

Firstly, I'd like to say we really value our School Bus Service. We live on a farm 9km from the school in town, and it is a really helpful service – particularly on days when things are really busy. We know the kids can get back to the farm safely and walk up to the shearing shed or similar to meet with us parents or their uncle or grandfather. The kids also really enjoy travelling on “their” school bus. We also really appreciate that it is a free service.

My two boys are complimentary passengers, and this arrangement suits us really well. As I work a professional casual job in town, it means that I can take the children to school / pick them up on days I'm heading into town for work, but on days that I'm not – or if I'm away or in a late meeting - they can get out to the farm on the bus and meet dad. The flexibility of the complimentary passenger position is really valuable for our family with our employment routine that is anything but regular hours.

Fortunately, the physical size of the bus on our run and the number of children on it, means that our position as complimentary passengers is “safe” – there isn't likely to be so much competition for seats that we lose our place. However, I am well aware from friends on busier bus runs that the complimentary passenger ticket is very uncertain. I think this is a major issue about the way School Bus Services are managed. It would cause a lot of stress for our family if we were to lose our place on the bus due to this system, but because of our irregular work schedule (and also because the boys are still very young and we like to see the teacher / pop into the classroom a few times a week as part of the way we choose to parent) we would be very hard pressed to meet the minimum travel requirements to get a permanent seat. Some weeks we'd meet that requirement, some weeks we wouldn't but the system doesn't allow for that much variability.

The bus doesn't come to our driveway, but instead 1.5km away to the main homestead on the farm – where their cousins are permanent passengers on the same bus. The way the road layout is, it would need to be a spur run to get to us, and the end of our driveway wouldn't be a safe spot to have a bus stop anyway, so we're perfectly OK with the arrangement (although as complimentary passengers we were never offered the option of a spur). In our situation, that is fine, but I have heard from other parents that the process of getting assessed for a bus stop can be anything from quick and easy, to a very long drawn out process. I don't understand why there is such a range.

The nearest appropriate school is an interesting issue too. The neighbouring town from us has a primary school that only goes to Year 4, and the bus arrangements around Woodanilling Primary seem weird. Some kids who live closer to Woody than Katanning can only get on the Katanning bus, and others have been denied bus access in the past because the parents have chosen to send them to Katanning (to avoid the child having to transfer schools mid-primary, or as the parent works in Katanning, or younger siblings go to childcare in Katanning etc) rather than Woodanilling and thus have been told it's not considered the nearest school, even though it is more appropriate for the family. It seems very inconsistent.