

The Walking Bus

a step-by-step guide



School Travel Team
01992 556125
www.hertsdirect.org/walkingbus



Introduction

The Walking Bus is a scheme encouraging parent volunteers to walk children to school along a set route. The children walk in pairs and everyone wears high visibility clothing. With a “driver” at the front and a “conductor” at the back, the children are collected at “bus stops” at agreed times along the route. With parents working a rota system, they gain more time for themselves as it may mean walking just twice a week.

The Walking Bus aims to help more children walk to school and to improve safety by reducing school gate congestion. Since it's powered by good old-fashioned leg work it promotes healthy lifestyles and by encouraging walking it also increases awareness of the local environment, independence and social opportunities.

Safety is a primary concern when setting up a Walking Bus – volunteers are trained and the route is assessed by the school's Walking Bus Co-ordinator, supported by Hertfordshire County Council's School Travel Advisers and Road Safety Officers.

Getting Started

A Walking bus should be part of a school's travel plan. A travel plan aims to encourage safe, healthy and environmentally friendly ways to travel to school. It is developed through consultation and involvement of the whole school community. For information about school travel plans, and help to develop a new or existing plan contact School Travel Plan team on **01992 556125** or www.hertsdirect.org/schooltravel.

School's Walking Bus Co-ordinator

You will need to identify someone, perhaps a parent or governor, to take the role of Walking Bus Co-ordinator. The co-ordinator looks after the administration of the bus, volunteer rota and is the contact point for all volunteers, and users. Often the Co-ordinator will also be practically involved with the bus as a driver or conductor.

The co-ordinator ensures that new volunteers joining an established bus are aware of safety issues and follow established procedures.

Advice on the co-ordinator role can be obtained from your HCC School Travel adviser.



What's Involved?

1. Read this guide and look at the walking bus documentation on: www.hertsdirect.org/walkingbus
2. Gauge parental interest and recruit helpers. School will need to get Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) clearance for volunteers.
3. Think about a suitable safe route and carry out a risk assessment.
4. Train volunteers on safe road use with help of Hertfordshire County Council.
5. Plan your Walking Bus timetable, and keep records of your helper rota and a register of children using the bus.
6. Agree standards of acceptable behaviour. Parents and children should sign "Walking Bus Agreement" (see App 3).
7. Get started! Within the first month a HCC Walking Bus Representative will visit to ensure everything is running smoothly and help with any teething problems.
8. Think about how to keep children's interest, support parent volunteers and ensure that over the long term you will have sufficient volunteers.



In May 2008, Wheatfields Infant and Junior Schools in St Albans celebrated 10 years of successful walking buses



Recruit Helpers

Send a letter out to parents/carers asking if their children would like to walk with the bus and whether they would be able to help. Volunteers must be over 17 years old. Drivers need to be at least 18 years old and conductors over 17.

Invite HCC's Walking Bus officer to meet interested people and explain the scheme. Provide copies of "Walking Bus Road Safety Guidelines for volunteers" (p8-9).

Routes for the bus will depend on the number of volunteers coming forward and where both they and the children who will use the routes live.

How many volunteers are needed?

For the walking bus to be viable there must be sufficient adults to cover each journey. Once started the bus will operate every scheduled day during term time, including the first day of term, whatever the weather.



There must be a minimum of two adults supervising each route – one to be the "driver" leading the group and the other to be the "conductor" following at the rear. This ensures that all the children can be seen and kept under control.

The minimum ratios are:

1 adult to 8 children (juniors)

1 adult to 4 children (infants)

1 adult to 6 children (mixed)

We recommend that adults hold hands with children under seven years old. On some walking bus routes, it may be advisable to have more adults. For example, it may be safer to cross difficult roads in smaller groups. In which case, additional adult volunteers may be required to look after each group.

However, depending upon the route, it could be possible to take up to 24 junior children with three adults.

If numbers exceed this another adult will be needed and it will be safer to run a second bus.

It is better to set up fewer routes with more volunteers taking turns on a rota system rather than overload a few willing walkers.

Devise a provisional bus timetable and check out with the volunteers.

If volunteers are unable to take their turns on a rota they must make arrangements for another volunteer to take their place.



Route and Risk Assessment

Once a route has been identified it must be risk assessed. This will follow the usual procedures operated by your school. Guidance on risk assessment can also be found on www.hertsdirect.org/walkingbus. It is a good idea for your volunteers to be involved in this, so that any concerns may be discussed and resolved.

The risk assessment must be signed by the Headteacher. Please send a copy to HCC's Walking Bus Representative. It is good practice to show each parent a copy of the risk assessment once it has been written up.

Adult volunteers and children must be provided with high-visibility clothing to be worn when travelling to and from school on the Walking Bus. These are provided by the school. Older children may be reluctant to wear this but all volunteers need to reinforce its importance in terms of safety and being seen by drivers. It could be helpful to point out others who wear high visibility clothing eg Police, road workers, school crossing patrols.

The school should decide how these are to be issued e.g. either give to each child to take care of or the driver stores and gives out to each child for the journey. Some co-ordinators keep a retainer fee £5.00 and hand it back when the clothing is returned.

Arrange Training

Contact HCC's Walking Bus representative to arrange a training session for volunteers. All approved volunteers acting as drivers and conductors are covered by Hertfordshire County Council's Public Liability Insurance, provided that they have undertaken training set out by Hertfordshire County Council and are acting within the guidelines set for the Walking Bus. New volunteers joining an established bus should be properly briefed

by the school on safety issues and the procedures agreed when the bus was set up (See App 4 Volunteer Training Checklist). Volunteers should be given a copy of Road Safety Guidelines for Volunteers (p8-9). They need to understand their responsibilities and any queries they have must be answered.

A HCC Walking Bus representative will accompany and observe the driver and the conductor operating the bus route with passengers within the first month. Further support visits will be made as and when necessary and will monitor if further training is required.



Bus Timetable

The bus will operate to a strict timetable and will not wait at the bus stop for late comers in the morning, even if certain children are expected to travel.

Likewise parents must ensure they are waiting at the bus stop when their children are dropped off on the journey home, unless they have given permission for them to continue home from that point unsupervised.

Additional bus stops may be added to the route at the driver's discretion. Indeed some children may join the bus as it passes by their house.



Records

It will be necessary for the co-ordinator to keep an up-to-date record of which volunteers will be supervising which route and when, and their contact telephone details. This information should also be available to all volunteers so that they can organise a relief if the need arises.

It is the co-ordinator's responsibility to keep records of all participants on the Walking Bus and to monitor if it is helping to increase numbers of children walking. See Walking Agreement form (App 3) which collects this information.

The school must have a record of all the routes and pick up/drop off times and keep signed consent forms that have been completed and returned by the parents.

Drivers must be provided with a register (possibly a small notebook) as they need to know who will be using the bus and when. It may also be useful to include addresses and telephone numbers in case these are needed.

Behaviour

Explain to children taking part beforehand how they are expected to behave. Children who endanger themselves or others or who misbehave generally may be reported to the head teacher. The child's parents may then be requested to withdraw that child from the Walking Bus. (See Walking Bus Agreement App3).

Provide copies of "Walking Bus Operating Guidelines" for parents.

Parent's Responsibilities:

Parents need to know that they are responsible for letting the driver know which days they will use the bus going to school/returning home and any changes to this pattern.

They should explain the importance of sensible behaviour to their children and must sign the Walking Bus Agreement (App3) to indicate that they are permitting their children to participate at their own risk and to provide emergency contact details for use by the walking bus volunteers.

Parents are responsible for their children's safety on the way to and from the designated bus stops. They should ensure their children are dressed appropriately.

If parents are unsure about letting their children join in, invite them to walk with the Walking Bus for the first couple of weeks. However, police clearance must have been gained and the necessary paperwork completed in order for them to be added to the list of approved volunteers permanently.

The Walking Bus can start once:

- **The volunteers have been police checked and trained.**
- **The route has been risk assessed.**
- **Written parental consent has been received.**

Your HCC Walking Bus representative will visit within the first month of running to check all is ok, and will visit in the future to check all is well, meet any new volunteers and if necessary arrange further training



Maintain Interest!

Schools may wish to consider measures to encourage children to use the Walking Bus.

Very basic incentive schemes might include:

- Giving house points, stickers or vouchers to use in the school shop.
- Gifts such as pencils, erasers, keyrings
- Umbrellas with the school or a sponsor's logo might be useful in wet weather.
- A trolley could be used to carry luggage.
- Local firms may provide sponsorship.
- Take part in National and International Walking initiatives, for example Walk to School Week and International Walk to School.
- "Virtual Walk around the World", assign a kilometre amount to each student for each time they walk to school and use this to calculate the distance the school has walked. You could place a map in the school hallway to track progress. (HCC's "Walk the World" scheme maybe useful - contact the School Travel Team if you would like more information tel. 01992 556125).
- Promote walking to all community members, encourage walkers to write postcards to a local radio station describing reasons they walk to school. Arrange ahead of time for the radio station to read the mail on air.
- Hold a Golden Boot Award. Paint an old boot with golden spray and present it to the children/class that walked the most over a certain period.
- Arrange passport stamping stations along walking routes when it's Walk to School Week or International Walk to School.
- Hold parties to celebrate special events such as the route's birthday or special achievements. Green Discos are becoming popular in schools trying to promote environmentally friendly habits, they also acknowledge the children's efforts and provide social opportunities for parents and children.
- What about observation trails or nature spotting; bring your Barbie or Action Man days; fancy hat competition?
- Some schools have organised special Walking Bus picnics or parties at the end of the summer term



Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What is the recommended maximum number of children on a Walking Bus?

A. *It is not advisable to have any more than 24 children on one bus. Any more than this and there needs to be a second bus.*

Q. What is the recommended length of a Walking Bus journey?

A. *The journey to school should not take much longer than 30 minutes. Bear in mind the pace of younger children.*

Q. Are children in pushchairs and adults pushing them included in the adult to child ratio?

A. *As long as children are secured in their pushchairs and remain seated they do not have to be counted. However, the adult pushing can be included.*

Q. What does volunteer training involve?

A. *Practical activity usually lasting 90 minutes, that includes walking the route.*

Q. Do I have to complete another CRB form if I already have one for my full time job?

A. *A CRB is only valid for each job & organisation so unless you are already CRB'ed with the school in a similar role, a new one will have to be applied for. Your school will advise if a new check is required.*

Q. What status should I be applying for?

A. *Enhanced.*

Q. What happened once the CRB forms are filled in?

A. *The forms are processed by CRB and you and the school are informed if clearance has been obtained.*

The amount of time it takes to receive clearance is variable but generally takes about 4-6 weeks.

Q. Are there any costs involved?

A. *The Walking Bus is free to use, unless the co-ordinator requires a retainer fee for clothing. High visibility clothing is purchased by the school.*

Q. Am I allowed to administer medication, for children with asthma for example?

A. *No, you are not insured to do this. If the child requires medication it should either be administered before leaving home or the child should have been taught how to do this for him/herself.*

Q. What happens if a child is unwell on the walking bus?

A. *Most walking Buses operate in the morning on the way to school, in this instance the child should continue with the journey to school where any first aid required can be given and the child's parents contacted if necessary.*

Q. Does anyone need to be First Aid trained?

A. *No, but it is advisable for at least one adult to carry a mobile phone in case of an emergency.*



The Walking Bus Road Safety Guidelines for Volunteers

The Walking Bus must be run safely. Volunteers are required to reinforce safe practice by demonstration.

Guidelines

- The minimum ratios are:
 - 1 adult to 8 children (juniors)
 - 1 adult to 4 children (infants)
 - 1 adult to 6 children (mixed)
- There must always be two adults present one acting as the driver, the other as conductor.
- Adults and children must all wear high visibility clothing in order to be clearly visible.
- The route to be used will already have been agreed and a risk assessment carried out. This route must be adhered to at all times. If any part of the pathway cannot be used because of temporary blockage e.g. road works or parked vehicles, the adults will need to divert accordingly. If there are persistent problems with a route these should be reported to the school's walking bus co-ordinator and an alternative route should be identified. The HCC Walking Bus officer can offer guidance.
- Where possible, the need to cross roads will be kept to a minimum and use made of specific crossing places.
- Parents are responsible for their children's safety on the way to and from the designated "bus stops". Drivers and conductors must remain with the group on the authorised route.
- Parents and walking bus volunteers must be particularly vigilant when children join and leave the bus.
- Parents should have spoken about road safety to their children before permitting them to join the Walking Bus but it is a good idea for the driver/conductor to give newcomers a brief reminder about their behaviour.
- Emphasise that children must listen to the driver and conductor and obey the instructions – in particular with regard to stopping and crossing.
- Guidelines for behaviour need to be clearly understood and consistent with all adults and children. **All adults should take responsibility for promoting good practice.**
- The driver will be in front leading the group and the conductor following at the rear so that all children can be seen and kept in order.
- The children must walk along the pavement away from the kerb in an orderly manner, and in pairs when possible, allowing other pedestrians to pass.
- Everyone should be aware of the danger when crossing driveways, especially as drivers may not easily notice small children.
- If there are enough adults, they should hold hands with children under 7 years old. Do not delegate responsibility to older children to look after younger children.
- **It is the individual volunteer's responsibility to find someone to take their place if they are suddenly unavailable for their turn.**

Using safe crossing places

a) Pelican Crossing

When using a pelican crossing make sure all the group is at the crossing before the "WAIT" button is pressed. Check that the green man shows and all the traffic is stopped before attempting to cross. Don't start to cross when the green man is flashing. Do not permit any of the children to press the button as it is important for the children to be ready to cross.



b) Puffin Crossing

Similar to pelican crossing but the red or green man is above the button and a sensor detects if someone is waiting to cross before changing the lights that stop the traffic. Make sure that the group arrives at the crossing together before the button is pressed to activate the sensor.



c) Zebra Crossing

Wait until all the traffic has stopped from both directions before crossing the road. Keep looking and listening all the time you are crossing.

d) School Crossing Patrol

If there are school crossing patrols on your route use them.

When using all of the above it is advisable to make eye contact with the car driver before stepping off the pavement.

Remember in bad weather it will take the drivers longer to stop and it is more difficult for you to be seen. Extra care should be taken if you are wearing a hooded coat or using an umbrella as they can obscure hearing and vision.

If using a pram or pushchair make sure the child is strapped in. If you have other young children with you, use reins or make them hold onto the top part of the pram so you can put your hands over the top of theirs.

Take care not to have the pram positioned over the kerb when waiting to cross. This also applies to any trolley the group may be using.

Crossing Roads

When you are ready to cross the road choose a safe crossing place away from parked cars/corners/junctions, etc.

We would not recommend using a traffic island with large groups of children unless it is possible to cross the width of the road in one go.

When crossing, gather the children around you away from the kerb until you have decided it is safe to cross. It may be safer and quicker to cross them in a bunch e.g. three rows of four abreast rather than have them stretched out in pairs. Walk across looking and listening as you go. When you have crossed safely, reform your group and continue with your journey.

It may be wise to cross more difficult roads in smaller groups. The HCC Representative will advise on this during volunteer training.

Remember that you are not empowered to stop traffic in order to cross.

If any driver stops to allow the group to cross it is vital that you check that all other traffic is aware of what is happening and has stopped before you step into the road. There is always the danger of other drivers overtaking the stationary vehicle.



Walking Bus Operating Guidelines for Parents

Safety and enthusiasm are the keys to an effective Walking Bus. Success depends on the number of volunteer helpers recruited and their level of commitment.

Safeguards

Volunteers must have Criminal Records Bureau clearance before escorting children.

Parents/carers must sign a consent form and provide emergency contact details.

There must be the correct adult to child ratio.

Everyone will wear high visibility clothing.

Each bus route will have a register of children who intend to use it with their contact details.

The route walked will be risk assessed by a representative for the school.

The HCC Walking Bus officer provides training on safe procedures with volunteers and how to cross the road with large groups of children.

There will be a “driver” leading the Walking Bus and a “conductor” walking at the rear to ensure the children can be seen and kept under control.

A HCC Walking Bus officer will accompany the walking bus once within its first month of official running and subsequent monitoring visits will take place to ensure that no problems have arisen.

Hertfordshire County Council provides public liability insurance cover.

Once the Walking Bus is in operation it will operate each school day it is scheduled, including the first day of term, whatever the weather.

Volunteers' responsibilities

If problems arise, these should be reported to the school and the HCC Walking Bus officer so that appropriate steps can be taken.

The location of the bus stops will have been identified during the risk assessment. It is here that children will join and leave the bus. Additional stops may be added to the route at the driver's discretion. Indeed some children may join the bus as it passes their house.

The bus will operate to a firm timetable and will not wait for late comers in the morning, even if certain children are expected to travel.

Drivers need to be at least 18 years old; conductors over 17.

The normal ratio is one adult to eight junior children with a minimum of two adults always present. However, when infants are using the bus this number is increased to one adult for every four infants with adults interspersed with children along the line. At no time should these ratios be exceeded. If numbers on route increase, more adults must be recruited. If extra adults are present they should hold hands with children under seven years old.

If the bus becomes too large to operate smoothly another one will need to be set up.

Volunteers work out a rota so that they do not have to operate the bus every day.



Parents' responsibilities

Parents must have completed and returned a consent form before a child is allowed to travel on the bus.

This form should also include emergency contact details and an indication of when the child will use the bus. This information can then be placed on the route register.

It is parents' responsibility to advise the driver of any change to the child's regular travel pattern.

Parents should be at the bus stop in good time to collect children on their homeward journey.

Parents are responsible for their children's safety on the way to and from the designated bus stops and should ensure their children are dressed appropriately.

Parents should also ensure that their children understand how the bus operates and impress upon them the need to behave sensibly and obey any instructions given by the driver and conductor.

If at all possible, offer to help with the running of the bus and make sure that the volunteer helpers know that you and your child appreciate them!

How to help your children:

Always use the road sensibly yourself – children will want to copy you!

Explain how to cross the road safely and show them how to use crossing facilities (e.g. Zebra crossing, Pelican crossing).

When walking with your children, make sure they walk on the inside of the pavement if there is one. Hold the hands of younger children and when you're out make sure you both wear clothes that make you easily seen.

When walking on roads without pavements, walk on the right hand side of the road, facing the traffic coming towards you.

Encourage and help children to make their own decisions and think for themselves.

- STOP at the kerb
- Look and Listen for traffic.
- Cross when it is safe to do so.



Children's Responsibilities

Children must wear their high visibility clothing whenever they use the bus.

They must behave sensibly and follow instructions.

Any children who endanger themselves or others or who misbehave generally may be reported to the Head Teacher.

The child's parents may then be requested to withdraw that child from the Walking Bus if the unacceptable behaviour continues.

Should the Walking Bus run in the afternoon and a child is left behind for any reason he/she should go to the school office and explain to the staff member.



Dear Parents

In an effort to ease congestion around the school and improve pupils' fitness we are considering setting up a 'Walking Bus'.

Children will walk to school as a group using an agreed route under the supervision of at least two responsible adults - a 'driver' and a 'conductor'. There will be set places along the way where children can join the 'bus'. It will operate every school day bringing children in to school and escorting them homewards.

Routes will be established along those roads most used by our pupils, depending upon the level of interest shown by parents and their willingness to volunteer as 'drivers' and 'conductors'.

This scheme can help to improve your child's safety and reduce the amount of school runs you make.

I am trying to find out whether or not this suggestion has your support so I would be grateful if you would complete the questionnaire and return it to school by the end of the week.

Yours sincerely

Walking Bus Questionnaire

Please print clearly and circle the appropriate answer.

Name/s of your child/ren:

Address:

How does your child usually travel to school ? walk / cycle / car / bus

If they walk which roads do they come along ?

Do you accompany them ? yes / no

Would your child use the Walking Bus if a suitable route was set up ? yes / no / maybe

Would you be willing to act as driver / conductor ? yes / no / maybe

Do you wish to know more about the scheme ? yes / no

Would you be able to attend a meeting at the school on yes/no



Appendix 2

Information for parents

Our first Walking bus route will begin on (date):.....

It will start at time: from (place):

And continue along route:

until it reaches the school playground.

There will be bus stops for the pupils to join at the following points:

Place: Time (am): Time (pm):

Place: Time (am): Time (pm):

Place: Time (am): Time (pm):

The adults acting as driver and conductor on this route will be:

Driver:

Name:

Address:

Telephone:

Conductor:

Name:

Address:

Telephone:

They will be wearing florescent/reflective tabards which will also be issued to all registered children using the Walking Bus.

At the end of the school day children using the bus to go home should wait by the:

.....

It will leave the school grounds at: passing the same bus stops at the times shown above. Please make sure you are there promptly to meet your child.



In order for your child to participate, the school must have a signed consent form. Please complete and return the 'Walking Bus Agreement' enclosed.

Places are limited by the number of volunteers helping to run the bus

Walking Bus Agreement

I would like to use the Walking Bus on the day/s:

I agree to wear my tabard whenever I walk with the bus. I will listen to the volunteers and behave sensibly while walking with the bus. I understand my responsibilities.

Signed (child)

I wish my child to use the Walking Bus

He/she will join and leave at the stop by:

Or as the bus passes our house at:

He/she will travel to/from school each day unless I inform you otherwise. I have read the guidelines and explained to my child about the need for sensible behaviour.

Signed: (parent/carer) **Date:**

Please complete the below (block capitals):

Child's name:Class:.....

Address:

Telephone number:

Emergency contact name:

Address

Telephone no.

Relationship to child

Before joining the Walking Bus, how did you usually travel to school?

Walk / Cycle / Car / Bus (Please circle usual mode of travel).



Appendix 4

Walking Bus Volunteer Training Checklist

Provide:

'Walking Bus Road Safety Guidelines for Volunteers' (The Walking Bus Guide)
Tabards for volunteers

Introduction

- Who's who
- What a walking bus is
- Safety - refer to school's generic and route Risk Assessments
- HCC public liability insurance cover

Co-ordinators role

- Bus timetable
- Arrange rota ensuring correct adult/child ratios are met
- Ensure register is kept
- Arrange purchase of hi-viz tabards/waistcoats
- Train new volunteers (App 4 of Walking Bus Guide)
- Provide copies of:
 - o Guidelines for Volunteers
 - o Walking Bus Operating Guidelines for Parents
 - o Information for new users (App 1 and 2 of Walking Bus Guide)
 - o Walking Bus Agreements (App 3 of Walking Bus Guide)

Safety (general)

- Ratios
- Managing groups (pairs/away from kerb/behaviour/pushchairs/holding hands)
- Hi viz clothing
- Crossing driveways/carparks
- Crossing roads/using safe places eg Pelicans, Puffins
- Splitting large groups
- Setting an example!

Walk route (paying particular note to areas identified in risk assessment)

- Identify safe meeting point
- Identify hazards and explain how they will be dealt with
- Road crossing (including driveways and school car park)
- Consider using role play/discuss hypothetical situations as a training tool

Where to get help if problems arise?

School, HCC Sch Travel Team or website: www.hertsdirect.org/walkingbus

Other

What to do if a Volunteer can't do duty

Highway Fault line (www.hertsdirect.org/highwayfaults)

Changes to route/new routes (need new risk assessment)

Support visits

Questions?



Checklist

Have you

Identified a suitable route or routes

Identified enough volunteers

Criminal background cleared all volunteers

Risk assessed the route

Trained volunteers

Devised a timetable

Recruited potential users of the Walking Bus

Talked to children about behaviour

Obtained parental consent

Issued guidelines to parents and volunteers

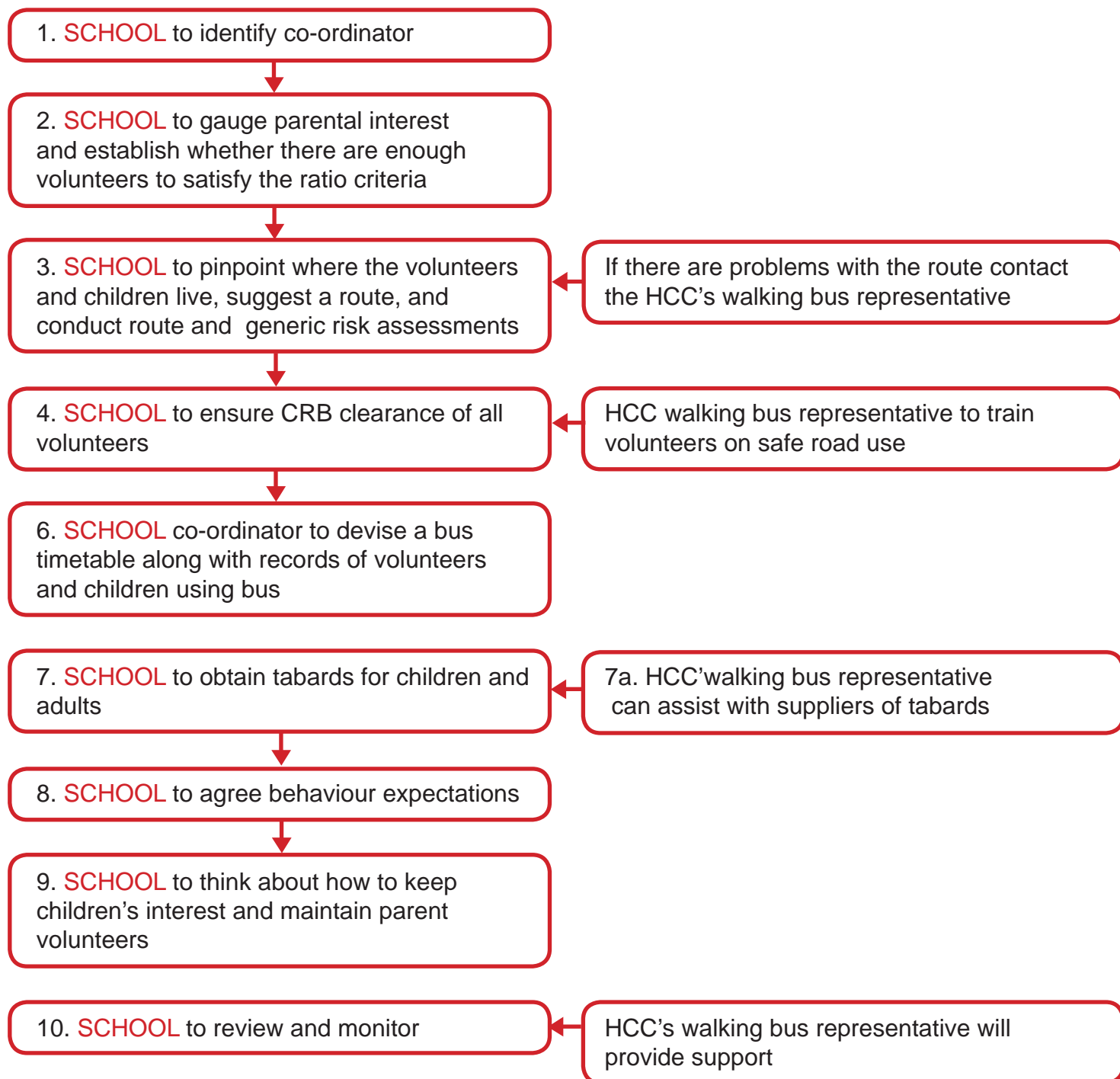
Set up a register of children on the bus

Obtained high-visibility clothing

You are now ready to start your walking bus!



How to set up a walking bus – who does what



For help setting up a walking bus contact the School Travel Team on 01992 556125



Hertfordshire County Council – making Hertfordshire a better place to live by providing

Care for older people, support for schools, pupils and parents
Support for carers Fire and rescue Fostering and adoption Support
for people with disabilities Libraries Admission to schools Road
maintenance and safety Protection for adults and children at risk
Trading standards and consumer protection Household waste sites
and recycling

These are only some of our services.

Find out more at:

www.hertsdirect.org

August 2008

Design Ref: 049983



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