

## **Guidance notes to support the home to school travel assistance policy**

### **Travel assistance for children and young people with special educational needs, a disability (SEND) and/or mobility problems**

What parents/carers need to know

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## **Introduction**

Cheshire West and Chester Council 'the Council' provides travel assistance for children and young people in certain circumstances. This guidance sets out details of eligibility, the application process, mode of travel offered, useful contacts and if applicable, the contributory charges for children and young people. This document supports the Council's home to school travel assistance policy.

## **Eligibility**

### **1. Whose responsibility is it to get my child to school?**

It is the responsibility of the parent/carer to ensure that their child/children get to and from school at the appropriate time each day. Travel arrangements are an important consideration when parent/carers are making preferences. Parents/carers should think about how practical it is to choose a school which is not within walking distance, unless it is designated as the nearest qualifying school. It is the responsibility of the parent/carer to ensure home to school travel arrangements are in place.

Parents/carers are expected to accompany their children to and from school or make other suitable arrangements. A child will not normally be eligible solely because their parent or carer's work commitments or caring responsibilities mean they are unable to accompany the child themselves.

Some children or young people may be eligible for travel assistance if their SEND or mobility difficulty would make it difficult for them to walk to the nearest school, even when accompanied by an adult. The Council is required to provide travel assistance in these instances. However, a child remains the responsibility of the parent//carer until they arrive at school and once they leave school at the end of the school day.

### **2. Who is 'eligible' to receive free travel assistance?**

There are four main criteria for free travel assistance that a local authority has to consider. They are outlined below.

#### **Statutory walking distances eligibility**

To provide free travel assistance for pupils of compulsory school age (aged 5-16) if their nearest qualifying school is:

- beyond 2 miles (if below the age of 8) or
- beyond 3 miles (if aged between 8 and 16).

#### **Special educational needs, a disability or mobility problems eligibility**

To make travel assistance arrangements for children who cannot reasonably be expected to walk to their nearest qualifying school because of their mobility difficulties or because of associated health and safety issues related to their special educational

needs and/or disability\* (SEND), even if they were accompanied by a responsible adult. Eligibility for such children will be assessed on an individual basis in order to identify their particular travel assistance requirements.

\*As per schedule 35 of the Act, in section 6 of Education Act 2010 as follows: a person has a disability if they have (a) a physical or mental impairment, and (b) that impairment has a substantial long-term effect on the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Therefore, a chronic health condition (medical needs) may lead to eligibility under this definition.

Not all children with SEND or mobility difficulties will be provided with travel assistance. As assessment will be carried out to determine whether:

- the child is attending the nearest qualifying school, and
- the degree to which their SEND or mobility difficulty would prevent the child from walking to and from school, accompanied by a responsible adult, as necessary

An assessment will take into consideration the severity of the child's SEND or mobility difficulties and how this would impact on them walking to school. For children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), the information in the plan will be used as the basis for the assessment. For children with a disability or mobility condition where the Council does not hold this information, parents/carers will need to submit this with the application form. The following provides a list of possible information that could be submitted, ideally dated within the last 12 months:

- information provided by the parent that can be corroborated by another professional;
- information provided by any professionals involved in the child's care, for example, an educational psychologist or hospital consultant;
- information provided by the child's school;
- any relevant information in their individual Health Care Plan, if they have one.

Please note: this is not an exhaustive list and is meant as guidance only.

Below are some examples from the Department for Education's Statutory Guidance for Home to School Travel Assistance regarding assessments on SEND or mobility difficulties. They provide an outline as to how an assessment would be carried out to determine whether a child's needs would prevent them from walking to and from school.

*Child A is fourteen years old and has a disability that requires them to use crutches to walk. They need to take their time to ensure they are balanced. They attend their nearest suitable school. It is 1 mile from their home. The assessment determines that they could not reasonably be expected to walk to school due to how effort it would take for the child to use crutches for 1 mile to get to school. Child A is eligible for free travel to school.*

*Child B is eleven years old and has been diagnosed with a long-term medical condition which causes them to take a long time to recover after strenuous physical activity. They attend their nearest suitable school which is a short walk from their home. As the walk to school is only a short distance and has not been assessed as “strenuous physical activity”, Child B would not need to recover for a long time once they arrived at school. Child B is not eligible for free travel to school.*

*Child C is fifteen years old and is blind. They attend their nearest suitable school which is a short walk from their home. The local authority determines that they could reasonably be expected to walk to school if accompanied. Child C’s parent is a single parent with a disability. On review, the disability prevents the parent from safely accompanying the child on the route to school. The local authority considers the individual circumstances and decides it would not be reasonable to expect their parent to make arrangements for their journey to and from school. It decides to arrange free travel to school for Child C.*

*Child D is fourteen years old and is also blind. They attend their nearest suitable school which is a short walk from their home. The local authority determines that they could reasonably be expected to walk to school if accompanied. There is no good reason why Child D’s parent could not reasonably be expected to accompany them or make other arrangements for their journey to and from school. Child D is not eligible for free travel to school.*

### **Unsafe route eligibility**

To make travel arrangements for all children who cannot reasonably be expected to walk to their nearest qualifying school because the nature of the route is deemed unsafe to walk.

### **Extended right eligibility**

Extended rights are designed to support low-income families to exercise school choice. Until the end of the **2025/26 academic year**, a child is eligible for free travel to school if they meet one of the criteria below and they are eligible for free school meals (FSM).

- the child is aged 8-11 and lives more than 2 miles from the nearest primary school
- the child is aged between 11-16 and ‘the school’ is between 2 and 6 miles from the child’s home (provided there are not 3 or more nearer suitable qualifying schools)
- the child is aged between 11-16 and attending their nearest school preferred on the grounds of religion\*\* or belief\*\*, between 2 and 15 miles from home.

From the beginning of the 2026/27 academic year, all children from households in receipt of Universal Credit will be entitled to free school meals. There will be two categories of benefits-based free school meals:

- **Targeted FSM** for pupils who are in households in receipt of Universal Credit with annual household earnings of no more than £7400
- **Expanded FSM** for pupils who do not qualify for Targeted FSM, but who are in households receiving Universal Credit.

From the beginning of the **2026/27 academic year**, a child will be eligible for free travel if they meet one of the following criteria and are eligible for Targeted FSM.

- the child is aged 8-11 and lives more than 2 miles from the nearest primary school
- the child is aged between 11-16 and 'the school' is between 2 and 6 miles from the child's home (provided there are not 3 or more nearer suitable qualifying schools)
- the child is aged between 11-16 and attending their nearest school preferred on the grounds of religion\* or belief\*, between 2 and 15 miles from home.

The Council will use the Department for Education's FSM Eligibility Checking Service to determine whether a child is eligible for Targeted FSM and can therefore be considered for extended rights travel assistance.

\*For schools choices based on belief, evidence from the clergy may be needed if this is not already held on the School Admissions system.

## **19 to 25 year olds**

The Council must make such arrangements for the provision of travel assistance as they consider necessary, or as the Secretary of State may direct for:

- adult learners who are receiving education at an institution maintained or assisted by the Council and providing further education or within the further education sector;
- relevant young learners who are aged between 19 and 25, have an EHCP and are receiving education or training at institutions outside both the further education and education sectors where the Council has:
  - secured the provision of education or training at the institution and
  - the provision of boarding accommodation.

Travel assistance will be provided where a relevant young adult with an EHCP is attending the nearest educational establishment to their home address that is:

- over 3 miles away AND
- the relevant young learner would be unable to access existing transport opportunities, such as a college or public transport services OR

- there are no existing transport arrangements for the relevant young learner to access OR
- the educational establishment is within the 3 mile walking distance but due to the SEND or mobility difficulties, the relevant young learner is unable to walk the distance

Assessments for travel assistance will be based on the overall qualification achieved at the end of the study and not on the individual modules studied.

Further information about the travel assistance arrangements can be found in the Post 16 Policy.

### **3. What is defined as a 'nearest qualifying school'?**

A 'nearest qualifying school' is taken to mean a school or registered educational establishment with places available that provides education appropriate to the age, ability and aptitude of the child, and any SEND that the child may have.

Qualifying schools are:

- community, foundation or voluntary schools
- community or foundation special schools
- non-maintained special schools
- pupil referral unit
- maintained nursery schools
- city technology colleges (CTC), city colleges for the technology of the arts or academies, including free schools and university technical colleges
- for children with SEND, an independent school can also be a qualifying school where this is named on the child's EHCP, or it is the nearest of two or more schools named.

For pupils with an EHCP the nearest qualifying school is taken to mean the school deemed appropriate by the Council to meet the pupil's needs and which also offers the most efficient use of resources. This is the school named in Section I of the EHCP.

Where a local authority names a school in a child's EHCP and that school then decides to educate the child somewhere other than the school site, the school should ensure the child will be able to access that site. They should not expect the authority to transport the child there, (although the authority may choose to provide travel assistance where exceptional circumstances apply).

The Council only provides travel assistance to pupils attending their nearest qualifying school, subject to meeting the eligibility criteria mentioned above.

Please note that the nearest qualifying school with places available may not necessarily be the catchment school for the home address or the preferred school.

#### **4. What is a suitable school?**

A suitable school for school travel purposes is a qualifying school that is suitable for the child's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs they may have.

'Suitable school' does not mean the most suitable school for a child. Schools are able to meet a wide range of needs. The nearest secondary school to the home of a child of secondary school age, for example, will almost always be their nearest suitable school (provided it would be able to admit them).

Please note: the example above refers specifically to secondary schools but also applies to other qualifying schools, such as primary and special schools.

Whether a school offers a specific subject, specialism or certain exam board does not impact whether it is considered a more suitable school.

Where a child has an EHCP, the school named in the plan will normally be considered to be their nearest suitable school. The exception to this is where the school has been named in line with parental preference, on the understanding that parents are responsible for all travel arrangements and costs because there is a nearer school to the home address that is considered suitable.

#### **5. What do you mean by accompaniment?**

It is an expectation from the Department for Education that parents/carers accompany their children on the route to and from school where this is under the statutory walking distance. All primary-aged children are expected to be accompanied although it is at parental discretion for those children at the end of primary school phase. For children with SEND who are starting in secondary school and where those needs would not prevent them from walking the route to and from school, accompaniment may be appropriate to support them to learn the route to and from school.

A child will not normally be eligible for free travel to school on the grounds of their SEND or mobility problem, or on the grounds that the route is unsafe, if they would be able to walk to school if they were accompanied.

Reasons such as the parent's working pattern or having children attending more than one school, on their own, will not normally be considered good reasons for a parent being unable to accompany their child. These apply to many parents and, in most circumstances, it is reasonable to expect the parent to make suitable arrangements to fulfil their various responsibilities (for example, their responsibilities as an employee and as a parent.)

The Council should take into account whether the parent has a disability or mobility problem that would make it difficult for them to accompany their child on the route to and from school and make other suitable arrangements. These applications will be considered in a similar way to those for children with a disability. The Council would not

necessarily hold this information and therefore evidence of the disability or mobility difficult will be required with the application form. Travel assistance may be provided in these instances, if the child is attending the nearest qualifying school, and the information confirms it would be difficult for the parent to accompany their child.

## **6. What is compulsory school age?**

Compulsory school age begins at the start of the term following a child's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday. Young people can leave school on the last Friday in June of the academic year in which they are 16.

The raising of participation age (RPA) legislation requires all young people to stay in a designated learning environment or traineeship until the age of 18. Please refer to the Council's Post 16 transport policy statement for further details. The raising of participation age does not alter the considered compulsory school age for travel assistance eligibility purposes, which remains at 16.

## **7. What else do you consider when looking at eligibility?**

At the point when travel assistance eligibility is considered, the prospect of being able to secure a place in an alternative (usually nearer) school or educational establishment must be a real one.

For children without an EHCP but with a disability or mobility difficulty, this will be during the normal school admissions round when places are being allocated by the admissions team. The transport team will liaise with the admissions team at this point in order to determine availability of places and the prospect of being offered a place.

For children with an EHCP, the SEN Team will consult with schools to identify the nearest school to the home address that has a place available and is able to meet the needs of the child.

If a nearer school could have offered the child a place, this becomes the nearest school to the home address, even if parents/carers did not apply for the school place.

For further information, see section 13-15.

## **8. What if my child lives at two addresses?**

In the event that a family has separated, travel assistance will only be provided from one address. The assessment will be carried out from the address which was identified on the school preference form. In the event of a Court Order, a copy of the Court Order will be required for our legal team to review. However, the Court Order usually dictates the care arrangements for the child/ren and does not compel a council to provide travel assistance from both addresses. In the event that parents cannot provide one

nominated address, the address which is registered to receive the Child Benefit will be nominated by the Council.

## **9. Cheshire West and Chester's discretionary free travel assistance for learners with SEND**

There is no duty on councils to provide travel assistance in the following circumstances but Cheshire West and Chester Council decided to offer travel support for the following children.

### **0-4 year olds**

Free discretionary travel assistance will be provided in accordance with the eligibility criteria listed within the 'statutory free travel assistance' section above for 0-4 year olds with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) who are attending a nursery, special school or provision placed by the Council.

### **16 to 19 year olds**

The 16 to 19 travel assistance duty relates to young people of 'sixth form' age with special educational needs and/or disabilities aged up to 19.

The same eligibility criteria applies as to those relevant young learners aged 19-25. See the relevant section above for further information.

Families may wish to apply for a 16 to 19 bursary fund. The 16 to 19 bursary fund is a central government scheme set up to help 16 to 19 year olds continue in education, where they might otherwise struggle for financial reasons. It is made up of two parts: bursaries of up to £1,200 a year to the most vulnerable young people; and a discretionary fund for schools, colleges, academies, training providers to distribute to other students who face genuine barriers to participation, which could include transport costs.

The 16 to 19 bursary fund guide for providers, which sets out arrangements for the scheme, is available to download from the government's education website:

<https://www.gov.uk/1619-bursary-fund>

## **10. Who is eligible for travel assistance with a charge applied?**

The Council may offer travel assistance at a cost to the parent/carer where the child has been assessed as ineligible. See section 4 of the home to school travel assistance policy and section 17 of these guidance notes for further information.

### **Route assessment**

## **11. How do you measure the route to the nearest qualifying school or educational establishment?**

The measurement of the statutory walking distance to the nearest qualifying school is not necessarily the shortest distance by road. It is measured by the shortest available route, that is not classed as hazardous for a child to walk, accompanied as necessary by an appropriate adult.

Please note: private driveways/private roads are excluded from the measurement.

Additionally, hazardous routes are only considered when a child is attending the nearest qualifying school.

The Transport Commissioning Service uses a bespoke in-house digital GIS mapping system which identifies the shortest available walking route. The system's measurements can include a combination of footpaths, bridleways, other pathways, in addition to recognised roads. Measurements along roads will also be considered, even if there is no continuous footpath, as long as the route has not been classed as hazardous.

Measurements start from the pupil's home gate or end of drive nearest to the school to the nearest gate/entrance of the school grounds. The system takes into account routes that have been classified as hazardous routes and would therefore not expect any accompanied child/young person to walk along a route which has been deemed unsuitable on safety grounds.

Please note: some internet packages might show a different measurement as they may only use the road network to measure distances and take into account traffic and roadworks at the time of measurement.

Children may sometimes live a very similar distance from more than one school. Where the schools are within the statutory walking distance, the Council will determine which is the nearest by measuring the shortest walking route. Where the schools are beyond the walking distance, the Council will continue to measure the shortest available route, and these routes may use a combination of road networks, cycleways and footpaths - whichever would result in providing the shortest route available. The method for measuring these distances will vary depending on the various routes available.

The 2-mile limit for extended rights eligibility is measured in the same way described above as the statutory walking distances. However, routes that measure beyond the 6-mile upper limit and the 15-mile upper limit to a qualifying school preferred on grounds of religion or belief are measured along routes that are passable using a suitable motorised vehicle. In short, the upper limits are measured along driving routes.

Where it is considered that the route may be 'hazardous', an assessment of the route will be made. This would also include concerns about the safety of a walking route to a bus-stop. The exception to this is where an assessment already exists to show that the route is safe to walk. The Council would not reassess the walking route in this instance.

Further information about the calculation of distances and hazardous routes are to be found in Appendix four - Guidance on Walking to School routes. In instances where the suitability and safety of a walking route is in question, the final decision will rest with the council.

## **12. What about straight-line distance (as the crow flies)?**

For school admissions purposes, the Council uses straight-line measurements to determine the nearest school with a place available. Distance measurements for travel assistance purposes are calculated on the shortest available walking route up to 3 miles or driving route for distances over 3 miles. Therefore, the nearest school for admissions purposes and for travel assistance can be different.

The Council has developed a mapping tool that will be available for the academic year 26-27 for parents/carers to measure the distances to the nearest school for admissions purposes and then for travel assistance purposes. This can be used as a guide to help parents/carers make informed decisions about school placements.

### **Exceptional circumstances**

## **13. Is travel assistance offered to children in temporary residential circumstances?**

Requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis. For families in temporary accommodation as a result of becoming homeless, travel assistance may be provided for up to 56 days so that the children can continue to attend school. Thereafter, it is expected that a more permanent housing solution will have been found. In cases where this is proving challenging and the family has been relocated to dispersed temporary accommodation by the council, travel assistance may continue to be provided for up to 6 months. Families are expected to find a more permanent residence during this time and travel assistance will cease 6 months from the date they moved into the dispersed accommodation. These time periods are taken from the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

Once permanent accommodation has been found, the usual travel assistance policy will apply. Parents/carers may want to consider school placements and how a child will travel to and from school following their move into permanent accommodation.

## **14. Is travel assistance offered to children in the care of the local authority?**

The allocation of a school or educational establishment will be reviewed as part of the child/young person's regular care plan review, especially where a child has moved from one placement to another. Where a child has an EHCP, discussions between the social worker and the SEN Team will be required in order to determine the suitability of the school, including the travel time to and from new residential placement. The Council has a duty to consider travel time to and from a school when looking to secure or

maintain an educational placement and where this is felt to be excessive, it may be that a suitable school closer to the child's residential placement may be more appropriate. In the event that all professionals involved feel that maintaining the current educational placement would be in the child's best interests, travel arrangements will be made for the child to continue to attend the school.

Children who are in long-term foster placements or have been adopted, will be considered under school admissions as being a child in care. This provides the family with the opportunity to secure a placement at a preferred school. However, travel assistance will only be provided to the nearest qualifying school with a place available. An exception may be applied if the school has not been judged to be able to provide high quality support to its vulnerable pupils and this will prevent the child from making progress.

### **15. What if I live under the statutory walking distance but have exceptional circumstances?**

Travel assistance may be provided if parents/carers are able to demonstrate sufficient evidence of exceptional circumstances. Typically, parents/carers will need to submit an eligibility appeal for their case to be reviewed by an officer at a stage 1 appeal. The officer will consider the information provided to determine whether the circumstances experienced by the family are exceptional, i.e. would not typically impact other families.

When determining whether to offer travel support, consideration will not be given to:

- Parents/carers work or other commitments, such as having children at different schools
- Personal circumstances when considering drop off/collection points and times
- If a parent chooses to send their child to a school that is not the nearest suitable qualifying school to the home address
- A journey from one educational establishment to another, including for off-site training
- Induction days, transition timetables, taster days, open days or interviews
- Work experience
- Vocational placements at college for students aged 14-16 on roll at a school
- School trips (for journeys of this nature the organising school or institution will be responsible for travel arrangements)
- Dental, medical or hospital appointments, or other non-educational appointments
- Children taken ill during the day
- Children who are excluded during the day
- Examination timetables – travel will not be tailored to examination timetables; it will only be provided at the standard school start and finish times
- Out of hours clubs (breakfast or afterschool clubs, extra-curricular activities or other commitments outside of school hours.) For journeys of this nature parents/carers will be responsible for travel arrangements
- Where the child is attending respite care, or similar, care - requests for support to and from respite should be directed to Social Care within the Council's Children

and Family Service. In these instances, a travel solution will be the sole responsibility of the child or young person's parent/carer.

## **Application and appeal process**

### **16. How do I apply for travel assistance?**

#### **Travel assistance for pupils of compulsory school age and 0-4 years with an EHCP:**

The SEN team will have consulted with different schools to secure an appropriate placement for the child and this will be named in Section I of their EHCP. They will also carry out an eligibility assessment for travel assistance and will inform you parents/carers whether the child is eligible for travel assistance.

#### **Travel assistance for pupils of compulsory school age without an EHCP:**

For children who have SEND or mobility difficulties and do not have an EHCP, parents/carers will need to apply for travel assistance on the [Council's webpage](#). Additional information will be required to evidence any SEND or mobility difficulties as this will not already be known by the Council.

#### **Travel assistance for pupils over the age of 16**

Parents/carers or the young person themselves will need to apply for travel assistance. Each young person will have an annual re-assessment to determine whether continued support is required. Where appropriate, the young person may be directed to the Independent Travel Training programme to support the development of independence skills.

There is an exception to this. For those young people remaining at a special school for sixth form, where they have previously received free travel assistance, they will continue to receive the travel support until the young person leaves the school.

If the young person changes course or campus or starts a new course, a new application will be required. Travel assistance will only be offered to the nearest setting offering the course. Varieties in course content will not be considered as one placement being more suitable than another. The overall qualification (Level 1 in Hospitality, for example) forms the basis of the assessment.

#### **Travel assistance for pupils with medical needs aged 5-16:**

A medical needs travel assistance application form must be completed. The form is available on the [school and college transport webpage](#). It is the responsibility of the parent/carer to produce evidence of the medical condition in all cases. This is normally endorsed by the family doctor or consultant. Any charges from medical professionals with regards supplying the necessary information will not be reimbursed by the Council.

Annual application is required, with updated medical evidence.

Any travel assistance provided will automatically cease at the end of the academic year where an application has not been received.

### **17. What are the timescales for responding to applications and making the travel arrangements for eligible children?**

Travel assistance is only provided on the basis of a formal application submitted by, or on behalf of, the parent/carer or in the cases of children with an EHCP, where the SEN team have assessed the child as being eligible. If the application is successful, assistance is effective 10 working days from the date the child is assessed as eligible. Travel assistance will not normally be provided retrospectively i.e. reimbursement, unless the Council has taken longer than the 10 working days to assess a child as eligible and a further 10 working days to send a bus pass or allocate the child to an available seat on a vehicle. (20 working days in total). If proof of expenditure can be supplied, (i.e. receipts), then a reimbursement could be provided from day 21 from the date the application was received.

Where the application is for the following September and the child has an EHCP, applications can only be responded to once an educational setting has been named in Section I. This may cause delays to the timescales.

For compulsory school aged children starting a new establishment in September, or those remaining at a special school sixth form, the Transport Commissioning Service aim to have information about contracts with parents/carers in the summer term, to allow time to prepare for any changes and arrange meet and greets with the driving staff. For young people attending a college, and where application forms have been received before 30 June, the information will be sent out around mid-August.

Assessments regarding the safety of a particular walking route assume in each case that children are accompanied. Where necessary, therefore, it is the responsibility of the parents/carers to make the arrangements for their child to be accompanied to and from the school by another responsible person, if they themselves are available.

Peak workloads are between June and September. This may extend the timescales by which the teams are able to respond to applications.

### **18. If my application does not meet the eligibility criteria, can I pay for a seat on the school bus?**

Please register an interest for purchasing a spare seat from us here:

[Spare seats scheme | Cheshire West and Chester Council](#)

Following changes to legislation, (Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (PSVAR)), spare seats can only be offered on vehicles with more than 22 seats where the vehicles meet these requirements.

Spare seats will only be offered to parents/carers of ineligible children when all eligible children have been allocated a seat AND there is no existing commercial contract, such as a public bus. This is because the Council has made a commitment to support local businesses, including local transport providers.

When allocating a seat, we prioritise the following way:

- current spare seat holders and who have applied before 30 June
- pupils living in our area and previous pupils who have missed the above deadline
- pupils living outside the authority

There is a fixed charge for a spare seat which is £880 for the academic year. Where individual cases can demonstrate hardship, the charge will be £440 for the academic year. This can be paid in three termly or six half-termly instalments.

For compulsory school aged children, hardship will be determined using the extended rights criteria as mentioned above in section 2.

For pupils of post 16 age, hardship will be determined using the discretionary hardship assessment completed by the Council's benefits team. Support will only be provided where the college is not able to offer transport support.

Please note: the offer of a spare seat is for one academic year only, or until an eligible child requires that seat. Parents/carers will need to apply on an annual basis.

Please contact the school/college if the bus service is provided directly by them.

For further information, please see the 'Spare Seats' guidance notes.

### **19. Can I appeal against the eligibility decision if my application for travel assistance is refused?**

Yes. If the policy has not been applied correctly or there are exceptional circumstances be considered, parents/carers can ask for the case to be reviewed. For further details regarding the eligibility review process please visit the [school and college transport webpage](#) and see question 15 in this guidance to understand what does and does not fall under exceptional circumstances.

### **Hardship/low income**

### **20. What if I am on low income?**

### **For compulsory school age children (aged 5-16):**

From the beginning of the 2026/27 academic year, all children from households in receipt of Universal Credit will be entitled to free school meals. There will be two categories of benefits-based free school meals (FSM):

- Targeted FSM for pupils who are in households in receipt of Universal Credit with annual household earnings of no more than £7400
- Expanded FSM for pupils who do not qualify for Targeted FSM, but who are in households receiving Universal Credit.

From the beginning of the 2026/27 academic year, a child will be eligible for free travel if they meet one of the following criteria and are eligible for Targeted FSM.

If the child is not eligible for travel assistance, parents/carers can register for a spare seat, at a charge. Children receiving FSM will be offered a seat at a discounted price. Please see question 17 above for further information.

### **For non-compulsory school age children (aged 0-4 years and 16-19 years)**

The criterion for determining low-income for non-compulsory school age pupils is not prescribed, but the Council has developed a discretionary hardship assessment process in which it will take into account the whole household income and expenditure. This includes income that would usually be discounted, like Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIP). Applicants wishing to be considered for discretionary hardship will be expected to complete and submit a hardship application form to the Council's benefits team in order for their financial circumstances to be assessed. Where low income/hardship is determined a contributory hardship charge will be applied for the travel assistance offered.

### **Types of assistance offered**

#### **21. If I meet the necessary eligibility criteria, what form of travel assistance is my child likely to be offered?**

All arrangements for travel assistance which may be made under the Home to School Transport policy will be at the Council's discretion, taking account of the child/young person's needs and best value principles. These arrangements will take the form of:

- travel pass for use on public bus and rail transport
- independent travel training (ITT)
- cycle allowance
- travel pass for use on school and college contract services (bus)
- alternative/accessible vehicle (minibus/taxi)
- cash grant (mainstream students)

- personal travel budget (PTB for SEND students)

## **22. What if I disagree with the mode of assistance offered?**

The Council is responsible for making such travel arrangements as it considers necessary in order to facilitate a child's attendance at the relevant school. It also has a duty to consider the most sustainable travel options for all eligible children as well as considering whether the child will arrive to school in a 'fit state to learn'. If the arrangements are not suitable, a suitability appeal can be submitted to review the arrangements. Information will be required to support a review of the arrangements which would demonstrate why the current arrangements are not suitable. For further details please see the school and college transport webpage.

## **23. How does a personal travel budget (PTB) work?**

A PTB is available if the child is eligible for travel assistance for children and young people with an EHCP.

The PTB calculation is based on the distance between home and school for the days that the child attends. The distance is measured using the shortest route and each journey is calculated from home to school to home.

Payments are made from the Council directly into your designated bank account, in advance, on a termly basis. The PTB will be reviewed each year and it is unlikely that it will impact on any other benefits.

For further information about the PTB, see the Council's webpages.

## **24. Is training available to help my child travel independently?**

Yes. We are able to offer one-to-one training to eligible children and young people who have an EHCP to help them travel independently. Our team of specialist travel trainers develop an individual package of support to help teach skills which include: road safety; planning a journey; accessing buses and trains learning routes and landmarks; and what to do in an emergency.

For further information about this scheme please see the Council's webpages.

## **Questions once travel assistance is set up**

### **25. How will I know about the travel assistance arrangements?**

The Transport Commissioning Service will inform parents/carers about the travel assistance offered. Should the child need specialist equipment to travel, a risk assessment will be undertaken. Should the Council need to change the child's travel arrangements at any time, the service aim to provide parents/carers with as much notice as possible.

Wheelchair assessments will be carried out on all children who need to travel in their wheelchair to ensure that it can be safely secured in the vehicle and has been appropriately tested.

If there are any particular health requirements, such as carrying or requiring emergency medication whilst travelling, and/or a Health Care Plan, please advise the transport team as soon as possible so that we can ensure appropriate travel assistance is put in place.

Ensuring that the appropriate travel assistance is in place will cause delays in these instances and so the timescales above will not be met.

## **26. Will my child have a passenger assistant?**

Passenger assistants are not normally provided on vehicles. Drivers and operators are fully checked to make sure they meet all of our requirements, including having a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check, (formerly Criminal Records Check (CRB)). When considering whether a passenger assistant is necessary, the team will take account of:

- the young person's medical needs, particularly where rescue medication is required
- where an individual young person's needs create a clear danger or health and safety risk to themselves and other passengers on the vehicle
- where a passenger assistant is required to help manage the journey and support all passengers on the vehicle

Passenger assistants assigned to the vehicle will be provided with information about the child/ren. Prior to the commencement of the travel assistance, an introductory visit should be arranged with the driver and, if necessary, passenger assistant.

Parents/carers will be responsible for arranging the meet and greets and a time mutually convenient to both parties. This is an opportunity to make sure that they are fully aware of the child's SEND or medical condition and any strategies to help make the journey as safe and pleasant as possible. This may include a list of likes and dislikes and the issue of a reading book or listening to music.

## **27. How long will the journey take?**

The Council aims to keep the journey times as short as possible. Sometimes children have a longer journey time to reach a special school. The travel assistance used may not necessarily follow the most direct route because it may pick up other children along the way.

The Department for Education recommends the following travel times:

- 45 minutes for a primary aged child
- 75 minutes for a secondary aged child and older

Although the Transport Commissioning Service aim to keep to these guidelines, it is acknowledged that it may not always be achievable, especially where placements are further afield.

## **28. Where will my child be picked up and dropped off from?**

For children accessing a mainstream bus or contract, the Transport Commissioning Service will inform parents/carers of the pick-up and drop-off location as well as timings. This is usually a bus stop or other convenient place. This can be up to 1 mile from the home address. Parents/carers are responsible for their child until they are received onto school premises and once they leave the school premises at the end of the day.

For children with SEND or mobility difficulties using a smaller contract, the pick-up and drop-off location is usually the home address. Parents/carers are responsible for ensuring that the child is ready to board the vehicle in the morning. If the child is not ready for the vehicle, the driver can wait up to 5 minutes, thereafter, they can leave to collect other children on the route. It will then become the parent/carer's responsibility to ensure the child arrives at school. Drivers do not sound their horns to alert parents/carers of their arrival. Passenger assistants will not collect the child from the home, nor lift them into seats.

Parents/carers will be notified of an estimated time and drop-off point. The child will not be left on their own or in the care of anybody else without prior written permission. If parents/carers are not at the designated drop-off point, the driver will contact the Transport Commissioning Service who will then arrange for a place of safety under the guidance of children's social care.

## **29. What if the vehicle doesn't arrive?**

If the travel assistance does not arrive, please telephone the Transport Commissioning Service on 0300 123 7039. They will find out why there is a delay and may arrange for another vehicle to be sent. Any replacement vehicle will be staffed with drivers, and if necessary, passenger assistants with DBS clearance.

## **30. Can my child use the travel assistance to travel to and from short breaks/ respite placements and before and after school clubs?**

No. Travel assistance is provided specifically to meet the standard school start and finish times and therefore cannot be used for before and after school clubs. Travel assistance to short breaks/respite placements must be requested through the child's social worker and will be considered by the children and family's service.

### **31. Can my child eat and drink on the travel assistance vehicle?**

No. Eating and drinking is not permitted on vehicles. If the child has a medical condition which means they must eat regularly, please notify the SEN team/medical needs team of this in advance of the journey. It may require a risk assessment.

### **32. Can my child take equipment on the travel assistance vehicle?**

Additional equipment and bags will only be permitted if previously agreed with the Transport Commissioning Service and:

- there is enough room on the vehicle
- they can be stored safely and securely
- it does not incur any additional cost
- it does not inconvenience other passengers.

Other options should be considered first, such as whether the equipment is available at the school.

Please note: if the child does take additional equipment and bags to their school, the driver and/or passenger assistant will not be expected to carry them. They will not be responsible for any damage to the equipment either.

### **33. What if my child needs to take medication to their school?**

Medication should be stored in a sealed container and placed inside the child's bag. Should there be a requirement to administer medication during the journey to or from the school, parents/carers must provide written consent and a risk assessment will be undertaken by the Transport Commissioning Service prior to undertaking any administration of the medication. If the child has a Health Care Plan, please share any relevant information to assist in completing a risk assessment.

### **34. What if I need my child to be dropped off at a different address?**

Local authorities must make arrangements to enable a child to travel to school for the beginning of the school day, and to return home at the end of the school day. They are not required to make arrangements:

- for children to travel between institutions during the school day;
- to enable children to attend extra-curricular activities and other commitments outside school hours; or
- to enable children to get to and from before and after school childcare, whether formal (for example, a childminder) or informal (for example, a grandparent)

## Conditions of travel assistance

### **35. Are there any conditions I have to abide by when accepting travel assistance on behalf of my child?**

It is the obligation of parents/carers under education law to secure their children's safe travel to and from their school. Parents/carers are responsible for their children until they are received onto the school premises and after they leave.

Travel assistance is provided to and from school for children who qualify under the Home to School Travel Assistance policy. This on the basis that parents, children, schools, Council and transport operators have a shared responsibility for its safe and secure operation in the interests of all the parties. A number of considerations are set out below:

#### **Children's behaviour:**

The Council may suspend its provision of travel assistance or employ other sanctions, as it considers appropriate, in the case of any pupil or student whose behaviour during the journey to or from their school is not of an acceptable standard. This includes smoking or vaping on buses. In addition, schools can employ a number of sanctions ranging from detention to exclusion in order to deal with persistent misbehaviour on school transport.

If the child causes a disruption or jeopardises the safety of passengers or road users, we can change their travel assistance arrangements or suspend them from receiving travel assistance. It will then parents/carers responsibility to get the child to and from school.

If the child causes deliberate damage to a vehicle, parents/carers will be invoiced for the cost of repairs.

A child's SEND will always be taken into consideration before any suspension or sanctions are put in place.

#### **Parental responsibilities:**

It is the obligation of parents under education law to secure their children's safe travel to and from their school. Parents/carers are responsible for their children until they are received onto the educational establishment premises and after they leave.

Assessments regarding the safety of a particular walking route assume in each case that children are accompanied. It is therefore necessary for parents/carers to make arrangements for their child to be accompanied to and from the school by another responsible person, if they themselves cannot be available.

### **Council responsibilities:**

Travel assistance is effective from date the child was assessed as being eligible. The Transport Commissioning Service have 10 working days in which to send a bus pass out to parents/carers or allocate them to a vehicle. The Transport Commissioning Service are responsible for managing the contracts, including any complaints or safeguarding concerns on the vehicle. They may apply sanctions to the company for not meeting the requirements of the contract or terminate the contract completely should there be sufficient evidence to support this. The Service aims to communicate any termination with parents/carers, where time allows. This may be at short notice in some circumstances.

### **36. What happens if my child misbehaves whilst travelling?**

Travel assistance is provided to and from the school for pupils who qualify under the travel assistance policy on the basis that parents/carers, children, schools, Council and transport operators have a shared responsibility for its safe and secure operation in the interests of all the parties.

If the child causes a disruption or jeopardises the safety of passengers or road users, the Council can change their travel assistance arrangements, suspend them temporarily or offer alternative modes of travel assistance. If suspended, it will be the responsibility of the parents/carers to ensure their child attends school. Any SEND difficulties will be taken into consideration before any action is taken.

If the child causes deliberate damage to a vehicle, parents/carers will be invoiced for the cost of repairs.

### **Change of details or circumstances**

### **37. What if my child's home address changes?**

When parents/carers move house, it is important to consider how the child will get to and from school or whether to move the child to a nearer school. It is not the Council's responsibility to provide travel assistance to maintain an existing placement.

Parents/carers are required to inform the SEN team who will then review travel assistance eligibility. If the child remains eligible, then alternative travel arrangements will be made. The Transport Commissioning Service will advise parents/carers of the changes. If the child becomes ineligible for travel assistance following an assessment, parents/carers will need to make the arrangements to ensure the child attends school.

Where the child continues to be eligible for free travel assistance, the Transport Commissioning Service will look to allocate the child to an existing contract. They require at least 5 working days in order to do this. However, if an existing contract

cannot be found and it either requires a new contract or for the service to commission a larger vehicle, the team will need at least 10 working days' notice.

### **38. What if I need to cancel my child's travel assistance?**

If the child is unable to attend school or the travel assistance is no longer required, parents/carers will need to contact the Transport Commissioning Service as soon as possible by emailing [SENtransport@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:SENtransport@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

To recommence travel assistance, contact the Transport Commissioning Service providing at least 5 working days' notice.

## **Post 16**

### **39. What happens when my child reaches 16 years old?**

#### **Students aged 16 to 19 years:**

Travel assistance for students aged 16 to 19 with an EHCP to sixth form, college or other training provider will be considered during the transitional planning process undertaken during years 10 and 11.

The Council would expect to be consulted in the transitional planning process regarding travel provision and parents/carers are strongly advised to contact the Council to confirm that this has taken place.

Parents/carers will need to complete an application form for travel assistance on an annual basis once the child is over 16 (before the 30 June). The application will be assessed by the SEN team using the eligibility criteria in section two. The exceptions to this are as follows:

- The child is continuing to attend a special school sixth form OR
- The child started a 2 year course (such as A Levels) and will be continuing the same course. In these cases, a review of the suitability of the travel assistance will be undertaken and where appropriate, Independent Travel Training will be offered to support transition into work or Higher Education (University).

Please note: that any applications received after 30 June may not be processed in time for the start of the academic year and therefore parents/carers will need to consider making their own travel arrangements.

#### **Students aged 19 to 25 years:**

Parents/carers will need to complete an application form for travel assistance on an annual basis. The application will be assessed by the SEN team using the eligibility criteria in section two.

If the child is deemed eligible for travel assistance, and there are no other suitable travel assistance arrangements already in place, then the Council will provide it free of charge. Similarly to young people aged 16-19, applications will be required where there has been a change in course, college or campus. Where appropriate, Independent Travel Training will be offered to support transition into work.

#### **40. How do I apply for post 16 travel assistance?**

See the [Council's webpages](#) for further information. If the young person has an EHCP or disability, please apply via the SEND pathway. If the young person is applying for consideration on financial hardship, please follow that route.

#### **Further information**

- SEN team - telephone 0151 337 6505 or email [sendschooltravelassistance@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:sendschooltravelassistance@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)
- Transport commissioning service - telephone 0300 123 7039 or email [SENtransport@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:SENtransport@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)
- The Department for Education's website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education>