

Minibus Policy

1. School context

Epinay School caters for children and young people with significant learning difficulties and/or diagnosed learning disabilities who are working at a level of 3- 4 years behind their peers and have limited ability to listen, process information, think, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations effectively.

In addition to their learning needs, the children and young people may have some social vulnerability as well as some difficulties with their functional skills, speech and language communication needs and a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Condition.

The school has some children who have anxiety and mental health difficulties and require additional support to meet their emotional needs, however, they do not present with disruptive behaviours.

A small number of our children have a severe learning difficulty (SLD) and/or disability, which means that they find it difficult to understand, learn and remember new skills. These students have problems with both the acquisition of skills and their application to new situations and possible sensory issues or poor coordination.

The majority of pupils are transported to and from school via Local Authority arranged transport or by Epina staff on our minibuses. Pupils attending trips and visits arranged by school often benefit from the use of school minibuses, driven by qualified drivers.

2 Aims of the Policy

- To ensure Epina School complies with current legislation and guidance concerning maintenance and driving of the school minibuses.
- To ensure the safety of minibus users (drivers and passengers), other road users and pedestrians.

3. Management of School Minibuses

Definition

A minibus is defined under the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 as a “Motor vehicle which is constructed or adapted to carry more than 8 but no more than 16 seated passengers, in addition to the driver.”

Ownership

Epinay School organises the hire of the minibuses and ownership lies with the companies they use.

Registration & Licensing

Epinay School has responsibility to make the necessary arrangements for the minibuses to be registered and licenced.

MOT Certificate

If required, it is the responsibility of Epina School to ensure that a current MOT Certificate is held (a minibus requires a current MOT Certificate from its first birthday). Due to certain special physical requirements related to the size of minibuses, vehicles of this class have to be taken to a testing station which is registered for Group 5 tests.

Insurance

Epinay School has responsibility to ensure the vehicle is suitably insured. Cover will normally be restricted to authorised drivers over 25 years of age and under the age of 71 (unless named on insurance) who are experienced at driving this type of vehicle, hold a full UK driving licence and who have no disability, recent motoring accidents or convictions. Any unauthorised journey made in the vehicle may render the driver liable to disciplinary proceedings. Should the incident involve that driver in a road accident, then the insurers may well refuse indemnity under the policy, leaving the driver liable not only for costs but also open to prosecution for driving without insurance. Insurance details are also kept on the each minibus file.

Minibus Inspections

The DVSA "Guide to Maintaining Roadworthiness" (updated for 2025/26) strongly recommends that school minibuses undergo a professional safety inspection every 10 weeks (or every 6 weeks if the vehicle is over 12 years old). This is separate from an MOT or an annual service.

- Epina School minibuses are required to have a 10-week inspection which are managed by the leasing company.
- MOTs and servicing are also managed by the leasing company and MOTs will be arranged with Epina School.
- Inspection records must be kept for 15 months.

Permit 19

Schools operating minibuses for "hire or reward" (which includes using school budget/fees) must have a Section 19 Permit for each vehicle.

- Epina School minibuses have Permit 19 certificates which **must** be displayed on the front window at all times. Drivers should check they are displayed for each trip.
- Permit 19 should be valid (as expiry every 5 years)

4. Operational Safety and Maintenance

- Prior to any journey, a driver must complete the Minibus check which is shown on the log sheet held in the Minibus File.
- The mileage for journeys must be completed and kept in the file for review by the Head Teacher.
- Any vehicle defects/issues must be written on the log sheet held in the minibus file and must complete a report form and handed into the Schools Business Manager or the Head's PA immediately.
- Drivers should check the fuel levels and if necessary fill up the vehicle. A fuel card is available from the school office and can be used in Petrol Stations at Tesco, Morrisons and Sainsbury's

- Each bus must carry a foam extinguisher (min rating 8A or 21B).
- A fully stocked first aid kit, which should be checked on a regular basis, will be stored on the minibus for easy accessibility in the event of an emergency.
- Vehicles are fitted with 24/7 loop-recording dashcams. It is important that minibuses are checked before and after use and that any **incidents are reported** as soon as convenient so video footage can be saved.
- PPE will be supplied, as part of Risk Assessment procedures. Any PPE should be checked regularly by the driver and/or escort.
- The carrying of spare fuel cans inside the vehicle is **prohibited**.
- Minibus mileage forms, checklists and fault reports must be kept for 15 months for DVSA requirements.

5. Driver Requirements and Qualifications

As a minimum all drivers must:

- Hold a full UK driving licence which includes categories B-D1. For Category B drivers vehicles must stay under 3.5t/4.25t. Epina minibus are Peugeot Boxer Lites and fall within this weight category.
- Have at least 3 years driving experience and be over the age of 25 and under the age of 71 (unless named on insurance).
- Have undergone tuition provided by a qualified external instructor to ensure they can confidently handle the vehicle confidently and with competence – Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme (MIDAS).
- All drivers are required to produce their driving licence termly. School administrator will request permission to carry out driving licence checks termly. Results of these checks are saved in Google Drive.
- Drivers who have endorsements on their licence for reckless driving or for offences involving drink or drugs are disqualified from undertaking the minibus familiarisation and assessment test.
- Drivers who have any illness or disease which may affect their driving capabilities must gain express permission from the insurers, via South Tyneside Council, to drive the vehicle.
- All new drivers who have qualified since January 1997 must take a PCV Licence test if driving a heavier minibus.
- If drivers' circumstances change between termly checks (eg endorsements gained on the licence), this information must be given to the School Business Manager or Head's PA as soon as possible. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action.
- Drive within the law and in accordance with the Highway Code. The school **will not** refund fines or other costs incurred by drivers as a result of any road traffic offence.

6. Journey Procedures

- It is the responsibility of the driver and any accompanying adult to ensure all passengers are wearing a seatbelt prior to the start of, and during the course of, any journey.
- It is the responsibility of the driver and any accompanying adult to ensure gangways and doors (nearside and back) must remain unobstructed.
- Whilst driving the vehicle, drivers should ensure that all doors are unlocked to assist with emergency evacuation if the need arises.
- Drivers should always park so pupils exit onto the footway, not a carriageway.

- The use of mobile phones is strictly prohibited. Drivers are also advised to avoid distractions like eating or drinking while driving.
- Whenever the vehicle is left unattended all windows are to be closed and doors locked.
- The vehicle must be left tidy and all rubbish to be removed at the end of each journey.
- All minibuses have a blue badge assigned, however, drivers must follow blue badge conditions.
- All minibuses are registered with the Tyne Tunnel.
- All minibuses are exempt from Clean Air Zone (CAZ) due to the age of the vehicles.
- If a trailer is used, the back doors of the vehicle need to be able to open fully to help evacuation if the need arises.

Driving Time - There are no statutory regulations concerning driving time and rest periods for drivers of minibuses. It is difficult to provide precise guidelines which would cover all eventualities however a number of factors must be taken into consideration relating to driving time and rest periods for drivers.

These include:

- The age and experience of the driver concerned.
- The nature and length of the journey to be undertaken (driving in the local area is very different to driving on a motorway or in an unfamiliar environment).
- The timing of the journey (a journey undertaken in daylight hours is very different from a journey undertaken at the end of the day in darkness).
- The number, ages and level of responsibility of the passengers (a minibus full of pupils can be distracting to the driver).
- The number of hours already worked by the driver prior to the start of the journey.
- All drivers should take regular short breaks during the course of a long journey.
- Drivers should use common sense to ascertain their suitability to drive at any given time (consider tiredness, recent alcohol or medicine consumption, illness, etc).

Reversing - Reversing vehicles can be particularly hazardous.

- Always check behind your vehicle before reversing. If necessary, ask someone (eg the Escort) to watch the area into which you will be reversing.
- If you use a guide, ensure they can be seen at all times whilst manoeuvring.
- Ensure rear view mirrors are clean and properly positioned at all times.

7. Emergency and Incident Procedures

- In the event of an accident, deal with any injured persons, ensure the safety of everyone involved and if necessary call the emergency services.
- In all cases, stop at the scene and take the names, addresses and telephone numbers of people involved including any independent witnesses. Take photographs of the accident scene from various angles if possible.
- Dealing with “road rage”: If threatened by another driver, drivers should stay in the vehicle with the windows closed and the doors locked and contact the police if necessary. Do not retaliate by flashing lights, sounding the horn or making offensive gestures. Note the registration number, the make, colour and a description of the driver and occupants and give the Police these details.
- Unsafe situations – if you feel that driving cannot be completed safely **do not continue**. Members of staff are not required to put themselves at risk at any time whilst driving on behalf of the school.

- Inform the School Business Manager or Head's PA immediately of the accident and details any serious injuries.
- In the event the vehicle needs recovering, contact the School Business Manager or Head's PA immediately. Marshalls Leasing Hire will then be contacted to recover the vehicle as soon as possible.

Details of "what to do in the event of ..." is also kept on each minibus file.

General Advice to the Escorts

- When deemed necessary, an Escort will be available on the minibus to assist the Driver.
- This person should be positioned as such to monitor behaviour and maintain good order.
- They can make and receive telephone calls so the driver does not have to.
- They should help with reversing if required and need to be visible at all times to the reversing driver.
- They should assist in the event of a breakdown or accident and can (if suitably trained and authorised to do so) act as a relief driver.

General Advice to the Driver

The driver must:

- Drive within the law and in accordance with the Highway Code. The school **will not** refund fines or other costs incurred by drivers as a result of any road traffic offence.
- Inform the School Business Manager or Head's PA of any penalty points received whilst using the school vehicle. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action.
- Inform the School Business Manager or Head's PA of any damages incurred to the vehicle whilst using it. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action.
- Be satisfied that the vehicle is in a roadworthy condition before and throughout the journey.
- Be clear about the route to be followed.
- Ensure that all pupils are wearing seat belts and remain seated while the vehicle is in motion.
- Always park so that pupils alight on a footway and not onto a carriageway.
- Ensure an adult supervises pupils exiting the vehicle.
- Behaviour concerns must be reported to the Head Teacher immediately. Pupils should be aware that poor behaviour on the bus is not acceptable.
- Ensure there is no smoking on the vehicle.
- Ensure that no alcohol is drunk by anyone involved in the journey prior to or during the course of the journey.
- The use of a mobile phone is prohibited whilst driving. There are other activities which can be unsafe and may attract the attention of the authorities (drinking, eating, etc). To this end, avoid any action whilst driving which could cause distraction.

Any member of staff who has queries relating to the driving of the school minibuses or the condition of the vehicles should bring them to the attention of the School Business Manager.

Policy approved by Governors: June 2026

Date of next review by Governors: June 2027