

Coventry City Council Home to School / College Travel Assistance Policy 2015/16 - Draft for Consultation

Introduction

The Council has a statutory duty to provide travel assistance to pupils of compulsory school age (5-16) who meet national eligibility criteria. In addition the Council must also assess the travel needs of children or young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) (including those aged 16 and over) and provide assistance which the Council considers suitable and necessary for the purpose of facilitating the child or young person's attendance at school.

Revised Department for Education guidance can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/home-to-school-travel-and-transport-guidance>

Key Principles

1. This policy applies to children and young people who are of compulsory school age, who are resident within Coventry, and to their parents and carers and to children and young people in the care of the local authority.
2. The legal responsibility for ensuring that a child attends school lies with the parent(s) or carer(s), including accompanying a child to school where necessary. If the parents' circumstances mean that they are working or otherwise unavailable at the time their child travels to and from school, it remains the parents' legal responsibility to make arrangements to ensure that their child attends school regularly.
3. This policy also seeks to promote independence for pupils and choice for parents and students. It is important that young people develop independent travel skills. Pupils/students should travel using normally available travel arrangements where they can. Where this is not possible the arrangements should be of the least restrictive form of travel for each individual young person in light of his or her specific needs and having regard to the need to ensure that Council resources are used to provide best value for money. For these reasons travel assistance will only be provided for as long as is necessary.
4. The majority of Coventry pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) or Education, Health and Care Plan (EHC plan) do not receive or require specialised travel assistance from the Council. Wherever possible the Council expects parents/carers of pupils with a Statement of SEN or EHC plan to make arrangements for their child to attend school in the same way as for parents/carers of pupils without a Statement or EHC plan, as this is an important factor in developing the pupil's independence, social and life skills.

5. All applications for assistance will be treated fairly and transparently in line with the principles and detail of this policy.
6. When making arrangements for travel assistance the Council is required to promote sustainable modes of travel.
7. In fulfilling its obligations the Council must consider value for money. As part of that requirement this policy will be reviewed at regular intervals.

Legal Framework

In certain circumstances, the Council has a duty to make arrangements to enable attendance at schools and colleges by providing travel assistance. There is no duty upon the Council to provide free transport for all pupils or students.

This policy for home to school travel assistance has been drawn up with regard to its statutory duty under section 508 of the Education Act 1996 and subsequent guidance issued by the Secretary of State for Education

Local Authorities (LAs) have a duty to prepare and publish an annual Transport Policy (*website*) which specifies arrangements to facilitate attendance in education or training for young people of sixth form age (the Education Act 1996 section 509AA). Section 508G imposes a duty on LAs to make arrangements to facilitate attendance in education or training for young people who are aged 19-24 who are subject to a Learning Difficulty Assessment or EHC plan.

Our policy

There are 3 separate aspects to the City Council's home to school/college policy:

- Pre 16 mainstream education
- SEN
- Post 16 SEN.

There are general requirements regarding eligibility across these areas. Our policy is to provide travel assistance for pupils who meet the criteria listed below. This will normally be provided to the pupil in the form of a bus pass. This policy does not apply to fee paying schools and educational institutions.

1. Eligibility for Travel Assistance

- a) All pupils and students for whom an application for travel assistance is made must live within/ or be a permanent resident within Coventry. A pupil's home address is

considered to be a residential property that is the child's only or main residence, proof of permanent residence at the property concerned may be required.

b) Children under compulsory school age in schools or nursery settings are not eligible for travel assistance.

c) Young people aged 16 and over (above year 11) are not eligible for support from this policy except where the provisions of the SEND policy apply.

d) The pupil must live more than the **statutory walking distance** from their nearest qualifying school. This is defined as follows:

- Children under the age of 8 are eligible for free travel assistance where they live more than 2 miles from their nearest qualifying school.
- Children over the age of 8 and below the age of 16 are eligible for free travel assistance where they live more than 3 miles from their nearest qualifying school
- Children over the age of 8 and below the age of 11, from **low income families** are eligible for free travel assistance where they live more than 2 miles from their nearest qualifying school
- Children over the age of 11 and below the age of 16 from **low income families** are eligible for free travel assistance to one of three nearest qualifying schools, where they live more than 2 miles but not more than 6 miles from the school.
- Children over the age of 11 and below the age of 16 from **low income families** are eligible for free travel assistance to the nearest school preferred by reason of a parent's belief or religion if they live more than 2 miles but not more than 15 miles from the qualifying school.

Definitions

Statutory walking distance is defined as two miles for children from Reception to Year 3, and three miles for children from Year 4 to Year 11. The measurement of the "statutory walking distance" is measured by the shortest route along which a child, accompanied as necessary, may walk safely. The measured route may include footpaths, bridleways, and other pathways, as well as recognised roads. Walking distance will be measured from the centre of the home to the nearest school gate using the local authority geographical mapping measurement system.

Low income families are where the parent/carer for the child meets the criteria for their child to be entitled to free school meals, or where the family is in receipt of the maximum level of Working Tax Credit (WTC).

A qualifying school for a child without a Statement of SEN or EHC Plan is defined as a school maintained by the Council, Academy or PRU. If a school placement has been agreed on the grounds of parental preference and this school is not the nearest school with places available, there is no duty on the Council to provide travel assistance.

For a child with a Statement of SEN or EHC Plan, a **qualifying school** is the school named in the Statement or EHC Plan or where two schools are named as being suitable the nearest school.

Where a parent(s) of a child with a Statement of SEN or EHC Plan request that their child attend a special school (or special provision) that is not the nearest suitable school that can meet need, there is no duty for the Council to provide travel assistance. In such circumstances, parents will be required to make and fund their own travel arrangements.

Exceptional circumstances

If a child's parent(s) by reason of disability, are unable to ensure that their child attends school, and are unable to make suitable alternative arrangements, eligibility for travel assistance will be considered on the individual circumstances, having regard to the requirements set out in the Equality Act 2010

Where pupils do not qualify for travel assistance at the Council's discretion in exceptional circumstances travel assistance may be provided, and a charge may be made or a contribution may be required. Applications must be made in writing. Each application will be considered on its individual merits, taking full account of all the circumstances put forward.

Travel assistance on medical grounds

Applications for transport for pupils with medical conditions which affect their ability to travel to school will be considered following receipt of information from a hospital consultant or by a school medical officer following an examination. If parents have secured a place at a school which is not their catchment area school based on parental preference then support will not normally be available.

2. Types of Travel Assistance

Even where travel assistance is provided it remains a legal requirement for the parent/carer to ensure attendance at school.

Travel assistance will be as determined by the Council and will normally be provided as a bus pass, and will be at a minimum level to secure the travel to school, e.g. a pass for a specific bus route. Further options for pupils with SEND are set out below.

Travel assistance will not be provided where schools send their pupils/or pupils attend more than 1 educational establishment.

Travel assistance is provided for the home to school journeys at the start and end of the normal school day only. If parents wish their child to attend any pre or post school activity, for example after school clubs, then they are responsible for the associated travel arrangements.

The LA will not provide travel assistance where a parent chooses a school on religious or faith grounds other than where the child comes from a low income family and the eligibility criteria set out in 1d above is met.

3. Change of circumstances

Families receiving travel assistance must notify the Council when circumstances change, for example a change of address, change of school, or change in eligibility for low income assistance. Parents are responsible for ensuring that the Council is informed of changed circumstances in a reasonable timescale.

Where pupil specific travel assistance arrangements are in place, families must notify the Council of required changes to these arrangements giving at least 1 full weeks' notice.

4. Appeals

Parents or young people aged 16 and over have the right to appeal if they disagree about the eligibility for school transport support. Once the authority's refusal of the home school travel application is received parents/the young person has 20 calendar days to challenge the decisions on grounds of entitlement, travel arrangements, distance assessment, route safety or an issue of exceptional circumstances.

Parents should make their appeal in writing to the address/email given below. The decision will be reviewed by a senior officer within 20 calendar days which will be notified to parents. If the parent is still unhappy with the outcome they can challenge within another 10 calendar days. A further review will then be held by an independent appeals panel within 30 calendar days. Parents may provide written and verbal representation to the panel and will be informed of the panel's decision within 5 calendar days.

Existing travel arrangements will remain in place whilst the appeal process is followed

Appeals should be sent to:
School travel assistance appeals
Coventry City Council
COVENTRY
CV1
Or email SENTransport@coventry.gov.uk

Pupils with SEND up to and including year 11

If a child is unable to walk the statutory distance to their nearest appropriate school because of their special educational needs or disability, even if accompanied by a responsible adult, the Council will, subject to the statutory assessment / annual review process, provide travel assistance.

The Council offers the following travel assistance options in consideration to the individual circumstances of the young person concerned:

1. Independent Travel Training (ITT)

This is available for young people over the age of 11 who have been assessed by the school and the SEN Management Services section as being ready and able to begin learning to travel to and from school independently.

2. Personal Transport Budget (PTB)

This is a sum of money calculated for each family to cover the cost of travel to and from school. This budget can be spent in any way your family sees fit to enable your child to get to school.

3. Standard council provided transport.

Where pupils have been assessed as unsuitable for independent travel training or families do not wish to use a personal transport budget, standard council provision may still be provided. Standard transport tends to take longer, with the student spending a lot more time on the vehicle provided (up to 1 hour). As a result this option is not recommended unless family circumstances dictate that neither ITT nor a PTB is appropriate.

Assistance provided may take many forms, including bus transport, escorted public transport, minibuses or smaller vehicles where required for specific pupil needs. Where assistance is provided by the provision of a specific vehicle, this may be pupils travelling together in mini-buses, specially adapted if necessary with pick-up and drop-off at a convenient location and within a reasonable distance from home. Requests for alternative pick up points or drop off points will only be considered if the distance involved is shorter than to the home address and can be accommodated within the designated route. Home pick-up and drop-off will only be made where the Council deems it essential due to the child's significant needs. The Council will normally only use home addresses for the purpose of making the arrangements for home to school travel assistance.

The need for travel assistance will be reviewed for all pupils on a continuing basis and at least once per year as part of the statutory annual review of the young person's Statement of SEN or EHC Plan.

For pupils placed in residential special school placements by the local authority which are out of city, pupils will be provided with travel assistance at the beginning and end of the each week for weekly boarding placements and at the beginning and end of each half term for termly boarding placements.

Further information is available from SEN Management Services, Civic Centre 2 Floor 3, New Council Offices, Earl Street, Coventry, CV1 5RS, (024) 7683 1614 or e-mail: SENTransport@coventry.gov.uk

Young people with SEND Post-16

Coventry is well served by public transport and the Council makes a significant financial contribution to the West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority CENTRO which enables young people to take advantage of concessionary fares. The Council

believes that this is adequate support to enable the majority of young people to access education and training through independent travel.

Young people aged 16-19 from low income families can also apply for financial assistance through the discretionary 16-19 Bursary Fund. These funds are held by education and training providers who, within national guidance, set their own criteria for accessing the funds. Details can be obtained from each post-16 provider including schools, special schools and colleges.

Young people up to the age of 18 who are in full time education may meet the criteria for a Disabled Persons Bus Pass. Further details can be obtained from the website.

Young people aged 16-19 (i.e. who are aged 18 or under on 31 August) who are unable to travel independently because of a special educational need or disability may be eligible for assisted transport. Assistance will only be considered for those who are attending either the education provider designated in their Statement of Educational Need or EHC Plan. If young people/parents choose to attend other providers then they will be responsible for travel arrangements.

Travel assistance includes a range of options as described above.

Where the Council agrees that assistance is essential a charge will be made at a rate equivalent to the appropriate bus pass (currently a term bus 16 -18 bus pass). This will be reduced by 50% where the parent / carer meets the criteria for low income as detailed in the definitions section above.

The Council also provides Independent Travel Training for those young people who are assessed as having the ability to travel independently with appropriate training. Young people who have successfully undertaken travel training will not be eligible for assisted transport unless there is a significant change in their circumstances.

Young people aged 19 and over on 31 August may, if they meet criteria, be offered travel assistance by the SEND team of the City Council's People Directorate. There is a charge for this.

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