

## ASSISTED SCHOOL TRAVEL PROGRAM

### IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR ASSISTED SCHOOL TRAVEL OFFICERS - 2013

This information aims to provide Assisted School Travel Officers (ASTO's) with comprehensive background information on the operations of the Assisted School Travel Program (ASTP) and to provide advice on your role and responsibilities as an ASTO. Also included is information in respect of the responsibilities of other parties in the provision of special transport services.

#### Assisted School Travel Program

The NSW Department of Education and Communities engages contractors to provide daily transport services for school students who meet the eligibility criteria to access education services. While the great majority of students travel successfully on transport without adult supervision, the Department also engages Assisted School Travel Officers (ASTO's) to travel with students whose medical or behavioural needs require additional support while in transit. All transport runs and services are regularly reviewed to ensure operational efficiency and to meet the changing needs and circumstances of students with disability.

As the management of the ASTP is a complex organisational exercise it requires the active cooperation of all parties concerned to fulfil their respective roles and responsibilities. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated in ensuring that the program provides the best possible service for eligible students.

#### Screening of Drivers and Assisted School Travel Officers

In order to meet contractual and statutory child protection requirements all transport drivers and ASTO's must submit the relevant screening forms prior to commencing any work that involves working with children. All forms (*Declaration and Consent, Declaration for Criminal Records Check*), including identification must be forwarded to the Assisted School Travel Program (ASTP) to facilitate screening prior to engagement.

All runs are required to have relief ASTO's available to cover the absences of the regular ASTO in circumstances such as sudden illness or incapacity. Relief ASTO's are also required to be screened and approved prior to commencing transport work.

ASTO's cannot commence work on a transport run until they have been screened and approved by the Department in accordance with current child protection legislation. Any enquiries regarding the screening and approval process should be referred to the ASTP by telephone on 1300 338 278.

Parents/carers who have any doubts about the identity of unfamiliar ASTO have been encouraged to ask for identification. Please note that if parents/carers or school staff ask to see your identification you must comply with the request.

#### Safety of Students

ASTO's have a direct responsibility under child protection legislation to ensure that students are not placed at risk. ASTO's should not:

- leave the immediate vicinity of the vehicle and leave students without direct supervision; or
- come into any unnecessary physical contact with students.

Further information on supporting students and managing emergency situations are included in the *Assisted Travel Emergency Action and Procedures* card. All contractors/drivers are provided with this card and it must be retained in vehicles at all times. Please advise the contractor to contact the ASTP if additional copies of the card are required.

### **Assisting Students To and From the Transport Vehicle**

It is the parent/carer's responsibility to assist the student to and from their home to the transport vehicle, and to ensure that they are safely seated. This includes providing any additional equipment that may be required for their safe transport, such as a harness or booster seat.

Parents/carers also have the responsibility to assist students in and out of seats and to ensure seatbelts and/or safety harnesses are correctly fastened. The parent/carer may seek the driver's (and if appropriate, the ASTO's) assistance, and every measure of cooperation should be provided. Where the student travels in his/her wheelchair, the driver must ensure that the chair is correctly positioned and secured within the vehicle.

School principals have been asked to ensure that appropriate supervision is arranged at the agreed arrival and departure times from schools and to assist students on and off vehicles.

ASTO's are to sit in as close proximity as practical to the student or students which have been identified as needing additional support while in transit. ASTO's are not to travel in the front passenger seat while students are in a vehicle.

### **Information on Students' Needs for Drivers and ASTO's**

If a school identifies that a student requires an officer to support his/her travel, under no circumstances should the student travel without the ASTO unless the ASTP has advised the contractor/driver of the change to support arrangements. Contractors and drivers cannot refuse or discourage the allocation of an ASTO to a transport run.

As the knowledge and expertise needed to provide specific assistance to individual students is held by parents/carers and school staff, they are best placed to arrange any necessary support or assistance for drivers and/or ASTO's in respect of the needs of students in transit. Where applicable, schools will provide drivers and/or ASTO's with copies of health care or behaviour support plans and provide advice in the implementation of the plan.

ASTO's who are concerned that the behaviour of any student in the vehicle is posing a risk must contact the school and the ASTP for advice and support. Drivers and ASTO's are encouraged to continually liaise with school staff and the ASTP in relation to seeking assistance or discussing concerns they may have in regards to better managing challenging behaviours or health care needs of individual students. In addition, parent/carers have been encouraged to explain any special needs or characteristics of students particularly when a new driver or ASTO has been allocated to a transport run.

### **Administering Medication to Students while in Transit**

ASTO's are not responsible for the transfer of medication between home and school on behalf of students. Exceptions may exist where medication is required to be carried by an ASTO in anticipation of potential life-threatening situations while in transit; however, under no circumstances are drivers or ASTO's to administer medication to students without the arranged authorisation of the ASTP and only following the completion of appropriate training in consultation with the school and medical personnel.

Please contact the ASTP on telephone number **1300 338 278** or email on: [asto.astp@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:asto.astp@det.nsw.edu.au) if you have any questions.