

**WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

The following questions have been received from Councillors and will be taken as read along with the written answer to be circulated the meeting. The Councillor asking the question may then ask one relevant supplementary question which shall be put and answered without discussion.

**(a) Councillor Davis**

“At the meeting held at Benfield School on the 27<sup>th</sup> May to discuss arrangements for the creation of two new reception classes at the school, the issue of transport to Benfield School and to West Blatchington School was raised.

Parents who have recently had their child directed to the new reception classes at Benfield School with an older child attending another school in the city and who work in central Brighton, outlined the difficulties that they face taking and collecting their children.

Given that the proposed numbers of children attending Benfield School, and possibly West Blatchington School, has now increased I would like to ask what plans the council is making in relation to school transport for these two schools.

Is the option of a special, supervised bus a viable option and when will this be known?”

**Response from Councillor Brown, Cabinet Member for Children & Young People.**

“Looking at the numbers of pupils allocated to the Benfield Reception classes, only five live beyond two miles, the distance at which the Council becomes responsible for providing assistance with home to school transport. For children of primary school age who are entitled to transport assistance we pay the equivalent of providing an adult bus pass plus the cost of the child fare for term time, approximately £500 a year. This means that the sum of £2,500 would be available to offset the costs of a school bus, which costs between £30,000 and £35,000 a year to hire. If the bus was to have an escort, this would be at an additional cost.

At the meeting held at the school officers undertook to look at the possibility of providing a vehicle, but with the caution that this would depend upon the number of pupils entitled to transport assistance. On the basis of current numbers, a subsidy of between £27,500 and £32,500 would have to be provided for a school bus to Benfield from Hove. Whilst we have every sympathy with the difficulties facing the parents offered Benfield, this level of support is not sustainable. If we were to provide a bus then other parents in the City living less than two miles from school would also reasonably ask

whether they could also have such a facility. That would place additional pressure on the home to school transport budget.

The question of a bus for West Blatchington was also raised at the Benfield meeting by Mr Howitt. At present 9 pupils are paid the bus pass equivalent totalling £4,500. Whilst more children than that attend from beyond 2 miles, 13 children with statements of special educational needs attend the special facility at the school, and are entitled to taxi transport so are not included in the calculation. From September 2010 a further 30 pupils living more than two miles from the school will join, assuming that they take up their allocated places. This will add £15,000 to the amount paid as bus fare equivalent. This would still leave a significant shortfall in hire costs, and again there would be an issue around a vehicle escort. The operation of such a route also assumes the availability of a vehicle at school time and that all those pupils living beyond two miles are living in central Hove and could access a single school bus route.

I am sorry that we are unable to be of more assistance with transport, but must look at potential costs in the context of current financial stringencies, legal entitlement to transport help and the local transport policy.

A letter has been sent to parents allocated the Reception places at Benfield setting out the position, as agreed at the school meeting.”