New travel plan idea for academy

By REBECCA GOUGH rebecca.gough@archant.co.uk

Students with a “good” attendance rate could be eligible for subsidised bus travel to and from school under new plans mooted by a Norfolk principal.

Thetford Academy pupils are currently taught across two sites but plans are in place to move all to the North Campus, on Croxton Road, by September 2013.

To ease the transition between sites, a free bus for Year seven pupils who live near the school’s South Campus, on Staniforth Road, has been provided for the past year by the academy, at a cost of £25,000, but this was only ever short-term.

The school has said it is now in talks with Norfolk County Council and local bus providers to try to come to a solution whereby pupils living some distance away could take an existing public bus to school at an appropriate time and in a safe way.

This would not be free but those pupils with an attendance of 95pc or higher during the school year could be eligible for reduced fares, subsidised by the school.

Thetford Academy principal, Cathy Spillane, said: “We’re working with providers to get them here at a good time on a good route and we would look at subsidised bus fares for children who have good attendance, for example, then the onus is on parents to encourage the children to come to school if they knew they wouldn’t have to pay the full fare.”

Obviously people have said it’s almost three miles there and three miles back for some children so we want to see if we can get a bus from the Barnham Cross Estate to Kimms Belt or Fulmerston Road and then through St Martins and St Johns to the centre of town so more kids can come and pick it up.”

Mrs Spillane said she was also considering providing bikes for pupils and would run a safety awareness scheme to increase their confidence in walking or cycling to school alone.

“Obviously our travel plan isn’t just about buses,” she said. “We will do anything we can to encourage increasing attendance and we know it’s one of the areas Ofsted has charged us to improve on, and rightly so.”

A spokesman for Norfolk County Council confirmed it was in talks with the school to try to find a solution for youngsters living some way from the North Campus but stressed none met the distance criteria to be eligible for free transport.

This is set by parliament at three miles, whereas the furthest point a pupil would have to travel to school in Thetford was 2.9 miles.