

Special Educational Needs Travel Assistance Policy July 2017

4.1 Introduction and Aims

This section of the policy sets out the Council's approach to the provision of funded home to school travel assistance for children of statutory school age and Post-16 students, who attend a local authority maintained school or academy and who have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

This policy aims to promote freedom and choice by

- encouraging independence and life skills development wherever possible, by providing independent travel training for children as appropriate
- enabling families to receive reimbursements for making travel arrangements for their own child as appropriate
- making the provision of transport a last resort for those that cannot access any other form of travel assistance safely and once other travel assistance options have been discounted

4.2 Eligibility

Children do not automatically qualify for travel assistance because they have an EHCP, although it is recognised that the child may face additional challenges in making the school journey.

To be eligible for travel assistance, the child must:

- live in the Borough of Southend-on-Sea
- be of statutory school age
- have an Education, Health and Care Plan
- be registered at a school named in the EHCP which is the nearest suitable school to the child's home address
- be unable to reasonably walk to school, even when accompanied by an adult, because of associated health and safety issues related to their special educational needs and/or their disability as defined by the Equality Act 2010

Unless there are specific circumstances as dealt with in other sections of this policy, the distance criteria for pupils with an EHCP are the same as for all other pupils. It will apply to the nearest appropriate mainstream school, learning resource base or special school as determined by the Council.

When parents request a placement for their child in a school of their choice which is not the nearest appropriate school, the Council is not responsible for the provision of travel assistance or the cost of that provision, as laid out in the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

The provision of travel assistance for the school journey should not be regarded as a permanent entitlement. Travel assistance will be reassessed as part of a child's review of their EHCP at transition points between Key Stages or at any point in between at the Council's discretion.

Children with special educational needs but without an EHCP are considered within the general home to school travel assistance policy.

4.3 Types of Travel Assistance

In determining the type of travel assistance to be offered, the Council will adopt a stepwise approach. The type of travel assistance to be offered to a child will be considered in the following order:

4.3.1 Public Transport Season Ticket

This is a ticket for use on public transport and is the most common form of travel assistance provided. Where it is possible for a child to travel on public transport accompanied by a responsible adult (if necessary) then a season ticket will also be provided for the responsible adult to facilitate this. Rail season tickets may be provided where appropriate.

4.3.2 Independent Travel Training

Children from Year 9 upwards whose application for travel assistance is successful will be considered for independent travel training to enable them to use public transport for the journey between home and school in the future. The process of determining suitability will be undertaken in consultation with the child's school. In arriving at a decision, the Council will consider the home to school journey to be made on public transport, as well as the informed view of the child's school regarding the child's suitability for training.

The child will be provided with travel assistance until the travel training process has been completed. Once travel training has been successfully completed, this may take the form of a season pass for the child, or other assistance as appropriate.

4.3.3 Travel Support Allowance (TSA)

Children who are deemed to be unsuitable for Independent Travel Training will be entitled to request a Travel Support Allowance (TSA). A TSA is a payment to help parents to get a child to school. Payments will be issued on a staged basis across the school year. In arriving at the TSA amount, the Council will take into consideration the cost of transporting the child using its own in-house vehicles or external contracted vehicles, as well as the child's age, their timetable, and the distance from home to school. A parent may spend the TSA in any way they choose, as long as it ensures that the child attends school, e.g. arrange for a friend or relative to travel with the child; car share with other parents; arrange school transport for a sibling to enable the parent to transport the child with an EHCP to school; use a Motability car to transport the child, etc. The Council may review the payment of the TSA if concerns are raised about the child's level of school attendance.

A TSA is optional for the parent and in making a request parents should consider whether it is appropriate for their circumstances. However, in instances where a child is to attend a school which is outside of Southend Borough, a TSA will be the first means of assistance offered.

4.3.4 Transport Vehicles

The provision of a vehicle (usually a shared minibus) to transport a child or young person to and from school is made in **exceptional circumstances only** where it is assessed that no other form of travel assistance is suitable. Vehicle pick-up and drop-off times are arranged so that journey times are minimised and cannot be varied to suit the parent. When accepting an offer of supported transport, parents are agreeing to a kerbside or bus stop arrangement. A door-to-door service is not provided, but the kerbside or bus stop pick-up and drop-off points will be close to the child's home.

The provision of supported transport may cease to be necessary as a child grows older and as they become more independent.

4.4 Parental Responsibilities

If supported transport has been granted to a child, it remains the parent's responsibility to:

- a. ensure that the child is ready for collection at the appointed time and at the arranged pick up point. Failure to comply will result in the parent being responsible for getting their child to school. Contractors will not be expected to vary contract times and the Council will not meet any additional costs incurred for pupils being late
- b. take their child from their home to the vehicle and to collect the child from the vehicle
- c. allow the Council to use any specialist seating which the child requires
- d. sign off the risk assessment in relation to complex/medical needs and/or passenger assistant provision, where applicable

In addition, parents are responsible:

- a. if the child needs to return home during a school day due to illness
- b. if the child needs to return home to attend any health appointments during a school day
- c. if transport is required outside of the normal school hours to facilitate attendance on a school trip
- d. for providing their own travel arrangements should the school decide to exclude the child
- e. if family circumstances dictate that the child needs to travel earlier or later than provided for within the contracted transport

4.5 Passenger Assistants

Passenger assistants are normally provided on vehicles which convey more than five children. In other cases, passenger assistants will only be provided for children with the most complex needs or where a child's behaviour raises questions of health and safety. The child's school will be asked to carry out a risk assessment in order to justify the need for a passenger assistant for an individual pupil, should the need for one be indicated in the 'Request for Travel Assistance' form. The risk assessment will be considered by the Council. In instances where a child requires solo transport

with a passenger assistant, the parent will be expected to act as the passenger assistant.

The Council only accepts passenger assistants who hold an appropriate Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate.

4.6 Southend Special Schools and Learning Resource Bases

The provision of travel assistance to attend the special schools and learning resource bases is not an automatic entitlement. It is recognised, however, that when a child attends a special school or a learning resource base attached to a mainstream school, this may not be local to their home. For this reason, when required because of distance (see Section 4.2), vulnerability, behaviour or physical disability, the Council may provide travel assistance and this will be identified in the child's EHCP.

If places are not available at the nearest appropriate school, the Council will provide travel assistance to the next nearest school if it meets the distance criteria.

4.7 Residential Placements

A child placed in a residential school will be provided with travel assistance. In the first instance, this will be in the form of a TSA to enable the parent to make their own arrangements for getting the child to and from school. In cases where a TSA is not appropriate, the Council will provide supported transport.

A child in termly boarding establishments will be entitled to travel assistance at the beginning and end of each term and for half term breaks. Weekly boarders will be entitled to travel assistance to the school on Monday morning and from the school on Friday afternoon.

The Council will not provide travel assistance:

- where the residential school requires a child to go home for a period which would not form part of the above arrangement (e.g. if a pupil is not included on a school trip, the school is responsible for the travel assistance)
- for pupils attending health provision (e.g. speech therapy, occupational therapy, mental health)
- for hospital appointments or dental treatment
- should the residential school decide to exclude the child
- if family circumstances dictate that the child needs to travel earlier or later than provided for within the contracted transport

4.8 Out-of-School Activities

The Council will not provide transport either at evenings or weekends for out of school activities in any school.

4.9 Reintegration / Integration and Alternative Educational Packages

Any travel costs associated with reintegration, integration and alternative educational packages, including work experience, will not be met by the Council and are the responsibility of the school, college or parent.

4.10 Exclusion from School

The Council will not reimburse any additional travel costs incurred as a result of a decision taken by a school to exclude a pupil.

4.11 Post-16 Students who have an EHCP

This section of the policy relates to:

a. 16-19 year old students attending educational settings

If the Council has supported the application, this is viewed as attending the nearest appropriate educational setting and the Council will provide subsidised travel assistance providing the eligibility criteria are met. If the Council has not approved the educational setting as the nearest appropriate setting, it will not provide travel assistance.

b. Students aged 19 – 25

If the Council has supported the application, subsidised travel assistance may be provided. Applications are dealt with by Adult and Community Services Department.

In common with the assistance available to statutory school age children, Post-16 students will be considered for Independent Travel Training as a first response to a request for travel assistance (see Section 4.3.2). Travel assistance will be provided whilst the student undertakes the training. Upon completion of the training course, should a student be considered unable to travel independently for the school journey, alternative forms of travel assistance will be offered, as detailed in Section 4.3 above.

If the student is deemed unsuitable for Independent Travel Training they will be allocated a space on a dedicated vehicle for Post-16 students.

In line with mainstream charges for eligible students, a charge will be levied for travel assistance provided by the Council to eligible Post-16 students. The charge will be reviewed on an annual basis. Those who are from a low income family may be entitled to free travel assistance. Proof of low income must be provided at the time of application. Please see the Council's Low Income Criteria for Education Transport, available at

http://www.southend.gov.uk/downloads/file/4758/low_income_criteria_for_education_transport_2017-18

4.12 Applying for Travel Assistance

In all cases where travel assistance is required, a 'Request for Travel Assistance Form' must be completed and returned to the Council's Transport Entitlement Officer.

4.13 Appeals

Those not eligible to receive travel assistance or those disputing the travel assistance offered may submit an appeal against the decision in writing within 4 weeks from the date of the refusal letter. Requests for appeal will not be accepted outside the 4 week period. The appeal should include a detailed explanation as to why the child should receive travel assistance, or a different type of travel assistance to that already offered, including supporting evidence of any exceptional circumstances. This information will be submitted to an appeal panel for consideration. There is no provision for the appellant to appear in person. The decision of the panel will be communicated to the parent/carer in writing. Further correspondence will not alter the decision.