment to the role of Bus Escort and Substitute Bus Escort**

Existing members of the school community are not permitted to work in the role of Bus Escort for the following reasons –

- As outlined in their employment contracts, Teacher and Special Needs Assistants are required to be present in the classroom before their assigned students arrive and remain after the students leave.
- Therefore, they are not able to fulfil the duties of Teacher/SNA and Bus Escort simultaneously and consequently, are not eligible for consideration for the role of Bus Escort.
- In addition, working time may be lost due to concurrent Bus Escort duties, creating inequality in relation to other employees.



The Bus Escort will be contracted on a Temporary Basis (Specified Purpose Contract) every year. Existing employment arrangements where SNAs/Bus Escorts who have held this dual role will continue to be honored, until their current route is stood down or when a student finishes school, leaves the school, or no longer requires school transport.

Parents/Guardians are generally not permitted to perform the role of Bus Escort for reasons of confidentiality of information relating to students, other than their own child, who are travelling to and from school on the same transport/route as their child. In addition, in the event of the reporting of incidents that occur in transit, the role of Bus Escort requires an independent witness account and as a parent is already a member of the school community; a conflict of interest may arise. However, where transport has been assigned to an individual student alone, then their Parents/Guardians may perform the role of Bus Escort.

## **Recruitment Process for Bus Escorts**

Vacancies for the role of Bus Escort will be filled on a competitive basis. Vacancies will be advertised, applications shortlisted and then the most suitable applicants may be invited for interview or a desk review conducted. Any offer is conditional on –

- A satisfactory Garda vetting record.
- A signed statutory declaration.
- Signing of the Bus Escort contract (issued annually from September – June).

Contracts will need to be issued each year and signed by all existing Bus Escorts. The school reserves the right to change an escort's travel route with a reasonable notice period.

## **Relief/Substitute Bus Escorts**

Every effort is made to ensure that Bus Escorts travel on each vehicle in order to assist the students and safeguard their individual safety. In general, this system works very satisfactorily but there are rare occasions that the Bus Escort is not available to travel on the route, and it can be difficult or impossible to arrange a substitute Bus Escort.

In these circumstances, ensuring the student attends school is the responsibility of Parents/Guardians. In the event that a Bus Escort is unable to perform their duties and a substitute Bus Escort is unavailable, no additional funds are provided to the school by the Department of Education to refund parents any costs associated with transporting their child to and from school.

Existing members of the school community are not permitted to work in the role of substitute Bus Escort, for the reasons outlined above in the section Recruitment of Bus Escorts.

Parents/Guardians are also advised that for reasons of confidentiality of students and also in compliance with the requirements of Garda vetting requirements contained in DE Circular 0094/2006, Parents/Guardians or Third Parties are not permitted by the Board of Management to travel on School Transport.



## Procedures for Bus Escort Absences

In the event that a Bus Escort is absent the following will apply –

- All Bus Escorts must text the Bus Driver to inform him/her of their absence and update the Bus Driver regarding further absences and/or return to work.
- All Bus Escorts must text all parents on their allocated travel route and update them regarding further absences and/or return to work, where transport is shared.
- In all cases, if a Bus Escort is absent, they must formally notify the school by text with details of the absence. Please note, a text response will usually be given. Please do not send messages by other media, for example, email.

The following information should be provided in a text –

- Name.
- Date of any further absences, if known at this time.
- Date of return to work, if known at this time.

Absences for any reason other than sick leave are not permitted, except in exceptional circumstances. Applications for exceptional leave must be applied for in writing via email, six weeks prior to the commencement of the leave. A poor record of attendance may lead to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. The School will not make any payment for any day that a Bus Escort does not attend for work but they may be entitled to claim social welfare benefit from the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs.

## Role of Bus Escorts

In addition to the list of duties below, the Bus Escort will undertake other duties pertaining to the role as may be directed by the School Principal and/or the Board of Management and/or as may be dictated by the needs of the School. It is expected that the Bus Escort will, on his/her own initiative, identify tasks/duties that need to be carried out as part of the role subject to the authorisation of the School Principal/Board of Management as appropriate. The duties listed are not intended to be exhaustive or exclusive. The Bus Escort must –

- Ensure that she/he is on the school transport at the time of the first pick-up and last set down.
- Is responsible for the safety of children when opening and closing doors prior to “stop” and “move off”.
- Assist children to board and alight safely from the school transport.
- Ensure that all children are seated with appropriate straps and harnesses where provided.
- Ensure that each student is received by some responsible person at the set down point.
- Supervise the children travelling on the school transport and to and from the school transport into and out of the classrooms.
- Maintain a good working relationship with the driver of the school transport.
- Act as liaison between the School Principal and/or class teacher and parents when required i.e. conveyance of messages and letters to parents.
- Observe confidentiality in all aspects of work.



- Be aware of particular disabilities of children on the school transport and be briefed by the School Principal or Clinical Director or Class Teacher on how to deal with same i.e. epilepsy etc.
- Implement any Behavioural Support measures recommended by the Clinical Director.
- Perform any other duties relevant to the position of Bus Escort which may be assigned by the School Principal from time to time.
- Not leave the school transport unless under exceptional circumstances.
- Ensure that his/her position on the school transport is where maximum control of the students is achieved.
- Attend any training required by the Principal or the Board of Management.
- Report all concerns to the School Principal and/or Class Teacher.

## Dismissal

In accordance with legislation, employees may be dismissed for incompetence, misconduct, incapacity, lack of qualifications, redundancy or other substantial reason. School employees must abide by school policies which are available on the school website or on request.

## Guidelines for Travel on School Transport

- To avoid delays in the morning, children should be ready in good time and waiting to board the transport, particularly if the transport is shared with another student.
- Bus Escorts are responsible for the safety of the students from the time they board the transport in the morning until they are dropped to school or from the time they board the transport in the afternoon, until they are met at their home by their Parent/Guardian.
- Bus Escorts are responsible for all students on the transport and to ensure that they can meet this duty of care, they must remain on the transport while Parent/Guardian take their child/ren to the transport in the morning and welcome them home in the afternoon.
- Bus Escorts are responsible for checking that wheelchairs, booster seats, or other equipment that the student might use for travelling, are in good working and safe condition before the student enters the transport (i.e. breaks are working, head rests are in the appropriate position, belts and harnesses are in good working condition ). If this is not the case then for safety reasons the student cannot travel and parents must be advised of same.
- All Parent/Guardian(s) will be provided with the contact details/telephone numbers for drivers and Bus Escorts at the start of each school year. In the event that a student is not travelling for any reason, Parents must inform the Principal, Bus Escort and Driver in advance, if possible. Parents are requested to ensure that any such calls/texts are made between the hours of 08.00 and 16.00 only Monday through Friday.
- Parents must provide the school with named persons to whom the student may be handed over in the evenings. It is the responsibility of Parents to ensure that the school receives prior and timely notification of any changes to these names.
- Parents must ensure that a Parent/Guardian or named carer is available at the student's home on time in the afternoon.
- Bus Escorts are not permitted to drop students off at empty houses.



- Parents are also advised that Bus Éireann are engaged to transport students to/from the child's home only and therefore, are not covered by insurance to pick up or deliver a student to any other address.

## **Management of Student Behaviour when Travelling to and from School**

Due to the nature of transport and the enclosed and small environment, it can be difficult to find solutions to the myriad of issues which may arise. However, where feasible, student behaviour will be managed using Positive Behaviour Approaches and School Staff will work together to assist students in coping with travelling to and from school. Any items in the possession of a student which may be regarded as a hazard to themselves or others will be removed.

Bus Escorts may be advised on the management of behaviour by the school's Clinical Director, the Principal/Deputy Principal or a Class Teacher. However, again as the environment is a limiting factor the options may be limited. If behaviour gives rise to a safety risk, parents may be asked to bring and collect their child from school, even at short notice.

Any concerns should be reported to the School Principal or Clinical Director immediately. Bus Escorts must complete the School Incident Report Form following any incidents that occur while students are under his/her Supervision. Any decision on the continuation of school transport in light of safety concerns rests with the School Principal and the Clinical Director and the Principal will notify the Bus Inspector.

## **Jonah Special School**

### **Transport Policy**

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management of Jonah Special School at its meeting held on:

**Ratified by the Jonah Board of Management on:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date**

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Principal**

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Chairperson, Board of Management**

**Next Review Period: *September 2028***