



4 School bus safety – behaviours and responsibilities

New Zealand has a very good school transport safety record. To maintain this record and minimise risks and hazards, everyone using school buses should follow the behaviour protocols and safety tips outlined in this fact sheet.

For Special Education School Transport Assistance safety requirements please see Fact Sheet 5.

Expected behaviour of students using school buses

1. Passengers sit down straight away and remain in their seats for the whole journey.
2. If a passenger is standing, they should stay behind the driver at all times, stand quietly, and not push or move around the bus.
3. Passengers do not eat or drink in the bus.
4. Passengers do not throw objects inside or out of the bus.
5. Passengers use socially acceptable language when talking to the driver and/or other students, and speak quietly so they do not distract the driver.
6. Passengers respect the transport service provider's property at all times (for example, do not stand on seats or vandalise the bus in any way).
7. Passengers do not harass, bully, or abuse other passengers or the driver in any way, whether verbally or physically.
8. Passengers respect others' property and do not interfere with it in any way.
9. Passengers listen to and follow the requirements and instructions of the bus driver and the teacher/s on duty at all times.
10. Passengers do not engage in any behaviour that could put other passengers, the driver or themselves at risk.
11. Bus operators have their own code of conduit for travelling as a passenger on their service. Passengers are expected to comply with these requirements.

Safety tips for students using school buses

Getting on the bus	Getting off the bus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › wait in the designated place – well back from the road › wait until the bus has stopped before getting on › carry your bag in front of you so it does not get caught in the door › if seated, put your bag (and anything else you are carrying) on your lap or under the seat in front of you › if there are no empty seats, fill the bus from the back first. Put your bag on the floor and hold on to a seat-back or handrail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › wait until the bus has stopped › carry your bag in front of you so it does not get caught in the door › get off the bus through the front door if possible › get off the bus carefully without pushing › wait well back from the road until the bus has moved away › if you need to cross the road, find a safe place, wait until the bus has moved away and you can see clearly up and down the road, then cross

What happens if a student behaves unsafely or inappropriately on a school bus?

If a student behaves in an inappropriate or unsafe manner, the student's school will take steps to manage this behaviour, as in any other area of school life. Students not meeting expected behaviour standards risk losing their place on the school bus either temporarily or permanently.

Can a student's place on a school bus be taken away?

Yes. Where a student's behaviour is an ongoing or serious problem, the school and the **transport service provider** may decide to withdraw the privilege of a place on a school bus. This could be a temporary measure or, in more serious cases, a permanent one.

In such circumstances, it is up to the caregiver to make their own arrangements to ensure they are meeting their legal obligation to get their child to school. Caregivers are not entitled to a **Conveyance Allowance** in this situation.

What can caregivers do to keep bus students safe?

To help make a school bus trip safe, caregivers who are dropping off/picking up students at the bus stop should:

- › when dropping students off at the bus, get out of the car and go with them to the bus stop
- › when collecting students, get out of the car and meet them as they get off the bus, on the same side of the road that the bus has stopped on, and go with the student to the car.

These practices will help to stop students running across the road to or from the bus into the path of passing traffic.

Caregivers should also spend time with students to help them understand how they can keep themselves safe and how they are expected to behave on the bus.

What can schools do to keep bus students safe?

Schools have a responsibility to support a safe environment for students getting on and off buses. They can help keep school buses safe by:

- › deciding on and documenting a process for safe loading and unloading of students (in conjunction with New Zealand Police, New Zealand Transport Agency, or the **transport service provider** if expert advice is needed)
- › supervising loading and unloading every morning and afternoon if there are hazards (for example, several buses are unloading in the same area)
- › posting a senior student or adult to signal to the driver when it is safe to turn and when it is not if a bus is turning near a loading area
- › giving students instructions on safe loading and unloading from buses and safe storage of school bags on buses
- › working with the **transport service provider**, caregivers and, if necessary, the New Zealand Police around managing student behaviour on buses.

How do bus drivers contribute to the operation of a safe school bus?

There are a number of things that bus drivers can do to help keep school bus students safe.

Picking up and setting down students	On the road	General
<ul style="list-style-type: none">› pick up/set down students on the left-hand side of the road› pick up/set down students on the same side of the road as the school, if possible› wait for the all-clear from the duty teacher before departing on the home run	<ul style="list-style-type: none">› report any inappropriate student behaviour to the transport service provider who will contact the bus controller or school	<ul style="list-style-type: none">› check the vehicle before each trip to make sure it is safe› give students instruction on using the emergency door at least once a term› check vehicle loading

Can a driver remove a student from a bus before they have reached home or school?

No. Where a student is not meeting expected behavioural standards on a bus, the bus driver cannot simply pull over and remove the student from the bus. In the interest of safety, the bus driver must finish the route and deliver all the students to their usual stops.

In extreme cases, where the bus driver judges that it is no longer safe to continue the route with the student on board, the driver will pull over and contact the police or the school to remove the student.

Are standing passengers allowed on a Ministry-contracted school bus?

Standing passengers may be allowed on school buses but there are strict conditions. The New Zealand Transport Agency determines the legal loading limit for every passenger service vehicle, including the number of standing passengers. This limit is specified in the vehicle's Certificate of Loading. **Transport service providers** are responsible for ensuring that they do not exceed these loading limits.

What does the Ministry of Education do to ensure good safety standards?

Safety is a priority for the Ministry of Education in providing school bus services. School transport service is a large operation, assisting approximately 105,000 students twice a day, and has a very good safety record. The Ministry continually assesses ways to improve the school transport service to maintain its high standard.

The Ministry uses the following processes to ensure good safety standards are maintained:

Tender process

When a school bus service is established, the Ministry of Education calls for tenders from potential **transport service providers** to run the route.

The Ministry will not award a **transport service provider** a contract to supply school bus services without first:

- › confirming details of driver training, business experience, school transport experience, accounting systems, and other relevant aspects of the potential bus service provider
- › checking maintenance records and relevant information about the vehicles that will be used to supply the service
- › getting technical advice from the New Zealand Transport Agency on the safety of the vehicles that will be used on the service.

During the tender process, the tendered cost is not considered until the Ministry of Education is satisfied that the tenderer has met specific safety and qualification requirements.

Transport service provider contract

The contract between the Ministry of Education and the **transport service provider** requires the **transport service provider** to comply with a number of contractual and legislative requirements, including, but not limited to, requiring the **transport service provider** to:

- › provide a safe and reliable service
- › observe all transport laws, regulations and rules
- › make changes when they know a problem exists. Note:
- › not all school buses are required to be fitted with seatbelts. Where seats are fitted with seatbelts, they must be used
- › there is no requirement for all students to be seated on a bus. To clarify whether children can stand on the bus they are travelling on, refer to the loading certificate for that bus.

If you are concerned that a school bus service is not meeting safety requirements, you can make a complaint. For more information, see Fact Sheet 6: Contacts and feedback processes.

Safety checks

The Ministry of Education's **service agents** are required to:

- › visit **transport service providers** at least once every two years to monitor contractual and legislative safety requirements
- › contact **transport service providers** by telephone at least once a year to discuss operational issues
- › communicate with schools regularly to stay informed of any operational or safety concerns.

Who else is involved in school bus safety standards?

New Zealand Transport Agency

- › sets vehicle standards
- › identifies issues on vehicle design, construction and maintenance
- › checks vehicles for safety (together with vehicle inspection agents and NZ Police)
- › › issues/declines passenger service licenses, which are required for all school **transport service providers**
- › › monitors school **transport service providers** to ensure they continue to meet legislative criteria
- › advises the Minister of Transport on transport safety matters and helps draft transport law
- › works with New Zealand Police to produce guidelines and training for school traffic safety teams
- › › participates in **transport service provider** tendering evaluation, as well as identifying vehicles and/or operators with unsafe history.

New Zealand Police Commercial Vehicle Investigation Unit

- › polices all aspects of commercial vehicle use including vehicle and driver fitness, driving hours and logbooks
- › administers road user charges as they apply to vehicle, road, bridge limits and vehicle dimensions
- › attends and reports on commercial vehicle accidents or incidents.

What protocols are in place if there is a bus crash or incident?

New Zealand has a very good safety record for school buses, and serious crashes and incidents are thankfully very rare. However, when an accident or incident does occur, the following actions are taken:

- › the driver/operator obtains medical aid and contacts emergency services, the school(s) serviced by the route and the local **service agent**
- › the police notify caregivers or next of kin by phone as soon as possible where there has been serious injury or death
- › the school **bus controller** notifies the principal(s) of the school(s) serviced by the route and also immediately telephones a report through to the local **service agent**
- › for less serious injuries, the principal(s) or bus controller(s) immediately notifies caregivers of any students who have sustained injuries
- › the service agent immediately notifies the Ministry of Education's national office
- › as soon as possible, the **transport service provider** completes a written report detailing the circumstances of the accident/incident. The **transport service provider** provides additional written reports for any new developments for the local service agent, as needed
- › the **service agent** will liaise with the school, the **transport service provider** and the Ministry's national office as needed.

Glossary of defined terms

Bus controller

The bus controller is responsible for school bus route administration and safety. Generally the bus controller is the principal or a full-time teacher.

Conveyance allowance

A conveyance allowance is funding paid directly to a caregiver or school as a contribution to the cost of transporting an eligible student to and from school.

Service agent

A service agent is the transport agent contracted by the Ministry of Education to manage and administer School Transport Assistance on its behalf.

Transport service provider

The transport service provider is the company contracted by the Ministry of Education to provide a school transport service.



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