



ABBOT'S LEA SCHOOL

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7 September 2022

Dear Families

Ref: Transport and Uniform

Following on from the communication sent previously and in light of some typical start-of-term “teething problems”, I am writing to respond to those and provide additional clarity on the issue of protocols regarding school transport and school uniform.

TRANSPORT

Firstly, I wish to clarify that Abbot's Lea School neither commissions, organises, provides or quality assures School Transport. Most students travel to school by transport provided by their placing Local Authority. Some travel to school with their family or privately-arranged cars. A small number of our senior students use public transport and walk to school each year.

As such, Abbot's Lea School cannot help with any transport-related enquiries, although we will always try to help as much as possible.

Most frequent concern raised this week was about the length of time children spend on transport to school, including whilst the vehicles are in road traffic or parked awaiting the start of the school day.

Whilst we share the concerns, we cannot, as a school, influence the transport company's decisions about their allocated group of children and their home addresses, the driver's chosen route to collect or drop them off, or indeed, the level of traffic during the journey.

We have communicated to the Local Authorities before the summer break and ahead of the school's reopening this week, that the school day for the students is unchanged this year, with a 9am start and 3pm finish.

We have changed the way we manage traffic on site. This change is as follows:

MORNING

School opens to students at 9am. The school gates open for transport at 8:45am.

Staff arrive at work by 8:30am and have protected professional duties time from 8:30am until 8:59m. This includes getting classrooms and teaching and learning, as well as therapy resources ready for the students' arrival. Staff also use this brief 30 minute slot to make and receive calls with families and external professionals, respond to the many emails from the night before, and holding team meetings or attending training, as needed.

At 8:59am (and not before or after), support staff on transport duty report to the main drive area and start welcoming students at 9am sharp. This process is always longer at the start of the school year but is always completed by 9:30am (which marks the end of the statutory Morning Registration Period).

We ask all transport providers not to allow students off the buses/taxis/private vehicles before 9am, as there are no staff to supervise them before 9am.

We will be reviewing the way that we meet and greet students, as we have observed that many staff spend time waiting for the right students to arrive, and, equally, many students spend time waiting for the right staff. This slows down the operation and we are keen to speed it up. Once we have reviewed this at the end of this first week, we will decide if we want to change the system slightly. We will not, however, consider lengthening the school day to start before 9am.

AFTERNOON

School closes to students at 3pm. The gates open for transport at 2:45pm.

Lessons end at approximately 2:55pm, allowing students the time to get ready for transport. All students are ready to leave their classrooms at 3pm.

As our school site space is limited, it does not allow us to have all students waiting outside for their transport. Instead, we have a duty leader in charge of alerting staff to a given bus or taxi arriving, and the class staff then bring the students from that transport route out.

Please do not expect students to be ready for collection before 3pm and please allow up to 30 minutes for the last student to leave the school.

Once the students have left (this week, the latest a student left the site was at 3:25pm), the staff return to their other protected professional duties, which they carry out until 4pm.

We are unable to respond to parental enquiries about what time their child will be home after school – for some, living nearby, this could be as early as just after 3pm, whilst for others who live further afield, it has been known to take an hour or longer.

What we can assure you about is that when the students arrive in the morning, however long and tiring their journey may have been, we support them to be ready for learning and engaged in their lessons. Equally, before they embark on the journey home in the afternoon, they are supported so that the journey is as comfortable as can be (toilet, drinks, etc.).

If you have a concern about the impact of the journey time on your child's wellbeing (including route, traffic or too early arrival on site in the morning), please raise it with your transport provider so that they can review it and possibly alter arrangements.

UNIFORM

As communicated, all students must wear a full school uniform every day. This includes formal uniform on some days and PE uniform on the days when PE lessons are had.

I want to thank you all for supporting this – it has been delightful to see the vast majority of students arrive this week looking smart and proud, wearing the correct uniform each day.

Some students are yet to present, as expected and I know that some concerns about complex sensory needs have also been raised regarding uniform. Those are not new and each year, we do respond to those, as they are valid and important to note and work with.

Our uniform options are designed by students with complex sensory needs and so, for the Early Years Foundation Stage and KS1 students, we start with soft options of polo t-shirts and jogging bottoms, or tights and skirts, gradually moving on to more formal options as the students learn to accept those. That said, even at Secondary Department level, we accept that some students will opt for the school's polo shirt and school jumper, rather than formal shirt, tie and blazer and we have made provisions for that through our flexible uniform options.

We will not, however, accept students coming into school in their own non-uniform clothes, including t-shirts, jeans, tracksuit bottoms or football kits, etc.

If the student refuses to wear school uniform in the morning due to their complex sensory needs, we politely ask that the uniform is sent into the school with the student so that our Multi-Disciplinary Team can help us design and implement a programme of support for the student to slowly extend their range of sensory tolerance.

We are very experienced in this regard and are here to help. In return, we thank you in advance for your support in teaching of this important life skill.

If the non-compliance with the uniform expectations is linked to financial hardship, please do let us know. We have a number of beautiful, high quality items in our free-of-charge uniform swap shop and would love to assist in matching for the right item and size. All of our pre-loved items are clean and in good condition and we invite you to take advantage of the stock we have. Equally, if you have good, clean uniform items to donate, please do – with the cost of living rising, we are committed to growing this important and sustainable initiative in the coming months, for all of our students and families to enjoy.

Very importantly, we have our official school photographs taking place next week and I hope that all students will look very smart and presentable in their uniforms by next week.

I thank you in advance for your understanding, cooperation and also patience and I am certain that the initial issues will soon be resolved, allowing us all to focus solely on celebrating students' progress and achievement – and I can already see, from the exemplary conduct and efforts this week – that we will have a phenomenal year ahead!

Yours sincerely



Mrs A Hildrey
Headteacher