Policy: Supporting Safe School Bus Operations by Eliminating Driver Distractions

Purpose

The safety of all students and staff on school buses is our highest priority. To ensure the safe operation of school buses, it is imperative to eliminate distractions for the driver. This policy outlines the expectations for student behaviour on the bus and the consequences of distracting behaviour.

Expectations for Student Behaviour

Students are expected to:

1. **Respect the Driver:** Follow the instructions of the driver, teachers and bus monitors at all times. The driver has the important job of getting you to school and home safely.
2. **Stay Seated:** Stay in your seat while the bus is moving, and keep the aisle clear. This also helps the bus driver to keep you safe.
3. **Seat Belts:** For your safety if the bus has seat belts, wear them at all times.
4. **Quiet Voices:** Use a quiet voice and respectful language when talking to your friends. Avoid loud noises that can distract the driver. Driving a bus is hard work and the driver needs to focus, so be kind.
5. **Keep Hands and Objects Inside:** Keep your hands or any objects inside the windows for your safety and the safety of others.
6. **Respect Others:** Be kind and respectful to fellow students and the driver, and look after the bus and other people's belongings. Report bullying or rough behaviour to your school principal, or the bus driver if someone is hurting you.
7. **No Eating or Drinking:** To keep the bus clean and safe. Save your food for when you get to school or home.
8. **Do not record without consent:** Do not use your phone to take photos or videos of other passengers.

Personal Belongings

9. **Keep Belongings Secure:** Store your backpack and other items under your seat or on your lap.
10. **No Large Items:** Avoid bringing large or bulky items on the bus that could clutter up the aisle or seats. It is just good manners to think of others.

Emergency Procedures

11. **Stay Calm:** In case of an emergency, stay calm and follow the driver's instructions.
12. **Know the Exits:** Familiarise yourself with the emergency exits and procedures.

General Safety

13. **Report Problems:** If you see something unsafe, report it to the driver or a teacher immediately. Make sure you talk to the driver after the bus has stopped.
14. **Stay Seated Until Stop:** Stay in your seat until the bus comes to a complete stop at your destination.

Remember, these rules are here to keep everyone safe and to make sure our bus journeys are enjoyable for all. Thank you for your cooperation and have a great ride!

Consequences of Distracting Behaviour

To maintain a safe environment, any behaviour that distracts the driver will be addressed promptly. The following consequences will apply to students who engage in distracting behaviour:

1. **Verbal Warning:** The driver will pull the bus over and explain the importance of maintaining safe behaviour. It is important to note that the driver will address the entire bus; given their focus on the road ahead they are unlikely to have identified the source of the distraction.
2. **Report to Manager:** The behaviour will be reported to the driver's manager. The manager will make a recommendation on the potential consequence.
3. **EasyBus review:** EasyBus will review the event, identify a recommended consequence and consult with the principal. The consequences below are not intended to represent a staged intervention to correct behaviour; the most serious consequence may be recommended for a first event. Potential consequences include:
    - **Seat assignment:** the student will be assigned to a specific seat on the bus and may have a 'buddy' assigned to monitor compliance
    - **Within-School Actions:** Action may be taken within school hours to disincentivise distracting behaviour
    - **Written warning:** A letter may be produced for parents/whānau noting the event and describing potential future consequences
    - **Short-term stand-down:** Students may face a short-term stand-down from riding the bus ranging from 1 to 5 days.
    - **Meeting with parents/whānau:** A meeting will be scheduled with the student, parents/whānau and principal to discuss the event/continuing behaviour and develop a documented plan for improvement.
    - **Extended stand-down:** Students may face a medium-term stand-down such as thirty days or until the end of term.
    - **Permanent removal.**
4. **School review:** The school leader reviews the event and the consequence and discusses with EasyBus as appropriate.
5. **Engage with other principals:** If the event involved a student from another school, the principal will collaborate with peers to discuss the event and consequence.
6. **Documentation of decision:** EasyBus documents the decision and prepares a communication to be sent to parents/whānau.
7. **Parental Notification:** Principal sends the communication.

Serious Infractions

Certain behaviours are considered serious infractions and may result in immediate suspension or permanent removal of bus privileges, depending on the severity of the incident. These include, but are not limited to:

- Physical violence or bullying resulting in harm.
- Deliberate vandalism or damage to the bus that requires the bus to be removed from service for repair.
- Use of profanity or abusive language towards the driver, that causes the driver to be unable to safely drive the bus
- Possession of prohibited items (e.g., weapons, drugs, alcohol)
- Any behaviour that endangers the safety of others

Caregivers may be billed for the cost of repairing any damage a student causes to the bus.

Reintegration

In some situations where a child or student has been removed from the bus temporarily, it may be appropriate to develop a re-integration plan. This plan might cover off:

- Expectations around interactions with other students.
- Required seating locations.
- Student-led daily reporting to driver, teacher or principal as appropriate.

If the removal was a result of an interaction with a student from another school, the principal will engage with their peers as appropriate.

Process Flow for Addressing Distracting Behaviour

1. Initial Response by Driver

- **Identify Behaviour:** Driver identifies distracting behaviour.
- **Pull Over Safely:** Driver pulls the bus over to a safe location.
- **Address Students:** Driver explains to students how their behaviour is distracting and emphasises the need for safety using a communication such as:

  "I need to tell you that the noise-level in this bus is making it very hard for me to concentrate on the road and operate this vehicle safely. If this continues I will have to pull the bus over and say this again, which is going to make everyone late home."

  or

  "Doing things like (insert distracting behaviour here) distracts me from keeping an eye on the road and keeping us all safe. Please don't do that again. If this continues I will have to pull the bus over and say this again, which is going to make everyone late home."

2. Report to RMTS Manager

- **Report Incident:** Driver reports the incident, including the specific behaviours and the students involved (where possible).

3. Notification and Action

- **Investigation:** EasyBus investigates event via CCTV footage. CCTV footage may also be viewed by RMTS to confirm event.
- **Determine outcome:** EasyBus, on behalf of the Network, advises the school of the recommended consequence. The school is then able to request that the decision is modified or deferred where appropriate within-school interventions are likely to be successful.
- **Notify Parents:** Parents are notified of the behaviour and the actions taken.
- **Implement Consequences:** Depending on the severity and frequency of the behaviour, appropriate consequences are applied (written warning, stand-down, or permanent removal).

4. Conflict Resolution (If Applicable)

- **Re-seat Students:** If the behaviour presents a severe distraction or involves conflict between students, the driver will attempt to re-seat the students in different locations on the bus to prevent further issues. It is accepted that this intervention may not be successful with older students. The driver uses a communication such as:

  "This behaviour presents a risk to the safe operation of our school bus. I would feel much safer if you would sit here."

- **Monitor Behaviour:** Continued monitoring of the students' behaviour to ensure compliance.
- **Return to bus following stand-down:** Student and parents re-attest to behaviour expectations by signing Code of Conduct.
- **Contact Police:** In a situation where the driver believes that behaviour presents an imminent threat to the safety of students or the safety of the school bus journey, the driver will contact the Branch Manager and request that the Police attend the scene. The Branch Supervisor will contact the schools and EasyBus by phone to advise of the event and the likely delay.

Driver professional development

Given that school bus drivers do not receive any formal training on behaviour management as part of the training they receive, school leaders will participate in delivering ongoing professional development to drivers.

A sample agenda is as follows:

Workshop Title:
Positive Engagement and Safety Protocols for School Bus Drivers

Objective:
To equip school bus drivers with effective strategies for managing disruptive behaviour and ensuring the safety and well-being of all students.

Workshop Agenda

1. Introduction and Workshop Overview

- **Welcome and Introductions:**
  - Introduction of facilitators and participants.
  - Overview of the workshop objectives.
  - Importance of the role of bus drivers in student safety and well-being.

2. Understanding Student Behaviour

- **Identifying Causes of Disruptive Behaviour:**
  - Discussion on common reasons children may act out on the bus.
  - Recognising signs of stress, anxiety, or external factors influencing behaviour.
  - Drivers to contribute examples to support discussion.
- **Engagement Techniques:**
  - Building rapport with students.
  - Establishing clear rules and expectations.
  - Positive reinforcement and its impact on behaviour.
  - Strategies for defusing situations before they escalate.
  - School leaders to contribute examples of engagement techniques.
  - Drivers to put forward questions on how to resolve scenarios that they have encountered.

3. Managing Disruptive Behaviour

- **Behaviour Management Techniques:**
  - Proactive measures to prevent disruptions (e.g., seating arrangements, bus rules).
  - De-escalation tactics: calm communication and active listening.
  - Handling serious behavioural issues (e.g., aggression, refusal to follow rules).
  - Documentation and communication: Reporting incidents to the RMTS manager.

4. Ensuring Safety and Preventing Inappropriate Conduct

- **Creating a Safe Environment:**
  - Establishing and maintaining boundaries between drivers and students.
  - Appropriate conduct: What is and isn't acceptable interaction.

- **Recognising Warning Signs:**
  - Identifying behaviours that may indicate a student is at risk.
  - Understanding the signs of inappropriate conduct by adults or peers.
- **Reporting and Response Procedures:**
  - Clear guidelines on what to do if inappropriate conduct is suspected or observed.
  - How to report concerns to school authorities while maintaining confidentiality.
  - Legal responsibilities and protections for bus drivers.

Communication to Drivers and Parents

Communication to Drivers

Dear Drivers,

At EasyBus, the safety of our students and staff is our top priority. To help maintain a safe environment on our buses, we have implemented a new policy focused on eliminating distractions for drivers. Please familiarise yourself with the following key points:

1. **Expectations for Student Behaviour:** Students are expected to sit properly, use quiet voices, follow instructions, respect personal space, stay seated, and respect property.
2. **Handling Distracting Behaviour:** If you identify distracting behaviour, pull the bus over safely and address the students using a communication such as that described below. Report the event to the school bus controller and to the RMTS manager.

   "I need to tell you that the noise-level in this bus is making it very hard for me to concentrate on the road and operate this vehicle safely. If this continues I will have to pull the bus over and say this again, which is going to make everyone late home."

   or

   "Doing things like (insert distracting behaviour here) distracts me from keeping an eye on the road and keeping us all safe. Please don't do that again. If this continues I will have to pull the bus over and say this again, which is going to make everyone late home."
3. **Conflict Resolution:** If there is conflict between students, attempt to re-seat them to different locations on the bus using the following:

   "This behaviour presents a risk to the safe operation of our school bus. I would feel much safer if you would sit here."

   It is accepted that this intervention may not be successful with older students.
4. **Reporting and Consequences:** Inform the school bus monitor and the RMTS manager, who will notify EasyBus. Consequences range from warnings to stand-downs or permanent removal of bus privileges.

Thank you for your cooperation and commitment to ensuring the safety of our school buses.

Communication to Parents

Dear Parents,

At EasyBus, your child's safety is our highest priority. We have recently implemented a new policy to eliminate distractions for our drivers to ensure the safe operation of our school buses. We kindly ask for your support in reinforcing these expectations with your children:

Students are expected to:

1. **Respect the Driver:** Follow the instructions of the driver, teachers and bus monitors at all times. The driver has the important job of getting you to school and home safely.
2. **Stay Seated:** Stay in your seat while the bus is moving, and keep the aisle clear. This also helps the bus driver to keep you safe.
3. **Seat Belts:** For your safety if the bus has seat belts, wear them at all times.
4. **Quiet Voices:** Use a quiet voice and respectful language when talking to your friends. Avoid loud noises that can distract the driver. Driving a bus is hard work and the driver needs to focus, so be kind.
5. **Keep Hands and Objects Inside:** Keep your hands or any objects inside the windows for your safety and the safety of others.
6. **Respect Others:** Be kind and respectful to fellow students and the driver, and look after the bus and other people's belongings. Report bullying or rough behaviour to your school principal, or the bus driver if someone is hurting you.
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10. **Stay Calm:** In case of an emergency, stay calm and follow the driver's instructions.
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General Safety

12. **Report Problems:** If you see something unsafe, report it to the driver or a teacher immediately. Make sure you talk to the driver after the bus has stopped.
13. **Stay Seated Until Stop:** Stay in your seat until the bus comes to a complete stop at your destination.

Any behaviour that distracts the driver will be addressed promptly. Consequences may include warnings, in-school actions, stand-down from bus privileges, or permanent removal of bus privileges.

Please note that the responsibility for providing access to school rests with you. If the privilege of access to a school bus is removed, you will be required to make your own arrangements to get children to school.

Thank you for your cooperation in helping us ensure a safe and pleasant bus ride for all students.

Sample Consequence Letter to Parent

[Parent's Name]
[Address]

Dear [Parent's Name],

I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to inform you of a serious matter concerning your child, [Child's Name], and their behaviour on the school bus.

As you are aware, EasyBus has implemented a strict policy to ensure the safety of all students and staff by eliminating distractions for our drivers. Unfortunately, despite previous warnings and interventions, [Child's Name] has continued to engage in behaviour that distracts the driver and compromises the safety of everyone on board. Specifically, [describe the behaviours, e.g., "your child has been repeatedly moving around the bus while it is in motion and causing disruptions by shouting."]

Given the repeated nature of these infractions and the potential risk they pose, we regret to inform you that [Child's Name] will be removed from the bus service effective [effective date]. This decision is not made lightly, but it is necessary to maintain a safe environment for all students.

We understand that this may cause inconvenience, and we bring to your attention the legislative obligation to ensure that your child attends school. Should you wish to discuss this matter further or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us at www.waikare.easybus.nz.

We appreciate your understanding and cooperation in this matter. Our primary concern is the safety of all students, and we hope that [Child's Name] will take this opportunity to reflect on their behaviour.

Sincerely,

Greig Neilson
Network Manager
EasyBus