



London Borough
of Hounslow

SCHOOL TRAVEL ASSISTANCE POLICY

Children's Services and Lifelong Learning

DRAFT

CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

SCHOOL TRAVEL ASSISTANCE POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

The Education Act 1996, as amended, requires Local Authorities to make such suitable free travel arrangements for 'eligible children'¹ as they consider necessary to facilitate attendance at school.

Since September 2006 all pupils up to the age of 16, or 18 if they remain in full-time education, have been entitled to free transport on buses within London. In light of this, the London Borough of Hounslow considers that this is sufficient to meet the transport needs of most children and young people under the age of 18.

This policy therefore, sets out the arrangements for meeting the Authority's statutory duty to make such suitable free travel arrangements for "eligible children" as it is considered necessary to facilitate their attendance at school. The policy takes account of the legislation and the statutory guidance which informs its implementation.

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The London Borough of Hounslow operates an integrated transport service for Children's Services which aims to meet the needs of clients in an efficient, safe, and cost effective manner.

Entitlement to borough-provided free travel assistance and the nature of the assistance which is appropriate will be determined using the criteria set out in this Policy.

All cases will be considered on their individual merits and in exceptional circumstances variations to the criteria may be applied. Decisions in respect of transport will be made in the context of:

- (i) an assessment of the individual child or young person's specific needs and the parents circumstances;
- (ii) the parents/carers' legal responsibility to bring about the attendance of the child at school;
- (iii) Suitability of the school, as defined in the guidance;
- (iv) the Council's overall duty to ensure an efficient use of its resources.

¹ See definition of "eligible children" at section 4.

3. TYPES OF TRAVEL ASSISTANCE

Decisions on the type of travel assistance will be assessed according to needs of the pupil². The types of travel assistance include:

- Funding for the provision of Oyster cards or travel passes to enable access to tube or train travel.
- Funding for the provision of Oyster Cards or Travel passes for parents/carers to enable them to accompany their child.
- Payment of mileage allowances for parents/carers who use their own vehicles.
- Payment of fares for travel arranged by parents/carers with the agreement of the authority.
- Provision of an escort or travel buddy to assist with travel.
- A seat on a vehicle to transport the client or pupil to the appropriate education provision from an agreed pick-up point³.
- In exceptional circumstances a seat on a vehicle which will transport extremely vulnerable pupils from home to school.

4. ELIGIBLE CHILDREN

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 has amended the Education Act 1996 and introduced the definition of an “eligible child” for whom a Local Authority has to make such suitable free travel arrangements as it is considered necessary to facilitate their attendance at school. An eligible child is defined as:

- a. Children living within the statutory walking distance – two miles for a child under the age of 8 or three miles for children aged 8 and over – who are unable to walk to school by reason of their Special educational needs, disability or mobility problems
- b. Children living within the statutory walking distance but who are unable to walk in safety to school because of the nature of the route
- c. Children living outside the statutory walking distance.
- d. Children who are entitled to free school meals and/or whose parents are in receipt of their maximum level of Working Tax Credit.

² Most decisions will be made using the information provided by the parent/carer combined with details of the pupil's needs contained on the pupil's SEN file. Where necessary, the Local Authority will seek advice from other professionals and will use a mobility assessor to find out further information on the needs of the pupil and/or the journey.

³ Pick-up points are likely to be at a convenient stopping point within a short walk of the pupil's home where a very small number of children (likely to be 1-3) can be picked up. The maximum distance that any child will need to walk is half a mile.

The majority of these children would be appropriately served by the entitlement to free travel on London's buses. The Authority would consider that in exceptional circumstances, pupils from categories (a) and (c) *may* qualify for alternative or additional support as set out in this policy, subject to the provisions set out in section 1. The types of circumstances in which pupils may become eligible are set out in Section 6 *Eligibility Criteria*.

5. LOCAL AUTHORITY MAINTAINED SPECIALIST PROVISION

The London Borough of Hounslow has a range of specialist provision for pupils whose special educational needs require a greater level of specialist support than would normally be available within a mainstream school environment.

In addition to special school provision for pupils with Complex Learning Difficulties; Severe Learning Difficulties; and Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, the Authority also provides a number of specialist places in centres which are attached to mainstream schools.

Through its travel assistance policy the Authority sets out the means by which it proposes to comply with its statutory duty to make appropriate arrangements to facilitate the attendance of pupils at specialist provision, which is unlikely to be the nearest school to the pupils' home and may therefore fall both within categories (a) and (c).

6. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR TRAVEL ASSISTANCE

Entitlement to travel assistance will differ according to the age and needs of the pupil and each individual case will be given careful consideration.

In general, the Authority would expect the vast majority of pupils either to walk to school or to travel on the free public buses and to develop their independent travel skills as they grow and develop.

However, the Authority acknowledges that children with Statements of SEN may have significantly higher levels of need that require access to alternative or additional travel assistance. Where this is the case, the Authority will review all travel assistance agreements regularly using the Annual Review of Statement of SEN and/or other appropriate assessment. Where pupils' circumstances or needs change this may necessitate/warrant changes in the Travel Assistance provided.

Parents who receive the higher rate mobility component of the DLA (Disability Living Allowance) for their child may wish to submit this information as evidence in support of their application for travel assistance.

Each request for travel assistance will be considered on its own merits, and decisions on a small minority of cases may depart from the criteria if there are exceptional circumstances that apply. Reasons for decisions will be recorded and reviewed as appropriate.

Pupils' eligibility for alternative or additional travel assistance will be considered against the criteria set out below.

6.1 Children of Nursery and Statutory School Age

The Authority will consider providing travel assistance to school for pupils:

- Who are attending specialist provision where the distance to the named school is outside the statutory walking distance, i.e. 2 miles for pupils aged below 8 or, 3 miles for children aged 8 and over, and/or is further away than the school preferred by the parent/carer; and
- Where the nature and/or severity of the pupil's mobility difficulties and/or special needs make it unreasonable for them to walk or to travel on public transport without assistance. *(Parents have a duty (S.39 of the Education Act) to ensure that they bring about the attendance of their children at a school where he or she is registered. Therefore, the Authority would not expect parents to unreasonably refuse to accompany their children if this was appropriate to the pupil's needs. In some cases it may be appropriate to reimburse parent/carer mileage claims.)*

Where the pupil attends the school of their parent/carers' choice, and this is not the school recommended by the Authority in order to meet the pupil's statement of special educational needs, the Authority would expect the parent/carer to make arrangements to accompany their child to school. In exceptional circumstances, the Authority may consider an application for transport assistance where the use of free public transport is not appropriate.

When deciding to place a pupil in a specialist provision the Authority will also consider whether, in the context of the pupil's special educational needs, they would be able to walk to school or access existing free public transport. In making this judgement the Authority would also consider whether the journey is reasonable in terms of the length of time spent travelling and the complexity of the journey.

In circumstances where it is not considered appropriate for the pupil to travel independently and the parent/carer is unable to accompany their child*, the

Authority will arrange transport from a designated pick-up point which, due to the severity of the pupils' physical or learning needs, may be the pupil's home.

In determining travel assistance for eligible pupils with a statement in mainstream schools, the Authority will apply the SEN Code of Practice (Sect 8.87), which states:

' . . . the parents' preferred school may be further away from the child's home than another school which is appropriate to the child's educational needs. In such a case it would be open to the LA to name the nearer school if that would be compatible with the efficient use of the LA's resources. It would also be open to the Local Authority to name the school preferred by the child's parents on condition that the parents agreed to meet all or part of the transport costs. . . '

6.2 Transport for Post-16 students

As pupils get older and approach statutory school leaving age it is expected that those who are able should be offered the opportunity to gain a variety of life skills, including independent travel where possible.

The Authority does not expect to provide travel assistance for post-16 students attending colleges although in some cases it may exceptionally do so.

In exceptional circumstances the Authority may provide alternative or additional travel assistance for pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs who are remaining in the same educational placement, where support with travel was provided up to the age of 16. In such cases, the Authority would consider whether there are exceptional factors that warrant a continuation of travel assistance. The type of travel assistance will be based on the young person's needs in accordance with the criteria.

6.3 Transport to out-borough schools

The same criteria will apply to pupils attending out-borough mainstream schools as for the provision within the London Borough of Hounslow previously set out in this policy.

For pupils with statements of special educational needs where the Authority has determined that an out-borough special school placement is appropriate, the Authority and school would encourage the pupil to undertake the journey themselves, if they are able to do so. If this is not possible parents/carers will be offered the option of making their own travel arrangements. Where parents/carers make their own arrangements they will be reimbursed either the additional cost of public transport; or at a mileage rate agreed by the Council if using their own vehicles; or exceptionally the cost of a taxi (where the Authority gives prior agreement to this arrangement and the cost). Where

a parent/carer accompanies their child on public transport, the Council will also reimburse the cost of the parent/carer's fare where this is considered appropriate and has been agreed in advance. This latter arrangement would usually apply for primary age pupils, and only in very exceptional circumstances for secondary aged pupils.

In cases where the pupil attends an out-borough special school other than that proposed by the Local Authority, parents/carers will be required to make their own transport arrangements. This is in line with the SEN Code of Practice (Sect 8.87), which states:

' . . . the parents' preferred school may be further away from the child's home than another school which is appropriate to the child's educational needs. In such a case it would be open to the Local Authority to name the nearer school if that would be compatible with the efficient use of the Local Authority's resources. It would also be open to the Local Authority to name the school preferred by the child's parents on condition that the parents agreed to meet all or part of the transport costs. . . '

6.4 Transport to residential schools

Where a child has been placed at a residential school by the Authority in order to meet the requirements of their Statement of Special Educational Needs, the Authority will reimburse the parents the cost of the travel on the same basis as set out above.

In exceptional circumstances where the nature and/or severity of the pupil's needs make the use of public transport inappropriate, and where there is evidence that the parent/carer is unable to make suitable arrangements, the Authority may undertake the arrangements for providing transport.

Where a pupil is placed at a residential school which is not the school proposed or recommended by the Authority, parents will be required to make their own arrangements to transport their child to school.

Details on the types of travel assistance and the basis on which requests will be considered and processed are contained in Appendix A.

7. THE ROLE OF PARENTS/CARERS

The Authority believes that parents/carers of pupils with a special educational needs have the same responsibility to ensure that their children attend school as those whose children do not and will strive to work in partnership with them.

Whilst the decision to provide travel assistance will be based primarily on the pupil's needs, the Authority will be mindful of particular difficulties faced by families of pupils with significant or complex needs which may impact on their ability to support their child. However, parents would not be expected to unreasonably withhold their support in assisting their child if there are not demonstrable and evidenced exceptional reasons that prevent them from being able to do so.

Where the Authority provides transport, parents and carers will be expected to agree to the following commitments to ensure the smooth running of their child's transport by:

- Providing the correct telephone number and address. (The Authority will then use a text alert system to warn parents of any delays or difficulties with routes.)
- Making sure their child is ready at least ten minutes before the pick-up time. *(In order to ensure other children are not disadvantaged the Transport will not wait for longer than 5 minutes after the scheduled pick up time at each pick up point, whether this is a designated meeting point or the pupil's home).*
- Understanding that each time the vehicle is delayed, this impacts on other children. *(Repeated failure to have children ready at the correct time, despite requests to do so, may ultimately result in a withdrawal of the transport.)*
- Bringing the child to the vehicle and helping to place them in their seat where necessary.
- Always being at the drop-off point at the right time at the end of the school day. *(Repeated failure to meet the vehicle at the allotted time despite requests to do so may ultimately result in a withdrawal of the transport.)*
- Calling the Transport Coordinator as soon as possible if their child is not able to attend school for any reason.
- Advising the escort if the child has any difficulties on particular days.
- Ensuring their child behaves appropriately on the vehicle and does not interfere with the comfort and safety of other passengers or vehicle staff.

The Authority would also expect where appropriate that parents and carers will help to train their child to travel independently as their child develops.

Whilst every effort will be made to comply with parents/carers' requests, it may not be possible to achieve this in all cases without serious and unacceptable detriment to the service to other passengers. Requests for exceptions or changes to the daily arrangements need to be made formally to the transport depot. Drivers and escorts do not have the authority to make changes to routes, pick up points or timings.

Where a pupil's behaviour on borough provided transport poses a serious risk to the safety and well-being of him / herself, other children or staff, the Authority will expect parents/carers to work with the Authority in attempting to improve behaviour and prevent such situations arising in future. Where, despite all reasonable steps to address the behaviour the pupil continues to pose a safety risk, the Authority will consider withdrawing transport and will require parents to undertake the responsibility for providing/arranging transport until such time as it is deemed safe to transport the child.

8. TRANSPORT OPERATION

The responsibility for arranging and commissioning the vehicles and routes for the provided transport is undertaken centrally by the Authority's Environmental Direct Services. All vehicles and staff, including those provided in-house as well as by private contractors, will be required to comply with industry and legislative standards. These include compliance with staff and vehicle checks and the provision of appropriate training.

Risk assessments of routes and pick-up points will be undertaken as necessary based on the needs of the children on the route. Amendments to routes may be made throughout the year for a variety of reasons – for example to accommodate new pupils. It is not appropriate for parents/carers to attempt to negotiate or instruct changes to routes directly with the drivers or escorts. Any changes in circumstances that may warrant a review of the route or pick up time must be provided to the Transport Section.

9. PROVISION OF ESCORTS ON TRANSPORT

Assessments of a pupil's Travel Assistance needs will include consideration of whether an escort is required to travel with the child. Given the variation in pupils' ages and needs, not all vehicles will require an escort.

Escorts will be provided on vehicles that provide transport for vulnerable pupils to safeguard the safety and well-being of passengers. Where possible, escorts will be recruited and trained by the Council. However, where necessary the Authority will supplement its own staff with escorts provided through an agency or by private contractors. The contracts will require those escorts to conform to the same equalities, health and safety and training requirements as its own employees. All escorts are required to undergo screening by the Criminal Records Bureau for past criminal convictions and will be subject to any changes in the legislation regarding safe recruitment.

In some circumstances when an individual pupil is being transported, the Authority and parent may consider it appropriate for the parent to accompany their child, at no cost to the Council.

Where possible, to provide stability and promote their understanding of the pupils' needs, an individual escort will be assigned to a particular route.

There will be occasions e.g. due to illness, when it will be necessary to assign another escort and all efforts will be made to provide consistent alternatives.

The Authority will also, where possible and appropriate, enlist the support of the schools and support services in providing suitable training for escorts.

10. APPEALS

The Authority will consider applications for exceptions from this policy on the merits of each individual case and would encourage parents and carers to discuss issues informally in the first instance as the Council anticipates that it will be possible to resolve the majority of issues in this way. Where the issues remain, parents of pupils who have been refused travel assistance or who are unhappy about type of travel assistance offered, can appeal against the decision using the two stage appeals procedures, the second stage of which will include a Member led Appeals Panel.

11. COMPLAINTS

Where there are concerns or complaints about the day-to-day operation of the transport service, parents and carers are advised to contact Environmental Direct Services (Transport Co-ordination). For other SEN issues, such as decisions regarding the type of assistance or the refusal of transport, parents/carers must contact the Special Educational Needs Service at the Civic Centre.

The Authority is committed to providing a high-quality service. To support the process of continuous review, Focus groups made up of those involved in the use and provision of transport will be set up to meet regularly to develop and improve the service and to identify and try to resolve issues of concern.

Parents/Carers will be asked to sign a contract which outlines arrangements and service standards to be provided to their child. The contract will also set out the commitments and conduct expected of parents/carers.

12. PUPILS WITH TEMPORARY MOBILITY OR MEDICAL NEEDS

There may be cases where a child or young person who would normally walk to school or travel on free public transport has an accident or suffers from a medical condition which causes them to require alternative or additional transport assistance; e.g. pupils with a temporary or intermittent disability or medical condition which makes walking or travelling by public transport inappropriate. In such cases the Authority will provide transport assistance where it is satisfied that the pupil's parent/carer is unable to make arrangements for the pupil to be taken to school.

Any such application for transport assistance will need to be supported by confirmation of the disability or medical condition from a Consultant Physician. The Authority will not normally accept a letter from a G.P. The provision of travel assistance will be time-limited, based on the nature and duration of the pupil's condition.

13. PUPILS WITH TEMPORARY MOBILITY OR MEDICAL NEEDS

This policy will be reviewed annually.

SCHOOL TRAVEL ASSISTANCE POLICY - APPENDIX A

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR SCHOOL TRAVEL ASSISTANCE

1. Decisions and Types of Travel Assistance

1.1 Decisions on travel assistance

Pupils may be entitled to have access to Authority provided transport in accordance with the statutory guidance definition of eligibility on the basis of an assessment of their individual needs. Where a pupil has a statement of Special Educational Needs, decisions on entitlement to transport assistance will be taken at the time the school placement is agreed. Consideration will be given as to whether the pupil is able to access free public transport, supervised or unaccompanied; is able walk to a designated pick up point if public transport is not appropriate; or needs to be collected from home.

1.2 Assistance with travel may be provided in the following ways:

- An additional travel pass for a parent/carer to accompany a child to school on public transport.
- Reimbursement of journeys made to school by public transport not covered by free travel or Oyster card.
- Provision of escorted walking route to school.
- Provision of escort/travel buddy to assist in mobility training on public transport.
- Reimbursement of fuel based on mileage claims submitted by parents/carers from agreed Hounslow addresses to the child's school.
- Provision of a seat on a vehicle from a pick-up point, other than their home, for mornings, afternoons, on certain days of the week; every day of the week. (*Arrangements must be confirmed in advance.*)
- Provision of a seat on a vehicle from home to school mornings, afternoons, on certain days of week; every day of week. (*Arrangements must be confirmed in advance.*)
- Reimbursement of taxi costs. (*Arranged by prior agreement with parent/carer.*)
- Combinations of the above arrangements.
- Travel training for pupils as appropriate by adults who meet expected standards of training and have been approved in that role by the Authority.

2. Assessment of Level of Need

All children undergoing a statutory assessment should have a needs-based assessment for entitlement to transport and, where appropriate, their suitability for public transport. The assessment of transport need is based on the information supplied for the statutory assessment and on information provided by the parent or carer when they request travel assistance. In order to assess the level of need the Authority requires that parents and carers provide relevant and factual information to inform the decision on the type of travel assistance and the support required on the journey to school. Parents/Carers of children who do not have a statement of SEN but who meet the eligibility criteria will be required to provide the necessary medical or other information to inform an assessment of need.

3. Eligibility

Assessment of eligibility is based on the criteria set out in Section 6 of the Travel Assistance Policy. Parents are invited to provide information on their view of the child's needs as part of the assessment. They may also need to provide further information on their child's levels of independence and, where appropriate, any factors relevant to their own ability to support their child in their request for travel assistance. Other advice provided for the Statutory or other assessments is considered and additional Medical and or specialist advice sought if necessary. To facilitate speedy decision making, parents and carers are also invited to provide evidence of their higher rate mobility component of the DLA (Disability Living Allowance) but are under no obligation to do so.

Consideration of pupil needs includes:

3.1 Severe Learning Difficulties and Complex Medical Difficulties:

- Does the pupil have learning difficulties, medical conditions or a disability, which would result in the walk to school causing the child undue fatigue, distress, discomfort or pain?
- Can the pupil access public transport safely? (This includes walking to the bus stop/station and mounting/dismounting the vehicle.).

3.2 Physical/medical disability:

- Does the pupil have a medical condition or disability that would result in the walk to school causing the child undue fatigue, distress, discomfort or pain?
- Can the child access public transport without undue fatigue, distress, discomfort or pain? (This includes walking to the bus stop/station and mounting/dismounting the vehicle.)

3.3 Other learning difficulties, social and communication and behavioural difficulties:

- Do the pupil's difficulties result in the walk to school being unsafe?
- Would the walk be considered safe if the pupil was accompanied/supervised?
- Can the pupil access public transport without undue difficulties? (This includes walking to/from the bus stop/station and mounting/dismounting the vehicle.)

3.4 Sensory impairment:

- Does the pupil's profound hearing loss or visual impairment make them unable to walk safely
- Would the walk be considered safe if the pupil was accompanied/supervised?
- Can the pupil access public transport without undue fatigue, distress, discomfort or pain? (This includes walking to the bus stop/station and mounting/dismounting the vehicle.)

4. **Assessment of escort requirement**

An assessment of the child's need to travel with an escort on the journey should be undertaken in conjunction with the assessment of transport need and will be based on the pupil's requirement for supervision/support and the transport arrangements. For example, a secondary aged pupil with a physical disability may not require an escort if she/he is able to enter and leave the vehicle without assistance. Only in exceptional circumstances would an escort be assigned to an individual child. For example, a pupil with medical needs e.g. a tracheotomy where constant supervision is required.

5. **Assessment of distance**

In calculating distances the route from front-gate or communal front entrance, using the shortest available route, is measured. Pupils are not expected to walk unreasonable distances to a pick up point when they qualify for borough-provided transport. There is no duty on the Authority to provide door-to-door transport. The Local Authority considers that up to half a mile is a reasonable distance for the majority of pupils but each case will be looked at individually

in relation to the pupil's specific needs. Distances are calculated using an independent online route planner.

6. Safety and Supervision

The safety of pupils is of utmost importance and the Authority aims to work in partnership with parents and carers and all those involved with the pupil to ensure they are safe.

If a pupil is required to attend specialist provision, lives within the qualifying distance, and is assessed as not eligible for alternative or additional transport on needs grounds, the Authority transport is not normally provided unless the measured route between home and school is considered to be unsafe as a walking route, and the next shortest safe route is outside the agreed distance and cannot safely and reasonably be accessed using free public transport. In determining whether routes are safe the Authority pays regard to DCSF statutory guidance, The Local Authority Road Safety Officers Association guidelines and relevant case law. In assessing the safety of a route, in an individual child's case, the Authority makes a reasonable expectation that parents/carers will accompany their child to school or a designated pick up point as necessary in accordance with their statutory duty.

Decisions in respect of Travel assistance are made on the basis of the pupil's needs and whilst any relevant factors which impact on parents/carers' ability to support their children are taken into consideration, the provision of transport assistance cannot be considered solely on the basis of any difficulties experienced by the parent/carer.

However, there are some circumstances in which the circumstances of the parent/carer may inform the Authority's decision:

- (a) Where a pupil does not meet the needs criteria but is required to attend specialist provision which is within the qualifying distance but which they cannot reasonably and safely access walking or unaccompanied on free public transport, the Authority acknowledges that there may be exceptional circumstances which prevent parents/carers from accompanying their child to school. This may be as a result of disability, medical or other limiting reasons. In such cases parents/carers may need to provide medical or other supporting evidence with their application for travel assistance.
- (b) The Authority acknowledges that parents/carers may have other children to take to school. This is not usually seen as a valid reason for being unable to accompany a child with special needs, but account will be taken of the school locations, pick up times and children's ages and needs, and whether there are other adults in the household/family who could assist in taking the children to school. In some cases it may be appropriate to arrange for the pick up point to be at the school attended by a sibling.

- (c) Where parents have existing work commitments this may be taken into consideration when assessing whether a parent is available to accompany their child. It is normally considered a parent's responsibility to balance the demands of work and child-care and make suitable arrangements.

It is important to note that the Local Authority reserves the right to exercise its discretion in considering submissions from parents, and it cannot be assumed that alternative or additional transport assistance will be agreed for cases falling within the above categories.

Risk assessments of walking routes, pick-up points and travel arrangements will be undertaken where necessary and reviewed in light of changed circumstances and pupil's increasing maturity and development.

7. Review of Arrangements

Where the Authority makes a decision to agree travel assistance, the provision is usually agreed for one year initially, or less in the case of pupils who qualify for temporary assistance, and is subject to review unless there are exceptional circumstances where alternative durations may be agreed. Where a pupil has a statement of SEN, consideration of the need for, and type of, travel assistance will be given at the annual review as is the case with other aspects of support.

Where a pupil changes school or moves home, the travel assistance will be reviewed in light of the new circumstances.

Parents/carers will have the right of appeal where the decision is made to cease transport assistance or changes are made to the type of assistance provided. There will be no right of appeal where there have been necessary changes to routes, e.g. the addition/removal of a pupil, which have minimal impact on the quality or nature of service provided to individual pupils.

NOTES

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