

FAQ's updated November 2018

### **What is BLOC?**

BLOC (Bus Link Oxford Culham) is a parent cooperative, organising a school bus service between the Europa School at Culham and the Oxford/Abingdon area. All parents are members of the cooperative. The bus coordinators are parents, nominated by the whole cooperative, who deal with the administration. The buses have been operated by Charlton services, a family-run business situated in Charlton-on-Otmoor, for many years.

### **Types of subscriptions :**

Full-time membership is given priority, but half-time subscription (5 mornings only, 5 afternoons only) or occasional use is possible, depending on availability.

Any change in membership should preferably be announced before the start of any new term.

### **Can I buy individual tickets for occasional rides if I am not a regular user?**

Yes, for children in primary years 4/5/6, secondary students and adults. Tickets (£4 each) can be ordered via the e-mail address [blocbus@gmail.com](mailto:blocbus@gmail.com). Once payment has been received (via electronical bank transfer), tickets will be sent by email. Please note that spaces can only be guaranteed for regular users carrying a bus pass.

### **Payment - What are the fares and how to pay?**

Fees are calculated per term. They are calculated by dividing the total cost of all five buses by the number of users. Invoices are sent out at the beginning of each term.

Note that the fees are calculated according to the type of subscription (full time and part time) on the basis of 5 days, even if the child rides less than 5 days.

By confirming your place(s) on the bus you commit for the term and to settle the fees promptly. Payment by bank transfer, please. BLOC Bank: SANTANDER ACCOUNT NUMBER; 47543286 SORT CODE: 09 01 53 REFERENCE <your last name> bus number (e.g. Smith BLOC 1)

### **For two or more children it is possible to pay in instalments?**

Please consult BLOC ([blocbus@gmail.com](mailto:blocbus@gmail.com)) to arrange this.

In the event of non-payment, the Service reserves the right to refuse access to the transport service (following notification) until the amounts due have been received.

In the event of late arrival of two consecutive payments, the Transport Service reserves the right to bill the amounts due for the following year in advance.

### **Deposit and rates:**

For a new school year, we are asking a £100 non-refundable down payment for each place reserved on the buses. This will be counted towards the autumn term fee. Currently, the cost for a full-time subscription is around £4.30/day (return ticket). Half time seats (mornings or afternoons only) are charged at half that price. Individual tickets are currently £4 each.

### **Bus passes**

As of September 2016, all regular users will carry photo bus passes with the child's bus stop and the type of subscription.

- Photos will be supplied by the parents.
- Bus passes of pupils no longer using the school transport service must be returned immediately to school reception.
- In the event of loss, pupils must request a duplicate from the coordinator.
- Equally, should a new pass be necessary because of a change of details (e.g. bus stop), it has to be requested from the coordinator.

### **Can my child use other BLOC buses as well?**

Payment of fees entitles users to a seat on the bus that they have requested. Space-permitting, it is also possible to use any of the five BLOC buses, either on certain days or as a one-off. However, you must check with the bus coordinator beforehand and, in the case of primary age children, inform the school.

### **What are the bus routes, stops and timetables?**

Current bus routes and stops have been negotiated with the bus company with a view to covering as large an area as possible and at the same time ensuring that the journey is not too long.

Wherever possible, we adjust bus stops to make it easier for families using the service. For various reasons, we prefer to have stops with more than one user. For young children up to and including year 3, it is a must that there are at least two families per stop.

Drivers endeavour to respect the timetables. But it is important to understand that times are approximate as traffic is unpredictable. Please arrive at the bus stop a few minutes early in the mornings and afternoons (if you collect your child).

### **Communication between parents:**

We strongly recommend that parents using the same bus stop liaise with each other and exchange telephone numbers. The bus driver cannot wait for parents who arrive late to pick up their child, and should you be delayed, please arrange with a fellow parent to receive your child off the bus. Coordinators are happy to facilitate introduction of families at different stops to each other (e.g. further down the route). Just ask!

Since 2018 WhatsApp groups have been created per bus number. You can ask your bus coordinator to add your phone number to your bus group. Some groups use it to inform other parents on the bus location.

### **Are there any special considerations for young children?**

As of September 2016, all regular users carry photo bus passes with the child's bus stop and the type of subscription. It is imperative that parents of young children are at the bus stop before the expected arrival time. Traffic is never entirely predictable. Young children are not capable of recognizing their stop, nor can drivers set them down without a parent. PARENTS MUST BE THERE. Should nobody be there to receive a young child off the bus, the child will stay on the bus and the parents will be contacted by the bus company to arrange collection.

### **Is there any supervision on the buses?**

On some BLOC buses, mature passengers (teaching assistants, visiting teachers, older students) act as bus monitors. While we try to encourage such agreements, it is a bonus and depends on the right circumstances.

As of September 2016, BLOC has instituted an official group of student monitors ("bus patrol"). Some student monitors use the experience towards their Duke of Edinburgh Award, others simply like to make a positive contribution with a sense of responsibility towards younger children. BLOC does not have a requirement for adult supervision on the buses. A paid monitor would raise the bus fee substantially and it has therefore been decided that adult bus monitors will receive no financial incentive other than a reduced travel price (please get in touch to see whether you would fit the criteria for an adult monitor).

### **Code of Conduct?**

All children must read the Code of Conduct at the beginning of the first term (even if they have been bus users for some time) and are expected to behave accordingly. By paying the bus fee, you and your children agree to abide by the BLOC Code of Conduct.

Children who break the rules will face consequences (discussion with the pupil, discussion with the parents) and may be banned from the bus by BLOC. Parents should remind their children to wear their seat-belts and stay in their seats during the entire duration of the journey. Drivers cannot conduct checks.

Riding the bus is in general a pleasant, positive experience and pupils overall behave well and are considerate to each other.

### **Can users have guests?**

Yes, but there will be no free guest tickets as of September 2017. If you plan on having guests for your children, please order tickets in advance to cover their usage of the bus. We regret that this will not be possible for children from reception to year 3.

Regular users with a bus pass (any age) can use any BLOC bus, i.e. ride a different bus with a friend for a playdate.

Exchange students on the one-week long compulsory spring exchange still ride the bus for free, all other visitors (students, teachers) are welcome to use the buses either on a ticket basis or with a subscription (pro rata if applicable).

Families hosting exchange students, please get in touch with your relevant bus coordinator to arrange for tickets, give us an idea about numbers and to discuss specific requirements.

As usual, students carrying a bus pass have priority should the bus be full.

### **What do parents have to tell the school?**

Parents need to inform the school at the beginning of each school year that their children are bus users, which bus they are on and, in the case of primary school children, what their regular pattern is. Parents of primary school children up to Year 3 must also inform the school of any changes to this regular pattern. The bus organisers are not responsible for this.

### **Can I try the service before committing to a full term's subscription?**

Yes, please get in touch with your coordinator to discuss options ([blocbus@gmail.com](mailto:blocbus@gmail.com)).

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you need more information or would like to book a seat.