



Telford & Wrekin
Co-operative Council

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TravelTelford



Borough of Telford & Wrekin School Travel Assistance Policy

February 2024



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Introduction

In Telford & Wrekin we want to ensure all children and young people are as independent and successful as possible in their adult lives.

This will be different for each child or young person and therefore we plan and work together to enable individuals to:

- Get a job, become employable or be engaged in meaningful activity.
- Live as independently as possible.
- Actively participate in community life – have friends and personal interests.
- Be as healthy as possible.

Travelling as independently as possible plays an important role in how children and young people achieve these 'Preparing for Adulthood Outcomes' and live ordinary lives. For children and young people who are not yet able to travel independently, we want them to have opportunities to travel to school in as ordinary a way as possible. This includes:

- How far and how long they travel – time to study, play or relax.
- Who they travel with – we want children and young people to travel with people who know them best; family or friends.
- Opportunities in which to develop the skills necessary for independent travel, self-regulation, resilience, social interaction and social communication skills, anxiety management, problem solving, timekeeping etc.

Where additional support is needed, it will always be by the most inclusive and least specialist form of travel assistance possible, to ensure that travel supports a child/young person's wider outcomes.

In compiling this policy, we have considered the latest statutory guidance and regulations issued by The Department for Education (DfE) and other Government organisations which can be found at the following link:

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

The local authorities' statutory duty in relation to eligible children is limited to facilitating the attendance at school of eligible children resident in the Telford & Wrekin area only.

This policy explains:

- Which children of compulsory school age are eligible school travel assistance.
- How to apply for school travel assistance.
- How to appeal a school travel assistance decision.

The policy for travel assistance for post-16 education and training is different from that for students of compulsory school age and therefore can be found on the Council's website at the following link:

https://www.telford.gov.uk/downloads/file/18209/post_16_travel_assistance_policy_2022_-_2023

Eligibility

Local authorities must make free-of-charge travel arrangements to facilitate the attendance at school of eligible children resident in their area.

A child is eligible if they are of compulsory school age, attend their nearest suitable school and:

- live more than the statutory walking distance from that school, or
- could not reasonably be expected to walk to that school because of their special educational needs, disability or mobility problem, even if they were accompanied by their parent, or
- would not be able to walk to that school in reasonable safety, even if they were accompanied by their parent.

There are also 'extended rights' to free travel to school for children from low-income households.

Suitable School

A suitable school for school travel purposes is a school that is suitable for the child's age, sex, 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 and so the nearest school will almost always be considered the nearest suitable school (provided it would be able to admit them).

For travel assistance applications following normal admissions rounds (i.e. those due to start primary or secondary school in September), parents are expected to have applied for a place at their nearest school and are also strongly encouraged to apply to four local schools. The nearest school will still be considered a 'suitable school' for travel assistance purposes where parents choose not to apply for a place and the child would have been offered a place on National Offer Day. The nearest school will also still be considered a 'suitable school' for those who apply late through the normal admissions round where families had the opportunity to submit an application on-time and would have been offered a place on National Offer Day had they done so.

For those that apply for travel assistance after moving to the area and submitting an in-year application (i.e. after the time that children usually start primary or secondary school), the nearest 'suitable school' will be the nearest school with a place available, where a place could be offered. This includes any schools that parents decide not to apply to.

A child may also be eligible for free school travel assistance where they receive education at a place other than a school if an arrangement has been made under section 19 (1) of the Education Act 1996.

Where a child is suspended or excluded from school and alternative provision outside of school is provided, the alternative provision provider will be deemed to be a 'suitable school' for travel assistance purposes.

Statutory Walking Distances

Statutory walking distances are used to determine whether a compulsory school age child is eligible for free travel to school:

- **A child under the age of 8 is eligible for free travel to their nearest suitable school if it is more than 2 miles from their home.**
- **A child aged 8 years or over is eligible for free travel to their nearest suitable school if it is more than 3 miles from their home.**

Where a child lives within statutory walking distance (and is not eligible for free travel on any of the other grounds set out in this guidance) the parent is responsible for arranging their child's travel to/from school. There is no expectation that the child walks to/from school. It is for parents to determine what is appropriate for their child.

Note that walking distances are considered for eligibility for school travel purposes, whereas straight line distances tend to be used when applications for school places are considered.

Extended Rights

Travel assistance will also be provided to children who are entitled to free school meals or if a parent with whom they live receives the maximum amount of Working Tax Credit, where the child is:

- Aged 8 or over but under 11, attend their nearest suitable school and it is more than 2 miles from their home; or
- Aged 11 to 16 years, and attend one of their three nearest suitable schools provided it is more than 2 miles but not more than 6 miles from their home; or
- Aged 11 to 16 years, attend a school that is more than 2 but not more than 15 miles from their home that their parents have chosen on the grounds of their religion or belief if, having regard to that religion or belief, there is no suitable school nearer to their home.

Where a child is eligible for extended rights to travel assistance, their eligibility will be reassessed before the beginning of each academic year. If a child ceases to be eligible for free school meals or a parent ceases to receive maximum Working Tax Credit during the academic year, we will continue to provide free travel to school for the remainder of the academic year.

Working Tax Credit is being phased out as claimants are transferred onto Universal Credit. This does not change the way eligibility for extended rights to free travel to school is determined. It remains the case that children will be eligible for free home to school travel if they are eligible for free school meals or live with a parent who receives maximum Working Tax Credit (and meet the criteria set out above). Once the roll out is complete, no further children will come forward who are eligible because their parents claim maximum Working Tax Credit.

Special educational needs, disabilities and mobility problems

A child is eligible for free travel to school if:

- they attend their nearest suitable school, and
- it is within the statutory walking distance of their home, and
- they could not reasonably be expected to walk there because of their special educational needs, disability or mobility problem, even if they were accompanied by their parent.

To be eligible on these grounds, a child does not need to:

- have an Education Health and Care plan (EHC plan); or
- have travel to school specified in their EHC plan if they have one; or
- attend a special school; or
- live beyond the statutory walking distance.

Not every child with an EHC plan or who attends a special school will be eligible for free travel to school.

We will need to assess eligibility on the grounds of special educational needs, disability or mobility problems on a case-by-case basis. The assessment should take account of the child's physical ability to walk to school and any health and safety issues related to their special educational needs, disability or mobility problems. It may take account of whether they would be able to walk to school if they were accompanied.

Information we may take into account when assessing a child's eligibility may include (but is not restricted to) the following, where it illustrates why the child may not be able to walk to school:

- information provided by the parent;
- 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 the child's EHC plan if they have one;
- any relevant information in their individual healthcare plan if they have one.

When applying for travel assistance, parents and carers of children with SEN and mobility issues, are asked to complete a comprehensive online questionnaire which collects information to help officers make an informed decision about the application. It is possible that through the assessment of the application, more information may need to be requested from families. This questionnaire asks for detailed information about the child's health and ability to travel.

Where a pre-school child with an EHC plan has been placed at a nursery, special school or other specialist provision by the Council, travel assistance may be provided in the same way as for children of statutory school age but a charge will be made. The charge will follow the same charging approach set out in the Post-16 Travel Assistance Policy.

A child may be eligible because of temporary mobility problems but, due to the short-term nature of some mobility problems, it may not always be practicable to make travel arrangements before the child has recovered.

Children with EHC plans

The naming of a school in a child's EHC plan is governed by section 39 of the Children and Families Act 2014. Parents have the right to ask for a particular school to be named in their child's EHC plan (when the plan is first written and when the EHC Plan is amended through an annual review). The local authority must name that school in the plan unless it would be unsuitable for the child's age, ability, aptitude or special educational needs, or incompatible with the efficient education of others or the efficient use of resources. Where the child will be eligible for free travel, the local authority will consider the cost of travel as part of this decision. Travel arrangements may also be relevant to the decision about the school that should be named in the plan in other ways, for example, the effect the journey may have on the child and their ability to learn when they arrive at school.

Where naming the parent's preferred school would be unsuitable for the child's age, ability, aptitude or special educational needs, or incompatible with the efficient education of others or the efficient use of resources, the local authority must name a different school that they think would be appropriate for the child.

This means that, where a parent would prefer their child to attend a school that is further away from their home than the nearest school that would be able to meet their needs, the local authority should consider whether arranging travel to the preferred school would be incompatible with the efficient use of resources.

We will determine the cost of providing the child with free travel to each of the two schools. If travel to the preferred school would cost more than travel to the nearer school, they should decide whether the additional cost of providing travel to the parent's preferred school is incompatible with the efficient use of resources. This will include deciding

whether the educational benefits and other advantages the school will provide for the child outweigh the additional cost.

If we determine that providing travel to the parent's preferred school would be incompatible with the efficient use of resources, we may:

- name a different school that would be appropriate for the child's needs (this may be the nearer school), or
- name the parent's preferred school on the condition that the parent arranges the travel or provides some or all of the cost of the travel.

Where we name the parent's preferred school on the condition that the parent arranges or pays for the travel, but the parent's circumstances subsequently change and they are no longer able to arrange or pay for the transport, the statutory SEND team may conduct a review of the EHC plan to reconsider whether naming the parent's preferred school is compatible with efficient use of resources. If they determine that providing travel to the parent's preferred school would be incompatible with the efficient use of resources, they may amend the plan to name a different school that would be appropriate for the child's needs.

We will clearly record our decision to name the parent's preferred school on the condition that the parent arranges or pays for the travel and should make it clear that they may review the school named in the EHC plan if the parent is unable or unwilling to arrange or pay for the travel. Transport should not normally be recorded in a child's EHC plan. We will record this information in a formal letter to the parent.

Suitable Walking Routes

A child is eligible for free travel to school if:

- they attend their nearest suitable school, and
- it is within the statutory walking distance of their home, and
- the nature of the route means they could not be expected to walk there in reasonable safety even if accompanied by their parent, and
- there is no alternative route within the statutory walking distance that they would be able to walk in reasonable safety, even if accompanied by their parent.

Our route assessment process follows the principles given in 'Assessment of Walked Routes to Schools Guidelines', published by Road Safety GB. These guidelines form the basis of the route assessment and are used in conjunction with local context and knowledge.

When assessing whether a route can be walked in reasonable safety, Officers will consider the whole of the route. This will include, for example, any sections that use

footpaths or bridleways, as well as sections that use roads. The assessment will also consider a range of risks such as crossing points, route type, ditches, speed of traffic and fields of vision, and age of the child.

Once a route has been assessed, the Council reserves the right to reassess unacceptable routes at any time and to revise their recommendation if appropriate.

Road Safety Great Britain guidance states that the presence or absence of street lighting on a route should not be considered to be a factor in determining the relative safety of a route.

Accompaniment

A child will not normally be eligible for free travel to school on the grounds of their special educational needs, disability, 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.

Where it is determined that a child would be able to walk if they were accompanied, the general expectation is that the parent will accompany them or make other suitable arrangements for their journey to and from school. A child will not normally be eligible solely because their parent's work commitments or caring responsibilities mean they are unable to accompany their child themselves.

Reasons such as the parent's working pattern or the fact they have 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. 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).

Where it is determined that a child could not reasonably be expected to walk even if they were accompanied, they would be eligible for travel assistance.

Journey times

In line with statutory guidance, the maximum each way journey for a primary school age child to be 45 minutes and 75 minutes for a young person of secondary school age. This includes any time taken to walk to a pick-up point, but there will be circumstances in which this is not possible, for example where children live in remote rural locations, where a child needs to travel a long way to the school named in their EHC plan, or when journey times are extended by traffic delays. We will always try to offer a solution which does not exceed these timings or have to make several changes on public transport.

Children with dual living arrangements

Where parents have shared custody for a child, the home address used to assess eligibility will be taken as the one where the child spends the most time. Where equal time is spent with both parents, the home address will be taken as the address registered for child benefit purposes. When there is shared care, parents must opt to use one address for their application. This address will be the only address where travel assistance is provided to and from should the child be eligible.

Foster carers receive an allowance to cover the cost of caring for a child. Being in receipt of foster care allowance does not affect a child's eligibility for free travel to school, but the local authority may meet their duty in respect of an eligible child by including additional funding in the foster care allowance, provided this is agreed with the foster carer.

Parental consent and independent travel

Section 508B (4) (b) of the Education Act 1996 requires local authorities to obtain parental consent in order to meet their school travel duty in respect of an eligible child by:

- providing someone to escort the child, or
- paying their travelling expenses.

This means, for example, that the parent's consent is required for a local authority to meet their school travel duty by providing independent travel training, or providing someone to accompany a child so they can wheel to school in their wheelchair. Where the parent does not provide consent, we the local authority must make alternative arrangements for the child's travel to school.

Travel Assistance outside of core school hours

Travel assistance will be provided 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. Travel assistance will not be provided:

- 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).

Where particular classes, year groups or pupils have a start or finish time that is different from most pupils at the school, it will not normally be possible to make separate travel arrangements. Schools may need to make arrangements to accommodate these pupils. In such circumstances we will consider if providing assistance is reasonably practicable at

an alternative time of day, for example if a child has a medical condition which means they are not well enough to attend school for the whole day, however this is not guaranteed to be provided. Schools should support local authorities by taking travel arrangements into account when making changes to their school day.

Where a local authority names a residential school in the EHC plan of an eligible child, the local authority must provide reasonable free travel to enable the child to attend that school, for example, on a Monday and Friday for children who are weekly boarders, or before and after school holidays for children who board full-time. Travel to residential placements will normally be agreed for the beginning and end of each term only and eligibility for travel assistance reviewed annually.

The Council is not required to arrange travel for an eligible child where:

- suitable free travel is provided by someone else, for example, their school; or
- a parent chooses to make their own arrangements for the child's travel to and from school (this does not prevent the parent from later requesting free travel to school).

Discretionary eligibility

In exceptional circumstances, we will consider providing free or subsidised school travel assistance for children who do not fall within the eligibility criteria outlined in this policy. This will be provided at the discretion of the local authority on a case-by-case basis and with reference to the statutory guidance relating to school travel assistance. The provision of any non-statutory travel assistance may be removed at any time, however, we will aim to provide parents with as much notice as possible so that alternative arrangements can be made.

How Travel Assistance will be provided

Should your child be eligible for travel assistance this will be offered in the following priority order:

- Public transport (bus pass).
- For pupils with SEND Public bus pass with [Independent Travel Training](#) - Access to Independent Travel Training is provided alongside a training programme to enable the child or young person to travel independently over a period of time.
- Escorted walking / 'walking-bus' or cycling.
- Personal Transport Budget (PTB) for petrol mileage reimbursements
- A seat on a mini bus or coach. Including the use of group pick up points where appropriate.
- Personal Transport Budget (PTB) which can be used for travel costs or any other associated costs e.g. childcare or breakfast/after school clubs.
- A seat within a shared vehicle.
- In exceptional circumstance - an individual vehicle.

- In the case of children with special education needs, disabilities and mobility problems, we will review your application form to determine the support your child may need. Where necessary, we will provide a specialist vehicle (for example, a vehicle that is able to accommodate a wheelchair). Where assessed, we will also provide passenger assistants.

As a local authority we have a duty to promote the use of sustainable travel on journeys to and from places of education in our borough. Sustainable travel in this context is that which may improve:

- the physical wellbeing of users, and/or
- the environmental wellbeing of all or part of the local authority's area.

Sustainable travel benefits children and everyone around them by helping people keep healthy, improving mental wellbeing, easing congestion and reducing toxins in the air.

Sustainable travel includes:

- public transport and shared transport.
- active travel – walking, wheeling, cycling and scooting.

When providing travel assistance we will utilise and champion sustainable modes of transport to meet this duty.

Travel assistance will only be provided to and from one address and that is the address on the travel assistance application – the child's home address. We will not consider alternative drop off arrangements e.g. to a childminders house or relatives house. Where a child is picked up and dropped off at home via a vehicle, it is the responsibility of the parent or carer to be at home to hand the child over to the driver and or passenger assistant at the vehicle, and to be at home to collect them from the vehicle at the end of the school day.

We will not always provide children with 'door to door' transport. Many will be able to walk to a suitable pick-up point to be collected, provided they would be able to do so in reasonable safety, accompanied by their parent if necessary. Some children's needs will mean they need to be collected from their home.

A child's needs may need to be reassessed from time to time, for example if their level of need changes or if they move to a new school. Some children with special educational needs can find change distressing. In these cases, we will provide parents with as much notice as possible of any changes to a child's travel arrangements.

Once travel assistance is provided, the type of assistance may be reviewed at any time at our discretion. In these cases, we will provide parents with as much notice as possible of any changes to a child's travel arrangements.

Safeguarding

The safeguarding of children is of paramount importance. The Local Authority ensures that:

- an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check, with a check of the children's barred list, has been carried out for drivers and passenger assistants involved in providing dedicated school transport.
- drivers and passenger assistants have received any training they need to perform their role in relation to safeguarding.
- drivers and passenger assistants know how to report any concerns they have about the children in their care.
- they share any concerns they have about the driver of a taxi or private hire vehicle with the authority that licenses them.
- they consider whether concerns they have about a driver should be referred to the DBS.

If there are any safeguarding concerns in relation to any child these should be referred by:

- Contacting Family Connect on 01952 385385 from 9am - 5pm, Monday to Friday
- Contacting the Emergency Duty Team on 01952 676500 after 5pm, Monday to Friday, and 24 hours during weekends and Bank Holidays.

If it is an emergency or there is a threat of immediate danger, always dial 999.

Further information on how to report abuse can be found on the [Family Connect website](#).

Risk assessment

Should a child be eligible for travel assistance the team may call the parent or carer to complete a risk assessment. The risk assessment will cover things like:

- the medical needs of the children and the likelihood of them requiring emergency medical assistance while travelling to and from school.
- their behaviour – including where this is related to their special educational needs or disability – and the likelihood of this causing harm to them or others while travelling.
- the safety of children while travelling on the vehicle and while boarding and alighting.
- the safe loading and tethering of wheelchairs.
- any information that will assist with the child's journey to and from the school for example their likes and dislikes.

We may also speak to schools for them to share any information they may have to ensure the child's needs are met whilst receiving travel assistance.

We may sometimes need to seek specialist advice about a child and their condition. A range of different health professionals may be involved in a child's care, for example a community nurse, specialist nurse or doctor. We require parents and carers support in helping us identify the appropriate health professional in relation to their child.

Parents and carers are encouraged to provide as much information to us as possible so we can provide appropriate support and assistance. Once completed a parent and carer will have the opportunity to read, sign and comment on the risk assessment via our online portal. The risk assessment is a live document and will be updated regularly. We will share the risk assessment with providers to ensure the safe travel of children.

Administering medication and performing medical procedures

A child's routine medication will not be administered on the journey to and from school, nor will routine medical procedures be carried out. It may sometimes be necessary to administer a child's emergency medication. If there is a requirement for emergency medication this must be recorded within the child's risk assessment. Emergency medication should be administered in accordance with instructions from a health care professional. The driver or passenger assistant responsible for administering the medication will receive training from a health care professional.

Behaviour on the journey to and from school

We expect parents and schools to promote good standards of behaviour by children on their journey to and from school through rewarding positive behaviour and using sanctions to address poor behaviour. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 empowers head teachers to take action to address unacceptable behaviour even when this takes place outside the school premises and when their pupils are not under the legal control of the school, but when it is reasonable to do so. We also take this to mean behaviour on the route to and from school, whether or not their pupils are in school uniform.

Unacceptable behaviour may include, but is not limited to, being rude, pushing and kicking, bullying, distracting the driver, refusing to wear a seatbelt, or refusing to remain seated. It may endanger the safety and wellbeing of other people.

In certain situations, where there is serious and/or consistent behavioural issues in council provided travel assistance, we will consider withdrawing travel assistance until the situation is resolved with parents/carers working with us, the school and the travel provider to resolve the situation. Whilst this is withdrawn we will meet our duty for eligible children by providing a personal transport budget.

Spare seats

Should there be spare seats on any mode of shared transport operated by the authority, these can be made available to those families who are not eligible for travel assistance as a charged service. There is however no guarantee that these spaces will be available, or will remain available as transport is planned to maximise the use of space for those requiring travel assistance.

How to apply

If your child meets the eligibility criteria as set out above and qualifies for travel assistance to their nearest suitable school, you can apply online via this link:

<https://travelassistance.telford.gov.uk/>

For those parents and carers who may have difficulty in accessing or completing this application, support and help is available from our support officers at our First Point and Library offices across the borough:

http://www.telford.gov.uk/info/20497/find_a_council_office/649/first_point_telford

In exceptional circumstances where parents and carers are not able to submit an application online, with support from officers, a paper application form will be available. Please phone the school travel assistance team on 01952 384545

You are encouraged to provide as much information as possible to support the application especially where it relates to a child or young person with SEND who may have particular support needs when travelling.

We advise you to submit applications for the new school year to us by **30th June**. It can take up to 20 days to process your application as each case is considered on its own merits so you must make your own travel arrangements whilst an application is being considered. This timescale may be longer during the summer months when we have high volumes of applications.

In-year applications

If a child moves home during the school year, parents/carers can submit a new application online at any time. This can take up to 20 working days to process. Parents will need to make their own arrangements to get their children to/from school whilst the application is being considered.

Review and Appeals

Should an application be declined, or you are not happy with the travel assistance arrangements, you have a right to appeal. It will be your responsibility to ensure your child's attendance at school whilst any appeal is being carried out. We must receive this appeal within 20 working days of our decision or where the appeal relates to travel assistance arrangements within 20 days of your letter confirming the travel assistance arrangements. After this date our decision will remain final.

Details of where to send your appeal will be contained in your decline letter.

Complaints about the service provided are handled as complaints and would not be handled within the separate appeal process.

Stage 1: Review by Senior Officer

Your appeal will be considered by a senior officer delegated by the Director for Education and Skills. They will review the original travel assistance or travel assistance arrangement decision in light of the information you have provided. You will receive their decision in writing within 20 working days of us having received your appeal.

Stage 2: Appeal hearing

If you are not happy with the senior officer's decision at stage 1, you may escalate your appeal to stage 2. Details on how to request a stage 2 appeal hearing will be provided in the outcome letter for your stage 1 appeal and you will be given the opportunity provide any additional information that you may wish to be considered in light of the stage one decision. At stage 2, your appeal will be considered by an independent panel at an appeal hearing.

The panel will be made up of three independent Council officers who were not involved in the original decision or in stage 1 of the complaint.

The hearing will take place within 40 working days of you notifying us that you wish to escalate your appeal to stage 2.

If you wish, you may attend this hearing to explain to the panel why you do not agree with the Council's travel assistance or travel assistance arrangements decision.

Council officers involved in the case will also attend the hearing to explain the reasons for the decision not to provide travel assistance or the mode of travel assistance being offered. There will be an opportunity for you to ask the Officers questions during the hearing. Should you be unwilling or unable to attend the appeal date the Panel may make a decision based upon your written representations.

You will receive the appeal panel's decision in writing within 5 working days of the appeal hearing.

Local Government Ombudsman

If, following your appeal, you feel we have refused help unfairly, made a mistake or not handled your application for home to school travel assistance decision correctly, you may be able to complain to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman or you may wish to seek independent legal advice. For more information visit: <https://www.lgo.org.uk/> .