

Home to educational establishment travel assistance

Guidance on walking to school routes

Free travel assistance to an educational establishment is provided to children and young people who attend their nearest qualifying school and who live more than the statutory walking distance from school. The statutory walking distance is two miles for children under eight years old and three miles for children aged eight years and over.

The law states that it is the responsibility of the parent/carer to ensure that a child is accompanied as necessary on the walking journey to school by a responsible adult.

In order to establish the nearest suitable school, the distance between home and school is measured using the Council's in-house digital mapping system: Geographical Information System, (GIS). This system measures along the footpath network between the pupil's home gate or drive to the nearest gate/entrance of the school grounds. The Council uses this measurement to assess each child/ young person's eligibility for travel assistance. Please note that some internet packages might show a different measurement, as they use the road network to measure distances.

In some instances, the shortest available walking route may be considered hazardous. In order to determine whether the route is deemed safe or unsuitable, a route assessment* will take place. The route will be walked by a member of the road safety team, starting from the home address to the school. The assessment of the route will always take place on a school day and at the same time a child would walk to or from school at the start or end of the normal school day. If there are road crossings to be made along the route, the assessment will include collection of traffic gap counts at these points. Where a route is of a rural nature and/or without footpath, traffic volume counts will be collected to establish the level of traffic using the route.

In this way the Council can get an accurate idea of the nature of the road. The Council also obtain statistical data, including road traffic accidents or fatalities, to get a full understanding of the route. If the Council finds that a section of the route is considered unsuitable, it can no longer be included as part of the statutory walking distance measurement.

If there is an alternative route to school avoiding the unsuitable section, the Council will measure the new route. If the new route measured from the home address to the school is further than the statutory walking distance, then travel assistance will be provided. However, if the new route is still less than the statutory walking distance free school travel assistance will not be provided.

*Assessments are restricted to examination of walking routes to the nearest school only. There is no requirement to assess the availability of walking routes to alternative schools where parents have expressed a preference for a particular school.

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For a route to be deemed suitable, the Council considers that any footpaths should be metalled or have a reasonably even and firm surface. In instances where the suitability of a path is in question, the final decision will rest with the Council. The route measured must be a route that a child or young person can walk with reasonable safety.

All walking routes are assessed in accordance with the Road Safety GB and Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, (RoSPA) guidelines, which assess the safety of routes and consider traffic and highways conditions. This is on the assumption that a pupil/student is accompanied by a responsible adult.

If we receive a request for a route to be assessed that has previously been walked and classified as non-hazardous for a child to walk accompanied as necessary, we will not re-assess it unless there has been a significant change to the route. A significant change includes, but is not limited to a change in road layout or speed limit change. Should an individual wish to appeal their case for eligibility based on the nature of the route assessed, they can request for their case to be heard through the published appeal process. Appellants should be aware that to challenge the nature of the route would require evidence that is equivalent to that of the Council's fully qualified Road Safety Officer who will submit evidence on behalf of the Council. Where this evidence is not available for the appeal committee to review, they will be unable to determine a decision which contents that of the Road Safety Officers recommendations.

The route assessment procedure

All walking routes are assessed in accordance with the Road Safety GB and RoSPA guidelines which consider the following principles:

- that each case is considered objectively on its own merits
- the child is accompanied as necessary by a responsible adult
- the potential risk created by traffic, highway and topographical conditions
- the existence of a footpath or roadside strip of reasonable width and condition, public footpath or bridleway (this will normally be assumed to provide an available route for that part of the journey)
- the existence of a verge, on a lightly trafficked or narrow road, which can be stepped on to by the child and accompanying person when vehicles are passing (it can normally be assumed to provide an available route and is what is referred to as a 'step-off')
- that the pedestrian will cross the road in order to use the footway or roadside strip
- where a footway isn't available, assessment of traffic flows and whether car drivers have enough time to slow down or pedestrians have time to step-off the road or verge
- where road crossings are necessary – the availability of any facility (e.g. central refuges, pedestrian crossings, traffic signals, etc.); and where no crossing facilities exist – assessment of the traffic speeds and flows, sight lines etc. (No crossing points can be deemed absolutely safe: the term used in the guidance is 'reasonable safety' which would make the walking route available)
- the road casualty records for the last three years.

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Details of the hazardous routes in Cheshire West and Chester can be found in the on the school and college travel assistance webpage: [CWAC route assessments deemed hazardous](#)

The assessment takes into account a range of factors. The fact that there is a high volume of fast-moving traffic is not in itself a reason to classify a route as hazardous; there may be a footpath and good crossing points along the route that would make the route available. Similarly, the lack of footpath or verge would not be a reason to deem a route hazardous if there were low volumes of traffic and good visibility.

A written record of the assessment will be produced for each route considered under the guidelines.

The assessment – summary

For a route to be classified as non-hazardous there needs to be:

- a continuous adequate footpath on roads which carry normal to heavy traffic
- Or**
- step-offs on roads which are lightly trafficked but have adequate sight lines to provide sufficient advance warning to drivers and pedestrians
- Or**
- on roads with low traffic flow, no step-offs, but sufficient good sight lines to provide adequate advance warning

And

If there is a need to cross a road, there must be:

- crossing facilities (zebra / pelican crossings)
- pedestrian phases at traffic signals (including necessary refuges)
- school crossing patrols
- pedestrian refuges

Or

- sufficient gaps in the traffic flow and sight lines to allow enough opportunity to cross safely (minimum of four opportunities in any five-minute period).

The following definitions are also used in the guidelines:

Footway - an adequate footway is defined as one that is “of adequate usable walking width for the circumstances”.

Step Off refers to the facility for pedestrians to be able to step clear of the roadway onto a reasonably even and firm surface. Such a "step-off" must be capable of being accessed quickly and easily by pedestrians who may be in charge of small children or prams/pushchairs.

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Visibility means: a. the horizontal distances of unobstructed vision when measured from the eye point of a driver (usually taken as being 1.05m from the road surface); b. the unobstructed distance a pedestrian can see from the point at which they have to cross the road or can see traffic when walking on the roadway; c. and the distance must be equal to, or greater than the appropriate minimum overall stopping distance as shown in the table in the Highway Code.

For further details of the assessment criteria or a request for a copy please visit the Road Safety GB website.

Hazardous routes are reviewed periodically. If the Council subsequently find that a route is no longer hazardous, the Council will give one term's notice that eligibility for travel assistance will cease.

When assessing walking routes, the Council do not take into account an individual's circumstances – e.g. personal availability to walk with a child/young person or the fact that younger children or prams may impede the walk

The Council does not take into account the following:

- parental finances
- local weather conditions – severe weather would be regarded as a reason for a pupil to be absent from school
- transient events – road closures, construction work, flooding
- lack of street lighting
- lack of pavement – the lack of a paved footpath is not necessarily a reason to deem a route hazardous
- the presence of uncut hedges
- difficult terrain/arduousness of the route – steep hills are not a hazard
- practicalities or time spent taken to walk the route.

Where parents have concerns around individual circumstances, they can ask for these to be considered through the Council's eligibility appeals procedure. For further information on eligibility appeals follow the link on the main school travel assistance webpage.