

Suzanne Billington
Principal, Tauriko School
cc: Tauriko School parents

16 February 2018

Tauriko bus travel from Kaimai zone

Dear Suzanne

The purpose of this letter is to provide clarity about the entitlement to school transport assistance for parents living inside the Kaimai School transport zone.

In deciding how to provide transport assistance we are heavily restricted by the rules imposed by the Ministry of Education. There are two restrictions in particular which influence our decisions around where we can send buses and fares for ineligible students:

- transport zones
- charging for travel on network buses.

Transport zone restrictions

In our funding agreement with the Ministry we are expressly prohibited from transporting students that live in a neighbouring transport zone unless that neighbouring school has given permission. In the case of McLaren Falls Road and the upper part of Omanawa Road I believe that permission has been given for students to travel on a network bus as long as they were enrolled prior to the end of 2015. Any students that have moved into the area from 2016 onwards are not able to travel on a Network bus inside the Kaimai zone unless they seek and obtain individual permission from the Kaimai Board of Trustees.

Charging fares

The Ministry of Education currently provides funding for 17 bus routes. Our Network has increased this number to 25, plus we send bus routes further than the Ministry would. A good example of this is Route 14. This route is funded by the Ministry as far as the corner of Tomsett Road and Omanawa Road. The Network then covers the cost of sending the bus further up Omanawa Road and down McLaren Falls Road to drop off your students.

The funding agreement with the Ministry explicitly states that we can not charge eligible students for travel on a Network bus. This leaves the parents of ineligible students to carry the financial responsibility for these enhanced services. Across the Network almost all schools are collecting fares from families in order to maintain the viability of the Network.

Speaking of viability, rest assured that fares are set at a level which solely maintains the financial sustainability of the Network. In previous years a surplus was distributed to member schools, but the current financial strategy of the Network is intended to set fares at a level just high enough to continue running our buses.

Casual fares, morning or afternoon fares

Over the last few weeks I have spoken to a number of parents who have put forward the suggestion that parents should have the option of casual fares, or perhaps a morning or afternoon fare. At face value this would be useful for the parents that would take advantage of this option, but in reality it doesn't reduce the cost of providing our bus services. The flow-on effect would be an increase in fares for the remaining families. I'm happy to do some further analysis on this suggestion and will present a recommendation to our next Network meeting.

Moving forward

The key piece of information that I want to reinforce here is that the Ministry of Education's policies place severe restrictions on what the Network can and can't do. That said, these policies are subject to change and I would encourage any families with concerns about how these policies affect them to write directly to the Minister of Education seeking a rule change. If and when the Ministry's policies change that will hopefully provide the Network with the freedom to offer an enhanced service.

Kind regards,

Greig Neilson