

28th August 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

Please see communication below provided by Stoke-on-Trent City council regarding:

Additional provision for pupils normally travelling by public service bus:

Under the current Government guidance regarding Covid-19 public service buses are currently running at reduced capacity. We are aware that some secondary school pupils rely on these buses to get to and from school, so Stoke-on-Trent City Council is working with local bus companies to provide extra capacity on the busier bus routes at school opening and closing times.

From Wednesday 2nd September a dedicated coach will be running to and from your child's school on the route and at the time shown on timetable below:

ST THOMAS MORE CATHOLIC ACADEMY	Wednesday 2nd September – Friday 23rd October 2020	
Operated by: Scraggs Coaches 01782 336677		
Pick up place	Pick up Time	Set down Time
Dawlish Drive (Bus Stop Latimer Way)	08:15	15:50
Dawlish Drive (Bus Stop Homestead Street)	08:17	15:48
Beverley Drive (Bus Stop just before Dividy Road/Lidl roundabout)	08:20	15:45
Weston Road (Bus Stop St Andrews Church and Penfleet Avenue)	08:25	15:40
Weston Road (Speed camera just past Harvey Road, opp former WMC)	08:26	15:39
Grosvenor Road (Bus Stop Seddon Road)	08:30	15:35
Meir Road (Bus Stop Alexandra Road)	08:32	15:33
Lightwood Road (bus shelter just after Chaplin Road)	08:35	15:30
St Thomas More Arrive/Depart	08:45	15:20

This coach will travel directly to school and pick up from the school at the end of the school day.

To use this dedicated coach service, you will need to purchase a SMART travel pass at the cost of £56.00 a month. By buying a SMART pass, pupils will still have the option to travel on public service buses but will also guarantee them a seat on the dedicated coach.

The SMART pass will be available to be purchased directly from school. If you would like to purchase a SMART pass please email office@stmca.org.uk to register your interest, please include your child's name and form and provide contact details that the school can telephone you on Tuesday 1st September. Further details will be provided within this telephone call on how to arrange the SMART pass.

Once payment has been received and the school has received a photo (by email) of your child an appointment will be made for the SMART pass to be collected. Due to COVID 19 precautions please do not come to the school at any time other than the arranged appointment time, this is required so the school can control the volume of visitors at any one time.

Coaches will be easily identifiable by the name of the school displayed in the front window of the coach. Please note that coaches to other schools may be running on the same route so pupils will need to ensure they are getting on the correct coach.

This service will be available until October half term when it will be reviewed under the Government's guidelines for Covid-19.

School, pupil and parent FAQs

Following Government guidance, we have been asked to look at how we can help to provide safe transport to schools for pupils who would normally catch a service bus.

Under current restrictions Public Service Buses can only allow about 20 passengers onto single deck buses, so we foresee a possible problem with capacity at school opening and closing times.

The school your child attends has been identified as having a larger than average percentage of pupils who travel by bus, and so, we are looking at allocating a "closed door" school coach, initially until October half term, but this date is under constant review. The coach will follow a set route and pick up at specified points. Timetables and pick up points are enclosed with this Questions and Answers sheet.

Under government guidelines a charge must be levied to use these buses equivalent to local bus fares. To keep costs down to parents, we will be offering the one calendar month multi-bus-Operator SMART pass, which is considerably cheaper than paying daily fares.

What is a SMART bus pass?

The SMART multi-operator bus pass allows you to travel on buses provided by different operators across much of North Staffordshire with just one ticket.

You can travel with any of the bus operators listed below, on any bus route, at any time of day across **Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme** within the boundaries of the scheme.

Smart tickets cannot be used to travel to or from areas outside of the boundary, but you can use it to travel up to the boundary and pay the additional fare to your final destination.

Smart tickets are valid on the following bus operators' services:

- First
- D&G
- Scraggs
- Arriva Midlands

Monthly calendar ticket costs £56.00

Where do I buy the ticket?

The Smart tickets will be on sale from the school for the closed-door school coaches

Can my child just pay to use a bus on the day with cash

No. The closed-door school coach will not accept cash fares

Can the Smart ticket that I buy at the school be used on any bus?

Yes, the pass bought at the school can be used on other bus operators' (public) services. The SMART ticket bought at the school is the only SMART pass that can be used on the school coaches.

What happens if my child forgets the pass? Will they be allowed to travel?

The pupil will need to show their pass and will not be allowed on the bus without the SMART pass.

What do I do if they lose the pass?

Let your school know as soon as possible. There is a £10.00 replacement charge if you need to replace a pass.

What happens if the school is closed due to Covid? Will I get my money back?

It depends on the length of the closure. If this is the case, we could look to extend the dates of the pass.

Does the pass guarantee my child a seat?

Yes, if the SMART pass is purchased from the school

Will the coaches have pupils from different schools on them?

No each coach will run to a specific school

Are the buses clean and safe to use?

Yes, all coaches will be cleaned following Government guidelines

Does my child need a face covering?

Face coverings must be worn on all services unless

- your child has a physical or mental illness or impairment, or a disability that means you cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering
- if putting on, wearing or removing a face covering would cause your child severe distress

If your child has been wearing a face covering before arriving at school or college, they must understand how to remove it and how to keep it or dispose of it safely. All schools and colleges should have a process for making sure face coverings are removed when pupils and staff who use them arrive at school. They should let you know what their process is.

Children and young people must:

- clean their hands before and after travelling to or from their school or college
- put any temporary face coverings they may have been wearing in a covered bin
- place reusable face coverings in a plastic bag that they can take home with them
- clean their hands again before heading to their classroom

Please contact travel.smart@stoke.gov.uk for further help regarding individual enquires

Why are there no coaches picking up in areas outside of Stoke on Trent?

The scheme is being operated by Stoke-on-Trent City Council and as such can only pick up and drop of students who live within the City boundary.

Why is there not a coach route for where we live?

We only have a limited number of coaches available and they are being provided for pupils who generally live furthest from school and/or do not have a direct bus service to school. For those living closer to school, we would ask that you consider if your child can safely walk or cycle to school, or alternatively use local bus services.

How long are the coaches going to run for?

At the moment we are planning to run the scheme until October half - term but this date will be reviewed on a regular basis.

Why are there 40 children on a coach and only 20 people allowed on a bus?

We are following the Government advice regarding school coaches. The coaches will only carry school pupils, so different guidelines apply.

Are all the drivers DBS and tested for COVID 19?

All bus companies contracted by Stoke-on-Trent City Council adhere to all current Government guidelines.

Will there be supervision on the bus to look after the children?

No, just like a service bus, they will not be supervised on the coach.

What about social distancing and risk of transmission?

The social distancing guidance for public transport does not uniformly apply for children and young people who use dedicated school or college transport. This is because:

- dedicated school transport often carries the same group of young people on a regular basis
- children and young people on dedicated school transport do not mix with members of the public

Local authorities, schools and transport providers will do all that is reasonably practicable to maximise social distancing where possible and minimise the risk of transmission. What is practicable is likely to vary according to local circumstances. This might include:

- asking your child to use a regular seat on this transport
- making sure boarding and disembarking is orderly and/or managed
- ensuring that transport operators maximise the flow of fresh air
- if windows or ventilation units are open they must not be closed by passengers

Pupils must ensure that they practice social distancing at the bus stop, some pick up points will be at service bus stops so there will be people who are not travelling on the school coach at the bus stop.