



Curial Offices, 196 Clyde Street  
Glasgow, G1 4JY

Tel: +44 (0) 141 226 5898

Fax: +44 (0) 141 225 2600

E-mail: [archbishop@rcag.org.uk](mailto:archbishop@rcag.org.uk)

[www.rcag.org.uk](http://www.rcag.org.uk)

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Ms Laura Mason  
Chief Education Officer  
West Dunbartonshire Council  
16 Church Street  
Dumbarton G82 1QL

## **A Proposal Document**

to

### **Alter arrangements for the provision of transport by West Dunbartonshire Council for pupils attending mainstream schools**

#### **Response of the Archdiocese of Glasgow**

The Archdiocese of Glasgow welcomes the opportunity to respond to the proposal within this consultation paper and to be involved in any discussions about denominational education within West Dunbartonshire Council.

It is important to state that we, in the Archdiocese, understand and appreciate that Local Councils, are in severe economic straits and need to use their funds to ensure the best possible outcomes for all people in their authority.

We note, therefore, that West Dunbartonshire council is proposing to discontinue their transport arrangements for primary and secondary pupils and reverting to the provision of conveyancing of pupils between home and school contained in the 1980 Education (Scotland) Act recommendation of a safe walking distance of 2 miles for primary children and 3 miles for secondary pupils.

This is disappointing given that West Dunbartonshire is one of the most deprived Council areas in Scotland with many of its families residing in Quintile 1, SIMD 1-2, regarding (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation).

It is obvious therefore, that families face great hardship in trying to feed and clothe their children and young people as well as striving to provide heating, lighting, electricity, and rent, in order to survive in these unprecedented times of economic hardship.

However before taking your transport proposals for pupils in West Dunbartonshire further, we would urge you to consider:

- That by this travel proposal you may be promoting further disadvantage for pupils in Quintile 1 (SIMD 1-2), as you are proposing a blanket approach for all pupils. Perhaps there should be a clause that allows pupils in these areas more support, considering their personal circumstances, ensuring an equitable approach.
- While you are encouraging 'safe walking' and list benefits of this, many parents will not want their sons and daughters to undertake this mode of travel for safety reasons. This may mean more car journeys or parents having to accompany younger pupils on buses which may impact on their ability to undertake employment thus causing further hardship.
- You note in your Consultation Paper that for some, if not travelling by bus, the journey to school will take longer. We consider that this may mean increased absences from school particularly in winter and inclement/cold weather. This may result in a fall in the attainment of those pupils resulting in increased disadvantage for them.
- If children are walking to school, they will require proper clothing for wet and windy weather if they are to remain healthy and fit to learn. This will place even more financial pressure on parents already struggling in our economic climate.
- It is recognised and appreciated that all young people between the ages of five and twenty-two years in Scotland have access to free bus travel, which in itself is a huge support to families. However, travelling by public transport at peak school times will be problematic not only for pupils but for the wider population, in terms of ease of access, reliability and safety. This may result in increased late coming to schools at the start of the day and a later time home for pupils thus increasing the length of their journeys and their overall 'school' day.
- Given that if this proposal is passed it will impact on the provision of buses and bus timetabled, we note that the bus companies are not included in the list of consultees.
- That the two denominational secondary schools have a wider catchment area than the non-denominational secondary schools. In fact, half of the population of Our Lady and St Patrick's High School will lose transport if your proposal goes through. It may be that parents rather, than having their children travel

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the new distance by foot or public transport, may feel forced to decide to send their son or daughter to the nearest non-denominational school. This could be regarded as indirect discrimination by the Council towards Catholic pupils.

- At a reasonable pace an adult will walk 3 miles in one hour. This means that some secondary aged pupils will be adding 2 hours onto their school day. This will impact on their capacity to remain in school for clubs, supported study and on their opportunity to do homework.
- While the intention to encourage walking to school is admirable, there is concern that removing organised school transport will only increase private cars, with parents (who have cars) choosing to drive their children to school, thus causing congestion and pollution at peak times.

Given our points for your consideration raised above we do not agree that West Dunbartonshire Council should bring transport provision for school more in line with the Government's safe walking distance to school. We wish you well in your decision making for the pupils of West Dunbartonshire.

We, in the Archdiocese, look forward to ongoing discussions on this and any other proposals which might affect denominational education in your Council area.

With my very best wishes for your continued work.



+William Nolan  
Archbishop of Glasgow