

Ashfield Girls' High School

Hollywood Road
Belfast, BT4 2LY

Principal: Mrs Louise Hanvey BSc (Hons) PGCE, PQHNI, PGDH



22 November 2021

Dear Parent / Carer

I am writing to you regarding our current bus provision from Belfast Bus Company, for the four routes – 108, 109, 110 and 111.

Belfast Bus Company has written to both Ashfield Girls' High School and Ashfield Boys' High School, to advise that they will not be reviewing their permit with the Department of Infrastructure to operate the above four routes. This means that the current arrangements will end on Friday 26 November 2021 (this date will be the last day under the current arrangements).

We have undertaken a survey within school to establish how many pupils currently use Belfast Bus Company.

- Route 108 – 46 pupils
- Route 109 – 36 pupils
- Route 110 – 27 pupils
- Route 111 – 23 pupils

In the interim, and to ensure that we maintain school service both schools have no choice but to enter into a Private Hire arrangement with Belfast Bus Company. Private Hire occurs when an organisation 'books' the bus for the day. This is the same situation that would occur if the school were booking a bus for a school trip.

The daily cost to both schools to 'book' the four buses will be £1000. As there are 185 school days in any academic year and I am sure that you can appreciate that £185,000 is a significant drain on both school budgets.

We will therefore, have to set up a bespoke ticketing system and charge a fare for passage on the buses at the below rate (in line with current fares);

- Single – £1.20
- Return – £2.20
- Weekly Ticket - £8.50

The majority of pupils who use the bus purchase a weekly ticket. This would collect £1700 per week in fares and the total cost to school would be £5000 per week – resulting in a weekly deficit of £3300. Both schools understand the importance of the bus routes to our pupils and therefore will subsidise the fares to retain the service for pupils.

Implications of this new arrangement;

- Pupils will not have to take multiple Translink buses to and from school, at a significantly higher cost than the school subsidised option.
- We are planning to operate a temporary paper ticket system for the remainder of this term. This will allow us to identify and install a digital ticketing solution with digital tickets e.g. QR codes that would be then scanned by the driver on entry to the bus. **From Friday 26 November 2021, parents / pupils will NOT be able to purchase tickets from Belfast Bus Company. Ashfield Girls' High School will be selling paper tickets at the rate above, from Wednesday 1 December 2021 – in**



school. As a goodwill gesture, we will provide each girl who travels on one of the four Belfast Bus Company buses, with their first weekly ticket. This ticket will only be valid for the week beginning 29 November. Any girl wishing to obtain the initial complimentary weekly ticket should register by calling to Mrs Snowden's office (Principal's Secretary) to collect their ticket.

- Due to the Private Hire status of the contract (the previous contract was a public service between Belfast Bus Company and the Department of Infrastructure), school will be hiring the buses on a daily basis - as we would for a school trip. Therefore, school have authority as to who is permitted to board any bus.
- Due to the Private Hire status of the contract, school will have greater authority in events of non-delivery of service e.g. late bus or failure to turn up.
- It should be noted that only pupils with tickets will be permitted passage on these four routes.

Once the longer-term digital solution has been identified and trialled; I will write to you again to provide detail on how the system will work. Until then any pupil wanting to use the Belfast Bus Company buses (route 108, 109, 110, 111) from Monday 6 December 2021 MUST have purchased paper tickets from the school reception at break time or lunch time.

Thank you for your continued support.

Mrs L Harvey



Principal

