

HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AGE 5-16

2020-21

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1.0 Introduction

This policy document sets out Wirral Council's Home to School Transport Policy for 5-16 year olds including those that have special educational needs and/or a disability (SEND). The policy sets out the criteria for eligibility to travel assistance and describes how the Council fulfils its duties and exercises its discretionary powers.

The Education Act 1996 places a legal duty and a responsibility on parents to ensure that their school aged children registered at a school attend regularly.

2.0 Entitlement to Travel Assistance

Under Section 508 (B) of the Education Act 1996 the Council must provide free transport to and from school for a child if they are aged 5 to 16 between home and their nearest suitable school under certain conditions.

A 'suitable' school for transport purposes is the nearest school to the child's home. There is no general legislative requirement for the Council to transport pupils to the nearest school of a particular type e.g. faith school, ability, academy or free school.

Assistance with public transport costs will be provided for pupils who qualify under the following circumstances:

- Pupils are Wirral residents between age 5 and 16 and go to their nearest suitable school and live at least:
 - 2 miles from the school if they're under 8
 - 3 miles from the school if they're 8 or older
- Pupils are registered at their nearest suitable school and are unable to walk to school due to a route which the Council has assessed as hazardous.
- Pupils are from a low income family (entitled to free school meals or maximum Working Tax Credit) if they are:
 - aged 8 to 11 and the school is at least 2 miles away
 - aged 11 to 16 and the school is 2 to 6 miles away - as long as there aren't 3 or more suitable schools nearer to home
 - aged 11 to 16 and the school is 2 to 15 miles away - if it's their nearest school preferred on the grounds of religion or belief
- Children with special educational needs and/ or disabilities (SEND) are entitled to free transport however far they live from the school if:
 - they have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) (introduced in 2014) or a statement of SEN that says the local council will pay transport costs
 - they can't walk because of their SEN, a disability or mobility problem

The distance from home and the school gate nearest to home by the shortest available walking route will be measured using a computerised mapping system.

As a general guide, we will treat routes without pavements and street lighting as unsafe for children and young people. When assessing the safety of routes, the Council will assume that the child is accompanied, as necessary, by a parent or other responsible person.

Initial assessment of route safety is made by the team responsible for assessing eligibility for home to school transport. Where the safety of a route is questioned by an applicant, the Council's Road Safety team will carry out an assessment.

3.0 Applying for a Free Travel Pass

If parents believe their child is entitled to receive a free travel pass based on the criteria above then they can contact:

The Council Call Centre Information and Advice Team 0151 606 2020.

Email: hotdesk@wirral.gov.uk

4.0 Support for Learners with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities

Consideration for transport support is provided to children and young people who are resident on Wirral who have complex special educational needs, a disability or mobility problem.

The child's needs will be identified in the students Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan which was introduced in September 2014; or prior to this their statement of SEN. The new EHC system was introduced in September 2014 replacing the Special Educational Needs (SEN) assessment process. The purpose of an EHC plan is to make special educational provision to meet the special educational needs of the child or young person. Over time existing statements of SEN will be transferred to the new EHC system.

As outlined in the SEN and Disability Code of Practice 0-25 years July 2014 Guidance for Organisations (Section 9.214) Local Authorities do not have provide transport funding based on parental preference. The parent/carer/young person's preferred school or college might be further away from their home than the nearest school or college that can meet the child or young person's SEN. In such a case the Local Authority can name the nearer school or college appropriate for meeting the SEN need. If a parent /carer/young person then chooses the provision further away, transport funding will be the responsibility of the parent/carer.

Not all children with an EHC plan or statement of SEN require free transport provision. Where a young person is able to access and use the public transport network safely they will be expected to do so. Where they are unable to walk because of their SEN, a disability or mobility problem they are entitled to free transport.

Parents / carers are required to submit an application form for an assessment for eligibility for free transport to be carried out. The decision will be based on information provided which may include information from health practitioners, educational psychologists, school headteachers, children's social care and the input of the students.

Following the assessment process parents will be notified of the decision regarding transport provision. Eligibility to provision will be assessed annually.

4.1 The Decision to Provide Transport

In determining whether a child cannot reasonably be expected to walk for the purposes of 'special educational needs, a disability or mobility problems eligibility' or 'unsafe route eligibility', the local authority will need to consider whether the child could reasonably be expected to walk if accompanied and, if so, whether the child's parent can reasonably be expected to accompany the child. When considering whether a child's parent can reasonably be expected to accompany the child on the journey to school a range of factors may need to be taken into account, such as the age of the child and whether one would ordinarily expect a child of that age to be accompanied.

The decision to provide transport is based on the student's needs. This means that Wirral Council is not able to take the following into account when considering home to school transport entitlement:

- Parents' work or other commitments.
- Attendance by siblings at other schools.
- If a parent chooses to send their child to a provider that is not the nearest appropriate provider to the home address.
- A journey from one educational establishment to another.
- Ad hoc visits to other schools, colleges or other establishments.
- Out of hours clubs (breakfast club, after school activities).
- To/ from dental, clinical, medical or hospital appointments
- At a different time due to detention or exclusion.

In these instances, transport arrangements will be the sole responsibility of the student's parent or carer. Parents sometimes raise issues regarding accompaniment as part of an appeal and these will then be considered on an individual basis.

4.2 The Type of Transport Support

If young people are assessed as eligible for free transport the type of transport provided will be based on individual assessment of young people's needs and with regard to the best use of the Council's resources.

This may be in the form of a free travel pass for use on public transport or transport in a contracted vehicle.

For students travelling in contracted vehicles there is no specific duty on the Council to provide passenger assistants. However, fulfilling a duty of care to passengers and others may involve the provision of a passenger assistant. A passenger assistant may be provided to accompany a young person with significant needs arising from a medical condition or a disability and where there is an exceptional need for care or supervision.

The decision on whether to provide a passenger assistant will be made as part of eligibility assessment taking a number of factors into account. Such factors may include information relating, but not limited, to:

- Medical issues.
- Health and safety related issues, including risk to self or others.
- The young person's mobility.
- Any challenging behaviour arising from the young person's SEN.
- Where a passenger has severe learning or physical difficulties, the need for continual care and supervision.

- Age and capability.
- Length of journey.
- The vehicle type and size.

Transport is allocated on an annual basis and parents/ carers and students can be involved in a discussion regarding the ongoing suitability of the existing transport arrangements during the annual review of the young person's EHC plan or statement of educational needs.

4.3 Independent Travel Training

Wirral Independent Travel Training (ITT) aims to give students with SEND the key skills and confidence to travel independently using public transport to and from school or college. The aims of ITT are to:

- Increase independence and use of own initiative
- Raise self confidence
- Provide greater freedom
- Develop social skills
- Open opportunities for learning and work
- Less reliance on friends and family

The service provides individuals with their own personal travel programme and assistance to learn how to travel independently. Working one to one with a travel trainer, students will be accompanied to and from school over an extended period of time until they are ready to make the journey independently.

The scheme is open to young people with Special Educational Needs and / or a Disability attending Wirral Special Schools, Education Inclusion Bases in mainstream schools or post 16 provision. Students currently in receipt of school or college specialist transport who would like to learn to travel independently can also apply.

To express an interest in accessing travel training please contact the Assisted Travel Service (contact details below) or view the website for further information:

<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/funding-and-financial-support/free-travel-school>

4.4 Children with Complex Physical or Medical Needs

In cases of students with high risk medical needs (who require additional funding from a number of organisations) decisions regarding transport will be informed by health, education and social care practitioners. If a child is eligible for transport, health professionals will provide recommendations based on the child's specific needs during transport to ensure safety. This will be reviewed appropriately in order to provide a responsive service.

5.0 Discretionary Travel Support

This policy has set out those eligible for free transport to school. In some exceptional circumstances the Council will pay the travelling costs of pupils who do not fall into the categories described. These cases will be short term time defined travel solutions and will be reviewed on an individual basis.

These exceptional circumstances include children with a temporary disability or illness where medical evidence is provided, some children in the care of the Local Authority and those with further special circumstances.

6.0 Transport Safety

The safety of those travelling on Council contracted transport provision is of paramount concern. Wirral Council reserves the right to refuse to provide transport on a contract vehicle where a pupil's behaviour is such that it is unacceptable to the operator, the passenger assistant or other passengers. If a student is suspended temporarily from transport parents and carers will become responsible for transporting their own children to school for the duration of the suspension. Where there are persistent cases of misbehaviour and assurances of good behaviour cannot be obtained or are not fulfilled a travel pass or mileage expenses may be offered.

7.0 Appeals Procedure

The Council operates a two stage review and appeal process. Parents or students can appeal in writing within 20 working days of receiving notification of the Local Authority's decision not to provide transport or against the detailed arrangements made.

Guidance to the appeals process and the relevant form is available from our website:
<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/funding-and-financial-support/free-travel-school>

8.0 Contact Information

Information regarding home to school and college transport can be obtained from:

For school travel pass applications:

The Council Call Centre Information and Advice Team

Email: hotdesk@wirral.gov.uk

Telephone: 0151 606 2020

For Special Educational Needs Transport and Travel Training

The Assisted Travel Service

Email: CYPD_transport4children@wirral.gov.uk

Telephone: 0151 666 4212 (Transport)

Telephone: 0151 666 4229 (Travel Training)