



**London Borough
of Hounslow**

Policy for Provision of Travel Assistance for Children aged 5 - 16

February 2020

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1. INTRODUCTION

This document sets out the London Borough of Hounslow's policy in respect of its statutory duties in relation to the provision of Home to School travel assistance for children and young people attending schools and colleges.

The Council's approach to providing travel assistance is to promote independence and allow children to reach their full potential. By working in partnership with parents, children and young people, schools and the voluntary sector, we hope to secure the right option for each child, so they are better prepared to enter adulthood confidently as active participants in society.

In most cases, this will be achieved by children and young people walking, cycling or accessing public transport to school, where necessary accompanied by a parent/carer.

The Council expects parents and carers to take responsibility for the travel arrangements for children and young people by either walking to school or accessing free travel on public buses. This includes supervising or arranging for them to be supervised where necessary. We also expect parents and carers to be supportive of arrangements the Council puts in place to increase a child's independence through independent travel training where this is appropriate (for more information see Appendix 1 section 4).

The Travel Assistance Policy sets out how the Council will help the small number of children and young people for whom the above modes of assistance are not suitable.

This Policy only applies to children and young people who are residents of the London Borough of Hounslow and defines travel from the pupil's main home address and school.

Travel assistance is based on need, as opposed to parental preference. The Council will make an assessment of eligibility and deliver assistance to those eligible based on the most sustainable, efficient and cost-effective use of the Council's resources.

Where arranged transport is provided, the Council will expect parents/carers to take and collect their child to/from a designated pick up/drop off point. In some cases, collection will be from the home address. References to "Home to School" within this document, should be taken to mean either "Pick up Point" or "Home".

In formulating this policy, the Council has considered the statutory legal framework including the Department for Education's Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (January 2015) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25> and Home to School Travel and Transport Guidance (July 2014) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/home-to-school-travel-and-transport-guidance>

This policy sets out the arrangements for meeting the Authority's statutory duty to make such suitable free travel arrangements for eligible children and young people as it considers necessary.

Throughout this document the term 'child' should be taken to mean a child or young person.

2. LEGAL AND STATUTORY DUTIES

Parents/carers are responsible for ensuring that their children attend school regularly. However, under the Education Act 1996 and the Education and Inspections Act 2006, Local Authorities have a duty to provide free assistance with travel to and from qualifying schools/colleges for eligible 5-16 in certain circumstances.

There is no statutory duty on the Council to provide travel assistance for children who are not of compulsory school age.

Under s508B of the Education Act 1996, Local Authorities must provide such travel arrangements as they consider necessary to get an eligible child to their “relevant educational establishment”. Travel arrangements for an eligible child must, under s508B be free of charge and may not require service users to incur extra costs.

Free travel for eligible children does not mean that the transport must be arranged by the Council if “suitable” transport has already been arranged by others. It is expected that the provision of free bus services by Transport for London (TfL) will meet the need for travel assistance in almost all cases.

The provision of travel assistance by the Council will be based on the individual needs and circumstances of the child. Where eligible and the free public transport is not suitable, assistance will be delivered with due regard to the efficient use of the Council’s resources.

Statutory walking distances will apply when assessing eligibility. Where these do apply, the distances which are considered to be excessive for children to walk to school are as below:

- Over 2 miles for children aged 5, 6 and 7
- Over 3 miles for children aged 8-16

There is an additional entitlement to free home-to-school travel assistance for children from low income families – those entitled to free school meals or whose parents are in receipt of the maximum working tax credit:

In these circumstances, the following scenarios will warrant free home to school travel assistance:

- Where the nearest suitable school is beyond 2 miles (for children over the age of 8 and under 11);
- Where the school is between 2 and 6 miles (if aged 11-16 and there are not three or more suitable nearer schools);
- Where the school is between 2 and 15 miles and is the nearest school preferred on the grounds of religion or belief (aged 11-16).

Distances are measured based on the shortest route along which a child may walk in reasonable safety. It may include footpaths as well as roads if these are well lit, are of reasonable width and are in good condition.

3. ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility for travel assistance is based **only** on the child's **needs** and only those children of compulsory school age are eligible to apply. Family circumstances such as parents and carers attending work, further education or who have responsibility for other children, will not be considered when determining eligibility.

With regard to exceptional circumstances any decision to offer support rests with the Council.

It is important to note that having an EHCP does not automatically result in a child being entitled to travel assistance.

3.1 An eligible child is defined by one or more of the following criteria:

- a) A child with a special educational needs, disability or mobility issues who lives within statutory walking distance, but who could not be reasonably expected to walk or use public transport, even if accompanied, because of their related SEN or disability.
- b) A child who cannot reasonably be expected to walk because the nature of the route is deemed unsafe. The general expectation is that a child will be accompanied by a parent/carer where necessary, unless there is nobody for whom it would be reasonable to accompany the child, or it is not reasonable to expect the parent to do so.
- c) A child who needs to travel beyond the statutory walking distance to attend their nearest suitable school (refer to section 2).
- d) A child from a low-income family and where the walking distance falls within the guidance (refer to section 2)

Any future changes in Government policy or legislation will be taken into consideration when assessing eligibility.

3.2 When assessing eligibility and suitable assistance, the Council will also take into consideration:

- a) The need for specialist transport e.g. physical or medical disability that makes it impossible to use public transport.
- b) Whether a child is deemed to be vulnerable and at risk of danger if they use public or other transport, which is associated with their SEN or disability.
- c) The potential capability of a child to travel independently, with suitable Travel Training.
- d) Children who have a temporary mobility problem, caused by a medical condition that prevents them from walking (consultant evidence will be required and travel assistance, if provided, will be time limited)

Other individual circumstance may be taken into account based on the child's needs.

3.3 A child will not be eligible, and the Council will therefore not usually have a duty to provide travel assistance:

- a) When a child lives within the statutory walking distance, unless sections 3.1 a) and 3.2 a) apply.
- b) Where the journey would be made safe in the cases of c) of 3.2 if accompanied, the expectation being the parent/carer will accompany or make arrangements for the child to be supervised if reasonable to do so
- c) When parents/carers have decided to send their child to a school that is further away than the school(s) the Council has deemed suitable and available to meet the needs of the child. In these circumstances, parents/carers will be expected to fund and make their own travel arrangements.
- d) If the child moves to an address outside of the Borough responsibility for travel assistance will revert to the new Local Authority where the family reside.
- e) Where there is a dual/linked placement (see Appendix 1, section 5) which requires additional transport or a change to regular timings, the school where the pupil is on role will be responsible for assisting with travel.

Also refer to Appx 1, Section 2.

4. TYPES OF TRAVEL ASSISTANCE:

The types of travel assistance offered to eligible children include:

- Funding of an oyster/travel card, where appropriate
- Independent Travel Training
- Walking Attendant / Travel Buddy
- Re-imbusement of a mileage allowance
- Personal transport budgets where parents/carers take full responsibility for getting their child to/from school
- A seat on a suitable vehicle arranged by the Council from an agreed pick up point
- Other types of travel assistance deemed appropriate, including consideration of more flexible options or creative solutions

5. APPLYING FOR TRAVEL ASSISTANCE

5.1 When applying for School Travel Assistance:

- If you believe your child is eligible, an application must be completed and returned. Further details can be obtained by e-mailing: schooltravelassistance@hounslow.gov.uk or phoning 020 8583 4177.
- Applications will be considered on their individual merits, in line with this policy. Refer to Additional Information, Appendix 1, Section 1 for information considered as part of the assessment when determining eligibility.
- It may be necessary to seek further clarification from parents/carers.
- Eligibility for Travel Assistance will be made by an Assessor in the School Travel Assistance Team based on the information and evidence provided by parents/carers and will be considered:
 - Firstly, to determine eligibility
 - Secondly, if eligible, to determine what type of travel assistance should be offered
 - The Assessor will aim to advise parents/carers of the outcome of the assessment within 14 working days of receipt of their application.
 - If travel assistance is approved, it is done so for an agreed period of time. Parent/carers will be required to re-apply when prompted to do so by the School Travel Assistance Team.
- Parents/carers will be required to re-apply if their circumstances change e.g. moving address, a change of school etc
- It is important for parents/carers to note that a failure to meet an application deadline will result in transport not being in place for the commencement of the school year, possibly not for several weeks. The Council will consider any reasons submitted for the delay; however, during this period parent/carers will be responsible for ensuring appropriate arrangements are in place for transporting their child to/from school.

The Council's Reviews & Appeals Process can be found at www.hounslow.gov.uk/schooltravel

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

1. EVIDENCE AND INFORMATION USED TO ASSESS APPLICATIONS FOR TRAVEL ASSISTANCE

- The EHCP and Annual Review reports.
- Relevant professional reports e.g. occupational therapists and physiotherapists
- Information regarding the nature and reasonableness of the route e.g. journey times, bus changes, safety of the route etc
- Information from Social Care or Early Help assessments, if appropriate
- Information submitted by parents/carers during the application process
- Travel Training Plans/assessments in relation to Independent Travel Training.
- Evidence from hospital consultants (not GP) – if parents/carers indicate they are medically unfit to take their child to school.
- Further clarification where required.

2. WHAT IS NOT COVERED BY SCHOOL TRAVEL ASSISTANCE

The School Travel Assistance Policy applies to home to school provision for eligible full-time children at the normal start and end times of the school day. Responsibility for transporting the child falls to parents/carers in the following circumstances, but is not limited to:

- Where arrangements are made which take the child out of the normal or planned school day e.g. part-time attendance or early finishing for any reason.
- Collection from school due to illness
- Parental attendance at meetings
- Travel to or from extended hours, school clubs and trips
- Medical appointments
- Visits to other schools or locations (including school trips)

3. CHANGES IN TRAVEL ASSISTANCE

Travel assistance may be subject to changes in provision, including whether assistance continues to be provided or the way in which it is provided e.g.

- Meeting transport at a pick-up point, as opposed to being picked up and dropped off at home.
- The removal of the attendant
- Parents/carers or suitable family member accompanying their child³ (at no cost to the Council)
- Change in the type of transport e.g. on a shared vehicle, as opposed to travelling on their own.
- Referral for Independent Travel Training
- Offer of a re-imbusement, mileage, personal transport budget, oyster card or similar.

4. EDUCATIONAL RESIDENTIAL PLACEMENTS

Where children attend a residential placement:

- Parents/carers will be encouraged to make their own travel arrangements and may be supported by a reimbursement.
- The number of journeys funded will be in line with the school contract for the placement (e.g. termly).
- Parents/Carers who wish their child to return home more frequently will be responsible for arranging and funding transport for these journeys.
- No additional assistance will be offered for parents to attend open days, review meetings or similar events at the school.
- Parents/carers will be expected to accompany their child (at no cost to the Council) if it is deemed a chaperone is required³
- If a vehicle is provided it will have reasonable, but limited space for luggage.
- The Council will not incur additional expense to provide a larger or additional vehicle to transport extra luggage/items.

5. DUAL ROLE / LINKED PLACEMENT

The school where the pupil is on role is responsible for paying any additional transport costs, where a pupil:

- attends more than one school
- the school arranges a linked placement, resulting in:
 - additional transport
 - a change to the regular timings
 - a requirement for transport in the middle of the school day.

The Council may consider assistance at its discretion on a case by case basis.

6. SUPPORTING INDEPENDENT TRAVEL

Travelling is an essential life skill. The Council's aim is for our young people to become safe and independent travellers, where possible. Hounslow's Travel Training Project has successfully supported many children / young people to become independent travellers.

Travel training offers 1-1 person-centred travel training to students with Special Educational Needs from the age of 11 upwards who have been assessed by the Travel Training Team as having the ability to travel train.

The Council's travel training provider works with each student for as long as is necessary for them to be able to undertake their journey independently to/from home to school and includes:

- Learning a route
- Road safety
- Asking for help
- Problem solving
- Stranger awareness

The Travel Training Team work closely with parents, carers and schools/colleges throughout the training, ensuring everyone is informed, consulted and comfortable with what is happening.

Once the student is trained to travel independently, the travel training team continue to be involved with the child to ensure that they remain safe on their journey. Additional support and training are given if the travel training team think additional support is necessary.

In determining whether a child may be suitable for ITT, we look at their needs according to their EHCP, a travel planner (who has travel training accreditation) will meet with the families/young people and carries out assessments of suitability and develops a travel plan. This helps inform decisions for those children/young people where it is not easy to ascertain their suitability just from the paperwork. We also liaise with schools and other professionals for views.

If the Council considers that travel training will facilitate a child's attendance at school and makes an offer regarding this, it is expected that parents / carers will engage and participate in the process to enable the training to take place and the Council to discharge the offer of assistance made. Similarly, if after a period of travel training, the child is able to travel independently to school, it is expected that parents / carers will support this.

Support with interim travel assistance will be provided to facilitate travel to and from school up until training commences and on required days during training. This interim support is provided subject to parents/carers engaging with the LA to enable the training to take place

If eligible and you have not been approached yet regarding Independent Travel Training for your child, this can be discussed as part of the EHCP review or speak to the School Travel Assistance Team at any time.

7. PICK UP AND DROP OFF ARRANGEMENTS

Most children will be allocated a pick-up point for collection and drop off. Home pick-ups will only be agreed in exceptional circumstances. Pick up points will be reviewed from time to time and can be subject to change.

Parents/carers are responsible for bringing their child to and collecting them from the vehicle, whether this is from home or a pick-up point. Drivers and Attendants will not leave the vehicle to collect and return children to/from front doors.

If parents believe it is safe for their child to make their own way to/from the vehicle, an instruction must be made in writing to the Transport Co-ordination Team to allow this. The Council will only take responsibility for children when they are on the vehicle. Parents/carers are responsible for ensuring their child's safety prior to boarding and after alighting from the vehicle.

The Driver and Attendant will not leave your child with any person who states they are there to collect them from transport. Parents/carers must inform the Transport Co-ordination Team (not the Driver or Attendant) if an alternative person will be collecting their child.

When allocating pick up and drop off times for pupils they are based on the most efficient route. Planning the routes to run efficiently and keeping travel times to a minimum is a priority. Therefore, it is not possible to take family circumstances into consideration when allocating these times.

Parents/carers are given an approximate pick up and drop off time for their child, which is subject to change for various reasons throughout the school year. This could include children/young people being added/removed, route efficiency, traffic, road works etc.

Parents/carers are expected to have their child ready on time for collection and be there on time at the end of the day for collection from transport. It is understood that on rare occasions circumstances may arise which are out of a parent/carer's control which mean the child is not ready on time. On such occasions, the vehicle may wait up to 5 minutes past the scheduled pickup time in the morning.

Should parents/carers be consistently late, including collecting from the vehicle in the afternoon, then travel assistance may be removed, either temporarily or permanently, depending on the seriousness of the delays and reasons. Should parents/carers not be there at the end of the day and the Transport Team are unable to make contact, social care will be contacted, and the child taken to a place of safety. If no provision is available, the only option may be to take the child to the nearest Police Station. Parents/carers will be responsible for collecting their child from where they have been taken to.

8. APPOINTMENTS AND ABSENCES

At least 24 hours' notice must be given to the Transport co-ordination team (not the Driver or Attendant) when a pupil has a prior appointment and will not be on transport.

If transport is not cancelled with 24 hours' notice there is a cost to the Council.

If absence is due to sickness it is required that the Transport Co-ordination Team is provided with 24 hours' notice of the child returning.

9. BEHAVIOUR

Respect should be shown to Council staff by service users (children/parents/carers). Verbal abuse and violence against Council staff will not be tolerated.

Children may be temporarily suspended from transport if allegations of unacceptable behaviour are received until a full investigation can be carried out, including collecting statements from any relevant parties. Concerns regarding behaviour which are not acceptable and could be of danger to the child and others, includes, but is not limited to:

- physical assaults
- fighting
- bullying
- abusing others
- spitting
- not wearing seatbelts
- not remaining in seats
- damaging the vehicle
- absconding from the vehicle

It is acknowledged that from time to time children may demonstrate challenging behaviour and the Council's Transport Co-ordination Team will work with parents/carers and schools to minimise risks. However, occasionally in more extreme cases where the child, other passengers, the Attendant, Driver or third parties have been or are at serious risk of harm the child may be suspended from transport until a risk assessment is carried out and, where possible, amendments to provision made.

In cases of physical assault, the child will be suspended immediately from transport, pending investigation, including obtaining written statements and further discussions with parents/carers and school.

In extreme circumstances or where risks cannot be reduced to an acceptable level, the Council will remove arranged travel assistance due to the Health & Safety risks of transporting the child. In these instances, and with prior agreement with the Council parents/carers will be offered a reimbursement/personal transport budget so that they can take responsibility for arranging suitable transport for their child. In order for travel assistance to continue, in certain circumstances, parents/carers could be asked to accompany their child or organise for another appropriate person to accompany them to/from school on arranged transport and no payment will be made to parents/carers for this.

During any periods of suspension, parents/carers are responsible for making appropriate arrangements to take their child to/from school. Temporary suspension of transport does not mean the Council is discharging its duty, but that the arranged transport, as a result of behavioural issues has had to be suspended or removed.

10. MEDICATION

Transport staff are responsible for the health and safety of pupils in their care, but do not administer medication. If parents/carers believe it is unsafe for their child to travel on transport without medication being administered, the School Travel Assistance team must be advised at the time of application or immediately if there is a change of circumstances.

In cases where there are complex medical needs, the Council will seek to provide appropriate support. Where it is not possible to provide suitable support parents/carers may be required to accompany their child on transport or arrange appropriate support (e.g. parent, relative, carer etc at no cost to the Council).

The Council's procedure is that emergency services will be called to deal with emergencies and parent/carers informed. It is for parents/carers to decide if they wish for their child to be transported under these circumstances.

11. SEVERE WEATHER

Transport will run unless parents/carers receive a text to advise otherwise. In the event that it is not possible for the vehicle to enter certain roads due to unsafe road conditions, parents/carers will need to determine whether they are able to meet the vehicle at an alternative pick up point (e.g. top of the road, main road etc). Should an alternative pick-up point be used in the morning, it will also be the drop off location in the afternoon.

If schools decide to close earlier than their scheduled finishing time or the weather deteriorates to an extent transport is despatched earlier, it will be necessary to return pupils home early. If it is not possible to make contact with parents/carers to ensure they will be there to pick up their child, they will be left at school and parents/carer will be responsible for collecting them.

12. CCTV & GPS

The Council may install CCTV with audio recording in its vehicles and, if so, will advise parents/carers on doing so. Any CCTV footage will not be shared or circulated with anyone outside of the Council but will be used to help improve outcomes of incidents or allegations.

Many vehicles currently operate with GPS.