



**WOKINGHAM  
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Travel Assistance Policy  
for children resident in Wokingham aged 5 to 16, including  
children and young people with Special Educational Needs  
and/or Disabilities.**

**Academic year 2026/2027**

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## 1. Introduction

As a parent or carer, it is your responsibility to make sure your child attends school regularly. This usually includes arranging how they get to and from school, unless the local authority has a duty to provide help.

This policy explains how Wokingham Borough Council supports children and young people who are eligible for travel assistance. It covers those who live in Wokingham Borough, are of compulsory school age (5–16), and includes children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND).

Travel arrangements for young people in sixth form or above are explained in a separate policy. You can find the Post-16 Travel Assistance Policy on the Council's website.

We want to help children and young people become as independent as possible. Learning to travel safely and confidently is an important life skill. Wherever we can, we will encourage and support independent travel, including for those with SEND.

If you disagree with a decision about travel assistance, you have the right to appeal. This includes if we refuse to provide help or if you feel the assistance offered is not suitable.

Once travel assistance has been agreed, it will normally stay in place unless something changes. This could be a change in your circumstances, your child moving from primary to secondary school, or if the original decision was made in error.

This policy replaces all previous versions. We will review it regularly to make sure it meets legal requirements and reflects any changes in the law.

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## 2. The Council's Statutory Responsibilities

The law says that local Councils must help some children get to school if they meet certain criteria. This is called Travel Assistance. It does not mean that every child will get free transport.

The Council can also choose to help in other ways, such as offering paid-for seats or subsidised travel, but this is not guaranteed.

### 2.1 Promoting Sustainable Travel

By law (Section 508A of the Education Act 1996), the Council must encourage families to use sustainable travel options wherever possible. This means ways of travelling that are better for health and the environment, such as walking, cycling, or using public transport.

### 2.2 Providing Travel Assistance for Eligible Children

The Council has a legal duty (Section 508B of the Education Act 1996) to make sure that eligible children can get to school. These are children of compulsory school age (5–16) who meet certain conditions, such as:

- Living beyond the statutory walking distance from their nearest suitable school.
- Having special educational needs, a disability, or mobility issues that make walking unsafe or impractical.
- Living on a route that is not safe to walk.
- Being from a low-income family and meeting specific criteria.

The full details of who qualifies are explained in the next sections of this policy.

### 2.3 Compulsory School Age and School Phases

In England, children must receive full-time education from the term after their 5th birthday until the last Friday in June of the school year in which they turn 16. This is known as compulsory school age.

The typical age ranges for school phases in Wokingham are:

- **Primary school:** Ages 5 to 11 (Reception to Year 6)
- **Secondary school:** Ages 11 to 16 (Year 7 to Year 11)

*Note: Many children start Reception at age 4, but compulsory school age begins the term after their 5th birthday.*

Eligibility for free home-to-school transport is based on **your child's age and the distance to their nearest suitable school**, not just whether they attend a primary or secondary school. This means that:

- **For children under 8 years of age:** Travel assistance is provided where the nearest suitable school is more than 2 miles from the home address.
- **For children aged 8 years and over:** Travel assistance is provided where the nearest suitable school is more than 3 miles from the home address.

## 2.4 When Travel Assistance Is Provided

Travel assistance is arranged for the normal start and finish times of the school day only. It does not cover:

- Individual course timetables
- Work experience placements
- Exam timetables
- Travel between schools or colleges during the day
- Off-site activities
- After-school clubs or extra-curricular activities

Parents and carers are responsible for making their own arrangements for these situations.

## 2.5 Following National Guidance

This policy is based on statutory guidance from the Department for Education, which sets out what councils must and should do when providing travel assistance.

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## 3. Definitions

### 3.1 Home

Your child’s “home” is the address where they usually live. If parents/carers are separated or divorced, we look at where the child spends most of their school days. If your child spends equal time at two addresses, we’ll use the address that was considered the main one during the school admissions process to assess eligibility for travel support. In line with national guidance, the Council only provides travel assistance to one home address; it will not provide travel assistance to different addresses on different days.

### 3.2 Distances

We measure distances to two decimal places, starting from where your home meets the public street (e.g. your front gate) to the nearest entrance to the school. We use the shortest safe walking route, which may include footpaths, bridleways, and other pedestrian routes, not just roads. This method also applies to Extended Rights transport, although the upper distance limits for Extended Rights are measured by the shortest road route.

### 3.3 Nearest Suitable School

This means the closest school your child is eligible to attend, where there is a place available, and which offers education suitable for their age, ability, and any special educational needs (SEND). **This could include schools outside Wokingham Borough, such as in Reading, Bracknell, or Hampshire for example.**

### 3.4 An available place/place available

This means a place which is available on National Offers Day, during the normal admissions round or at the time of an in-year application. An In-year application is an application made for a school place not during the normal admissions round.

You can find your nearest schools and colleges by referring to the [Government website](https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/Search)  
<https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/Search>

### 3.5 Qualifying School

**A qualifying school includes:**

- foundation or voluntary school.
- community or foundation special school.
- non-maintained special school.
- pupil referral unit.
- academies, including free schools.

### 3.6 Nearest

We determine the “nearest” school by straight-line distance.

### 3.7 Normal Admissions Round

This refers to the usual time children start school:

- Reception for infant and primary schools
- Year 3 for junior schools
- Year 7 for secondary schools

Applications for these year groups are made during specific periods set by the Council and follow the national school admissions timetable.

Please note: For eligible children, the relevant educational setting may be a qualifying school or another place where they receive education.

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## 4. Nearest Suitable School

To qualify for free travel assistance, your child must attend the **nearest suitable school** — that is, physically, the closest school that:

- Has a place available
- Can meet your child’s age, ability, and any special educational needs (SEND)

A school is only considered unsuitable if there’s a physical reason your child cannot attend. For example:

- A secondary-aged child being placed in a primary school, or vice versa.

## 4.1 What Does Not Make a School Unsuitable?

We do not provide transport to the nearest school based on preferences such as:

- Gender
- Faith
- School type (e.g. academy, grammar, free school)
- Catchment/designated area, unless it is also the nearest suitable school with a place available

**We also cannot consider a school unsuitable just because it doesn't offer a specific course or has a lower Ofsted rating than you'd prefer.**

## 4.2 Why It's Important to List Your Nearest Schools

During the normal admissions round, unless there are exceptional circumstances, we assume that your four nearest schools (including those in neighbouring boroughs) will have space to accommodate your child.

To be considered for travel assistance, you must:

- List all four nearest schools on your application
- Apply to the nearest suitable school as your first preference

This helps ensure that if your child is not offered a place at the nearest suitable school, we can consider whether transport to another school may be provided under this policy.

If you only apply to one school and do not get a place, you may be allocated a school that is further away. In this case, you will not be entitled to travel assistance, even if the allocated school is not one of your preferences.

**Please note: The nearest suitable school with places available may not be your catchment or designated area school and may be in a neighbouring Local Authority area.**

## 4.3 Children with SEND

For children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), the nearest suitable school is the one the local authority considers most appropriate to meet their needs.

## 4.4 What Happens If Your Child Isn't Offered a Place at the Nearest School?

If your child is not offered a place at the nearest suitable school and you meet the distance and eligibility criteria, the Council may provide transport to the next nearest school with available places.

To qualify, you must:

- Show that you applied to the nearest school and
- Provide evidence that you were refused a place at that school and any other closer schools, including those in neighbouring boroughs

## 4.5 Attending More Than One School

If your child attends more than one school, travel assistance eligibility will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Typically, the Council will only provide transport to the school that a child is on roll at. If this school chooses to put alternative provision in place for your child, it would typically be the school's responsibility to discuss travel arrangements to any such provision with your family.

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## 5. Statutory Walking Distances

The Council must provide free travel assistance if your child lives further away from their nearest suitable school than the legal walking distance:

- **More than 2 miles** for children **under 8 years old**
- **More than 3 miles** for children and young people **aged 8 to 16**

These distances are measured using the shortest safe walking route, which may include footpaths and other pedestrian routes—not just roads.

If your child lives **within** these distances, they are generally expected to walk to school (with an adult if needed), unless other eligibility criteria apply (such as low income or special educational needs that mean that they cannot walk to school, even with accompaniment).

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## 6. Extended Rights

Some children may be entitled to additional travel support if they are from a low-income household.

This applies to children who meet the age, distance, and school criteria and whose household qualifies for free school meals under the low-income threshold (currently household income below £7,400 per year).

### Free school meals and extended rights transport

Eligibility for free school meals is assessed under separate national arrangements. While eligibility for free school meals has been extended nationally, not all children who receive free school meals will be eligible for extended rights travel assistance.

Universal Credit entitlement alone does not determine eligibility for extended rights transport.

### Low-Income Eligibility criteria

If your child is eligible for free school meals under the applicable low-income threshold for extended rights transport and meets one of the following criteria, travel assistance may be provided:

#### Aged 8 to 10

- They attend their nearest suitable school, and
- The distance from home to school is more than 2 miles.

## **Aged 11 to 16**

- They attend one of their three nearest suitable schools, and
- The distance from home to school is between 2 and 6 miles.

## **Aged 11 to 16 (faith-based preference)**

- They attend a school that is between 2 and 15 miles from home, and
- The school was chosen on the grounds of the parent's religion or belief, and
- There is no suitable school closer to the home that aligns with that religion or belief.

## **Low Income - Changes in circumstances**

Eligibility for travel assistance will be reviewed annually, at key transition points, or at the end of a school term where appropriate.

A change in free school meal status or household income during the school year will not normally result in the immediate withdrawal of transport assistance. If eligibility is no longer met, transport assistance may be withdrawn at the end of the school term in which the review takes place, subject to written notice and the right of appeal.

## **Low Income - Evidence required to support an application**

When applying for extended rights transport, parents or carers will be asked to provide evidence to confirm that the household meets the low-income threshold applicable to transport entitlement.

This may include one or more of the following:

- Confirmation of annual earned income showing income below the applicable threshold.
- A Universal Credit statement or other official notice showing household earned income.
- HMRC documentation such as a tax calculation, P60, or other official notice showing household earnings

If the required evidence is not provided, the application cannot be assessed under the low-income (extended rights) criteria. In such cases, it will only be considered against the Council's standard travel assistance eligibility rules and may be refused if the child does not meet those criteria.

## **6.1 Children attending schools on grounds of religion or belief**

Ordinarily assistance with travel to a faith school will only be provided if it is the nearest suitable school. If parental preference results in children's attendance at a faith school when there are suitable schools nearer to home, then no travel assistance will normally be provided. However, if children meet the Extended Rights eligibility category criteria, then travel assistance to a faith school which is not the nearest suitable school may be considered.

Under Extended Rights, when considering whether a faith school is preferred on the grounds of religion or belief, Wokingham Borough Council will consider the nature of other schools that may have been named as higher preferences on the application form. For an application for travel assistance to be agreed under this section, the expectation will be that the school that is preferred on the grounds of religion or belief will be named above any non-faith schools that have been named on the application form.

Parents/carers must provide supporting evidence regarding their genuine adherence to their religion or belief, and this will normally be confirmed by asking their minister of religion to sign the application form.

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## 7. Parental Preference

The Council is not required by law to provide free travel assistance if your child is attending a school based on parental preference, rather than attending the nearest suitable school (or one of the three nearest suitable schools for low-income families under extended rights).

This means that if you choose a school that is not one of the nearest, you will be responsible for arranging and paying for your child's travel.

### 7.1 Children with SEND

Children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) are eligible for travel assistance only if they attend the nearest suitable school that can meet their needs. If you choose a school that is further away, even if it meets your child's needs, you may be responsible for travel arrangements and costs for the entire time your child attends that school.

### 7.2 Refused Places at Nearest Schools

If your child is refused a place at the nearest suitable school, travel assistance may be provided to the next nearest school with space, but only if:

- You listed your four nearest schools on your application
- You were refused a place at all of them
- You meet the standard eligibility criteria (e.g. distance)

**Please note that travel assistance will not be provided if you apply for a place at schools which are not the nearest but don't get into those schools and are allocated a place at a school further away because there are no spaces left at the nearest suitable school.**

### 7.3 In-Year Applications (Outside the Normal Admissions Round)

If you decide to change your child's school outside the normal admissions round (even if the change is supported by the current or new school), the Council will **not provide travel assistance** unless:

- The new school is the **nearest suitable school**, and
- You meet the standard eligibility criteria

## 8. Safe Walking Routes

### 8.1 Route Safety

If your child lives within the statutory walking distance to their nearest suitable school, the Council may still provide free travel assistance if the walking route is assessed as unsafe.

A route is considered unsafe if a child cannot reasonably be expected to walk it safely, even when accompanied by an adult.

We assess walking routes using the national guidance: **“Assessment of Walked Routes to School”** (published by Road Safety GB).

### 8.2 What Makes a Route Safe or Unsafe?

**A walking route may include:**

- Footpaths, bridleways, and other pedestrian routes
- Recognised roads and pavements

A route is considered available if a child, accompanied as necessary, can walk it with reasonable safety. It is not considered unsafe just because a child would be walking alone.

#### Factors Considered in Route Safety Assessments

- Road width, visibility, and sharp bends.
- Presence and continuity of footpaths, verges, or safe walking areas.
- Traffic volume and speed during school travel times.
- Availability and difficulty of road crossings.
- Urban or rural setting and driver expectations.
- Speed limits, warning signs, and other safety measures.
- Accident history (typically over the past three years).

#### Factors NOT Considered in Route Safety

- A parent’s availability to accompany the child.
- Personal safety concerns (e.g., fear of strangers).
- Family circumstances or finances.
- Local weather or seasonal conditions.
- Temporary issues (e.g., roadworks, flooding).
- Absence of street lighting (on its own).
- Lack of pavements (unless combined with other hazards).
- Overgrown hedges or uneven terrain (unless they obstruct the route).
- How long or tiring the walk is.

### 8.3 Route Improvements and Reassessments

The Council is committed to improving walking routes. If a route is improved and reassessed as safe, free transport will stop at the end of the current school term.

We may reassess a route at any time if new information becomes available, including updates to our mapping system.

## 8.4 Parents/Carers with Disabilities

If a parent/carer has a **disability that prevents them from accompanying their child**, they can request a walking route assessment. If:

- There is **no other responsible adult** available, and
- The route is not suitable for the parent's disability or the child's age requires accompaniment

Then the child may qualify for free travel assistance. Supporting evidence of the disability will be required.

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## 9. Travel Assistance during the school day and accompaniment

The Council's duty to provide travel assistance applies only to the compulsory part of the school day — that is, the start and end times of the normal school day.

This means the Council does not provide travel assistance for:

- Part-time attendance or trial placements
- Breakfast clubs or after-school activities
- Medical appointments during the school day
- Any other activities outside the standard school timetable

If another organisation (such as the school) offers alternative travel arrangements for these activities, the Council is not responsible for providing additional or bespoke transport.

### 9.1 Accompaniment and Route Accessibility

When assessing eligibility for travel assistance due to Special Educational Needs (SEN), disabilities, mobility issues, or unsafe walking routes, the Council must consider whether a child could reasonably be expected to walk if accompanied by an adult.

This includes walking to a bus stop or pick-up point as part of the journey to school.

The general expectation is that a child will be accompanied by a responsible adult (usually a parent or carer) where necessary, unless it is unreasonable to expect this. The following are not normally considered valid reasons for a child being unable to be accompanied:

- Parental working arrangements
- Childcare responsibilities
- Lack of availability due to other children or use of pushchairs/prams

**Wokingham Borough Council expects working parents/carers to make appropriate arrangements, such as using wraparound care, childminders, or support from family and friends.**

### 9.2 Parents/Carers with Disabilities

The Council promotes equality of opportunity for parents/carers with disabilities. If a parent's disability prevents them from accompanying their child on a walking route that would otherwise be considered safe, the Council will consider reasonable adjustments, such as providing travel assistance for the child.

If the parent is supported by Adult Social Care, they should contact their social care team first, as travel assistance may be provided as part of their overall care package.

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## 10. Timing of assessment of eligibility

We assess whether your child is eligible for travel assistance at the same time as school places are allocated during the normal admissions round:

- **Secondary school applications:**  
Apply in **September–October**. Offers are sent out in **early March**.
- **Primary and junior school applications:**  
Apply in **November–January**. Offers are sent out in **early April**.

If you apply after the deadline, your child's eligibility for travel assistance will be based on the schools that still have places available at the time your application is processed. This includes checking whether places were available at nearer schools when your application was made.

In some cases, eligibility may be assessed during the school year, such as when a family moves to a new address within the borough.

### 10.1 Duration of Travel Assistance

If granted, travel assistance usually applies for the whole school year. It may be reviewed however, if there are significant changes, such as:

- A change of address
- A change of school

Families are responsible for informing the Council of any change in their home address.

### 10.2 Children Turning 8 years old

If a child under the age of 8 receives travel assistance because they live between 2 and 3 miles from their nearest suitable school, this assistance will end at the end of the term following their 8th birthday, unless they meet other eligibility criteria.

### 10.3 Annual Reviews and Policy Changes

- All travel assistance is reviewed annually.
- If a child is no longer eligible, the Council will consider the impact on the child before making changes, aiming to avoid unnecessary disruption.

**Important:** Any future changes to travel assistance or school admissions policies will not be applied retrospectively. Children who were deemed eligible under the current policy will continue to receive support for the duration of their entitlement.

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## 11. Travel Assistance for Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), Disabilities, or Mobility Problems

The Council has a duty to provide travel assistance for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), disabilities, or mobility problems who:

- Are attending their nearest suitable school, and
- Cannot reasonably be expected to walk to school or use public transport, even if accompanied, due to their needs or health and safety concerns

This applies even if the school is **within the statutory walking distance**.

### 11.1 How Eligibility Is Assessed

Eligibility is needs-based — there is no automatic entitlement to travel assistance just because a child has an EHCP or a diagnosed condition.

Each application is considered on a case-by-case basis and reviewed regularly. Parents/carers will be asked to provide information about their child's needs, and professionals supporting the child should submit evidence explaining why it is not reasonable to expect the child to walk, even with adult support.

Travel arrangements are reviewed at least annually, and updated professional evidence may be required to continue support.

### 11.2 Supporting Independence

The Council is committed to helping children develop independence. Travel assistance may be designed to support this goal, where appropriate. More details are available in section 17: **“Supporting Independence and the Development of Self-Reliant Travellers.”**

### 11.3 Parental Preference and EHCPs

Please note:

- The Council is not required to provide travel assistance if your child attends a school based on parental preference, even if that school is named in their EHCP.
- To qualify for travel assistance, the school must be the nearest suitable school that can meet your child's needs.
- If you choose a school that is further away, you will be responsible for arranging and funding your child's travel.

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## 12. Travel Assistance for Short Term medical conditions

The Council may provide temporary travel assistance if your child:

- Is fit to attend school, but
- Cannot walk or travel by their usual means due to a medical condition, and
- Is attending their nearest suitable school

## 12.1 Medical Evidence Required

To apply for travel assistance on medical grounds, you must provide appropriate evidence from a medical professional. This could include:

- A letter from your child's consultant
- A report from a GP or specialist involved in your child's care

Transport will be provided only for the time period specified by the medical professional. If no timeframe is given, or if the condition is long-term, the Council will review the situation at least once per academic year and may request updated medical evidence.

## 12.2 Timely Submission of Evidence

To avoid delays:

- Medical evidence must be submitted within 20 working days of the Council's request
- If you need more time, you must request an extension
- If no evidence is received and no extension is requested, the application will be refused

If the delay is outside your control, please inform the Community Transport Team as soon as possible.

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## 13. Types of Travel Assistance provided

If your child is eligible for travel assistance, the type of support offered will be decided by the Council, based on:

- Your child's individual needs
- The nature and practicality of the journey to school
- Efficient use of public resources

The assistance offered might include, but is not limited to:

- A personal travel budget paid to parents who agree to use their own car
- A walking escort or responsible adult to accompany the child on public transport
- Independent Travel Training to help children travel safely on their own
- Free public transport passes
- A seat on a dedicated school bus or minibus
- A shared taxi, where more personalised arrangements are needed

**The Council will always aim to provide travel assistance that is appropriate, safe, and cost-effective, while meeting the needs of each child.**

### 13.1 Passenger Assistants

The Council may provide an escort on Council-arranged transport **only in specific circumstances**, such as:

- Where a child has medical needs, including the need for rescue medication
- Where a child's behaviour or needs pose a health and safety risk to themselves or others
- Where a group of children travelling together requires support to manage their needs

If a child attends a school within statutory walking distance and an escort is needed, the Council may ask a parent to accompany the child. This will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

## 13.2 Application Processing

Applications received during the school year will be processed as quickly as possible, with transport arrangements confirmed **within 10 working days**, or sooner where possible.

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## 14. ‘Suitable’ Travel Assistance arrangements

For travel assistance to be considered suitable, it must be:

- Safe
- Reasonably stress-free
- Allow the child to arrive at school ready to learn

### 14.1 Journey Times

Government guidance recommends that:

- Primary-aged children should not travel more than 45 minutes each way
- Secondary-aged children should not travel more than 75 minutes each way
- These times include any walking time to and from pick-up points

However, it is recognised that in some cases — such as rural areas or remote locations — these journey times may not be achievable.

### 14.2 Children with Complex Needs

For children attending specialist or out-of-borough placements, shorter journey times are desirable, but may not always be possible due to:

- The specialist nature of the provision
- The distance from home
- The need to share transport with other children with complex needs

In some cases, journey times may exceed the recommended limits to avoid placing children in multiple small vehicles, which can be costly and less efficient.

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## 15. Personal Budgets

If your child is eligible for free home-to-school travel assistance, the Council may offer a Personal Travel Budget (PTB) instead of arranged transport — but only where this offers best value for money and you agree to it.

A PTB gives you greater flexibility and control over how your child gets to school. You can tailor travel arrangements to suit your child's needs and your family's circumstances.

### 15.1 Benefits of a Personal Travel Budget

A PTB may be especially helpful if:

- Your child has complex needs, and you prefer to arrange transport yourself
- You want to combine the Council's contribution with your own finances, benefits, or bursaries to create a bespoke travel solution (potentially, combining PTBs with other families who attend the same school)
- Your child attends a course that is partly outside normal school hours, and you need more flexible arrangements
- You want to use a trusted family member, childminder, or carer to support your child's journey
- You want to avoid shared transport and provide a more familiar or calming travel experience

### 15.2 What You'll Be Responsible For

If you accept a PTB, you must ensure that your child:

- Travels safely
- Arrives at school regularly and on time
- Is ready to learn once they arrive

**Note:** Attendance will be monitored, and the Council may reclaim funds if your child does not attend school or college as expected.

You are also responsible for checking any HMRC obligations related to receiving a personal budget.

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## 16. Pick-up Points

Travel assistance is assessed based on your child's registered home address, but transport may not always be door-to-door.

The Council may use reasonable pick-up and drop-off points, such as:

- A nearby bus stop
- A safe location where children and parents/carers can wait for the vehicle

Children may be required to walk to a pick-up point, usually **within one mile** of their home. The total walking distance will be considered alongside:

- The child's age and ability
- Any Special Educational Needs or Disabilities

## 17. Supporting independence and the development of self-reliant travellers

The Council is committed to helping children and young people become as independent as possible. Where it is safe, appropriate, and reasonable, children with SEND may be expected to walk (accompanied if needed) to a common pick-up point near their home.

To support independence, the Council may offer Independent Travel Training. This helps children learn the skills needed to travel safely on public transport. Training is delivered 1:1 and may include:

- Reading timetables and managing time
- Orientation and route planning
- Road safety and personal safety
- Buying tickets and accessing transport
- Communication and problem-solving

If the SEND Transport Team identifies that a child may benefit from travel training, a formal assessment will be carried out to create a personalised plan. Training typically lasts around 8 to 12 weeks, and is only considered complete when:

- The child, trainer, and family agree the child is ready to travel independently

Once a child is deemed capable of independent travel, no further travel assistance will typically be provided, except in exceptional circumstances. However, we will often support independent travel by offering a bus pass, where appropriate.

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## 18. Residential Schools

Where children with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) require a residential placement following assessment, Travel Assistance may be offered as follows:

- Weekly borders: Travel Assistance between home and school once each direction each week
- Termly boarders: Travel Assistance between home and school at the beginning and end of each term and half term
- 52-week placements: Travel Assistance between home and school for eight visits throughout the year

Travel Assistance will not normally be provided to and from respite placements.

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## 19. Travel Assistance for those not eligible for Free Home to School Transport under this policy

### 19.1 Children Under 5

There is no statutory duty to provide Travel Assistance for those under the age of 5.

### 19.2 Spare Seat options for non-eligible children

If your child is not eligible for free travel assistance, you may be able to:

- Purchase a spare seat on an existing school transport route (subject to availability and conditions)
- Buy a public transport pass directly from local bus or train operators

Parents can Read our [Policy for Allocating Spare Seats on Council School Buses \(PDF\)](#) to find out more about how spare seats are allocated on school buses.

**Important:** If a seat is later needed for a child who is eligible for free travel, your seat may be withdrawn. You will receive two weeks' notice, and a refund for any unused portion of the fare.

The cost of fare-paying seats is reviewed annually and reflects:

- The cost of transport
- The aim to fill spare capacity
- The Council's commitment to offering options for families not eligible for free travel

**Note:** Additional vehicles will **not** be provided if demand from non-eligible children exceeds available capacity.

If you are experiencing financial hardship, please contact the Council. We may be able to signpost you to other sources of support.

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## 20. Exceptional circumstances, change of circumstances and other assistance

The Council may consider providing travel assistance in exceptional circumstances or where there has been a change in family circumstances.

### Change of address

If you move house, you must reapply for travel assistance. Eligibility will be reassessed based on your new address.

- If you choose to keep your child at their existing school after moving, this is considered parental preference, and you will be responsible for transport.
- The only exception is if closer schools (including those in neighbouring boroughs) do not have places available in your child's year group.

To qualify for transport in this case, you must:

- Apply to the nearest suitable schools
- Provide evidence that your application was refused due to lack of places

Travel assistance will not be provided to a Wokingham school if there are closer schools (even outside the borough) with places available and within statutory walking distance.

If you move home, you must update your new address with the school admissions team before submitting a travel assistance application. **Without this updated, we will not be able to validate your application.** For assistance with updating your home address email [schooladmissions@wokingham.gov.uk](mailto:schooladmissions@wokingham.gov.uk)

## Years 10 and 11 – Special Consideration

In exceptional cases if you changed address when your child is in Years 10 or 11, the Council may provide transport support if it means a child can stay at their existing school and the following circumstances apply:

- the existing school remains the nearest school (subject to age/distance criteria and any applicable low-income criteria) or
- where there have been unavoidable reasons for a move such as a forced move due to fire or flood, or due to a forced eviction.

## Children living in temporary accommodation

If a child is of statutory school age and the family are placed in Temporary Accommodation by the Council, consideration will be given to the provision of Travel Assistance for the purpose of accessing education for up to one term, subject to the standard eligibility criteria being met.

## Change of child's needs

From time to time a child's needs can change during the year. If the current Travel Assistance is no longer meeting the child's needs, parents/carers should in the first place contact the Community Transport Team to discuss the change in their child's needs, and any reasonable adjustments that may be required. In some cases, further evidence or advice from professionals involved with the child may be required.

## Changing Schools

Where a parent decides to change their child's school after they have started, the child's eligibility for Travel Assistance will have to be reconsidered. This may include the need to make a completely new application.

## Managed Moves

Where parents/carers and school agree to a managed move between schools, transport will only be provided to the new school if it is both the nearest suitable school and it is outside the statutory walking distance from the home address.

## Transport to a Pupil Referral Unit or other education provider

Although the Council offers Travel Assistance in cases where the eligibility criteria are met, it is still the responsibility of parents/carers in all circumstances to ensure their children get to school. This includes attendance at a Pupil Referral Unit and any other places where education may be provided.

Parents/carers should be aware that there is no automatic transport entitlement to and from the Pupil Referral Unit or similar education provider. This also applies to pupil exclusions.

Transport to a Pupil Referral Unit and to other places where education will only be provided in accordance with the child's general entitlement. If a child has been placed temporarily in a Pupil Referral Unit, they may be eligible for Travel Assistance if the eligibility criteria are met.

Any requests for exceptional assistance will need to be supported by documentary evidence from the Pupil Referral Unit e.g., Medical Certificate or a Court Order.

Travel Assistance may be withdrawn from pupils who regularly fail to attend the PRU – responsibility for transportation to ensure regular attendance will then pass to parent/carers/guardians.

## Pupils Excluded from School

A pupil permanently excluded from a school will be provided with Travel Assistance to his or her new school provided it is both the nearest suitable school, as agreed by the Council and is outside the statutory walking distance from home.

## Temporary Attendance at Alternative Provision

Where a pupil is registered at a school but is attending a place other than that school as a result of temporary exclusion, eligibility for Travel Assistance will apply to the other place for the temporary period.

## Elective Home Education (EHE) and Education Other Than at School (EOTAS)

Where parents/carers have made the choice to educate their child at home no assistance will be available from the Council in connection with any transport need(s) arising.

When the Council arranges for a child to have an education other than at school, the Council will consider a Travel Assistance budget as part of the overall package for families to arrange their own transport.

**Further information and advice regarding Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) and travel assistance can be found in the [EOTAS Policy \(PDF document\)](#)**

## Children in Care

Children for whom the Council is the corporate parent sometimes attend schools other than their nearest school. Where the professional staff responsible for the child decide that it would be detrimental to the child's wellbeing to be moved to another school, funding for travel assistance will need to form part of the overall foster care package.

Following a move into Foster Care, where the school attended is no longer the nearest school for the new address, and the foster carer is unable to provide transport, then transport may be provided to enable the child to continue at their current school on a temporary basis. In these circumstances transport will need to be discussed with the Social Care team and if transport is deemed necessary it will need to be funded as part of any Social Care package for the child/children concerned.

When it is decided that a child placement will be long term (over six months), consideration must be given to the child relocating to a local school.

## Other

There may be other circumstances in which the Council will consider providing transport assistance. These include but are not limited to:

- changes of address due to fleeing domestic abuse,
- changes of address or school are linked to preventing harm to, or exploitation of, a child.

Parents/carers who believe these circumstances apply to them should contact the Council for advice. They will be expected to provide evidence of the relevant circumstance before their application can be considered.

## Travel Assistance provided in error

Where free Travel Assistance has been provided in error, or, where there has been material changes to the route to school, provision will be withdrawn. However, Travel Assistance will continue until the end of the term in which the error was notified, to allow families time to make alternative arrangements.

## For clarification Travel assistance will not be provided for the following journeys:

- Journeys to and from breakfast or after school clubs
- Trips and journeys during the school day which are in the curriculum.
- To or from a venue that isn't the normal home address, for example the address of a childcare provider or a short break placement (unless there is a legal order in place, or a statutory care plan agreed by us)
- If a child is unwell and has to be collected from school during a school day
- If a child is excluded during a school day
- For medical appointments or other approved activities which affect the start or end of and during the school day
- If a child has missed the contracted transport
- For transitional/integration placements in schools/colleges
- For attendance at work experience programmes
- If a child is withdrawn from school by their family and placed in an alternative education setting
- If a child is placed at an Alternative Provision setting by a school (assuming they remain on roll with that school).
- To fall in line with other family members travelling in the same/similar direction
- To accommodate work commitments or domestic difficulties of families including taking other children to school or an allocated pick-up point

- Where parents/carers are unwilling, or unavailable to escort their child to school or an allocated pick-up point.
- A family being unable to transport their child to school only on the sole grounds that they are a single parent family.
- Children in temporary care, including foster care (these cases should be referred to the children's social care team to consider available support)
- An inability to afford existing transport arrangement, e.g. Resulting from loss of employment
- Family breakdown and fragmentation.
- Long-term or temporary medical conditions without sufficient medical evidence from an appropriate medical professional

**Please note that the above list is illustrative and not exhaustive.**

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## 21. Behaviour on School Transport

Families, schools, children, transport contractors and the Council, working in partnership, all share responsibility for ensuring that acceptable behaviour is maintained to ensure safe and stress-free school transport for all.

In particular we expect all children and young people to be ready for their transport in good time.

When travelling on transport we expect all children and young people, as appropriate to their ability, to:

- Behave in a safe and responsible way whilst travelling,
- Follow all instructions from the driver (or Escort where one is provided), especially in an emergency,
- Always wear seatbelts or appropriate safety harnesses whilst on the vehicle, where these are provided.

Bullying, including the use of hate speech, will not be tolerated, and will be reported to parents/carers and school/college. We will not tolerate abuse of any sort, whether from a young person or from their parents/carers and carers.

Children and young people are expected to behave in a safe and appropriate manner whilst on transport. The Council will work with schools, parents/carers, and the child to help manage behaviours to ensure the ongoing safety and comfort of all passengers including drivers and any passenger assistants.

Should a child or young person misbehave whilst being transported to or from school, the provision of transport may be withdrawn either for a specified period of time or permanently. Normally a warning letter will be sent to parents/carers/carers/guardians prior to transport being withdrawn. However, if an incident is considered serious enough, following an investigation by the Transport team, the withdrawal of transport may be immediate. In this instance the responsibility for ensuring attendance at school will remain with the parent/carer/guardian of the child.

As part of its responsibilities to ensure that children and young people in Wokingham Borough are safe, the Council will engage with transport operators and providers in the local area to ensure that drivers are aware of and carry out their safeguarding responsibilities appropriately. If parents/carers and carers have any issues or concerns around the safeguarding of their or other children whilst being transported to or from a place of education or learning, they should contact the Travel Assistance team without delay.

## 22. How to Apply

### 22.1 Pupils without an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

Application Forms are available online at:

Travel assistance to school and college: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/schools-and-education/school-information-and-services/travel-assistance-school-and-college>

Any application will only be considered once by the Community Transport Unit. If an application is refused, one Stage 1 appeal may be submitted and if that is unsuccessful, one Stage 2 appeal. A fresh application may only be submitted if there is a change in circumstances which could affect eligibility.

### 22.2 When to Apply

Parents/carers who wish to apply for Travel Assistance should do so as soon as the offer of a school place has been accepted. For parents/carers and carers who file an appeal against a placement, the application should be made as soon as possible after the appeal outcome is known.

Those wishing to be considered for Travel Assistance under the extended rights criteria should include evidence of income and/or entitlement to free school meals with their application.

If Applications for Travel Assistance are made as soon as the offer of a school place has been accepted, applicants will be notified of outcomes from their application as soon as appropriate Travel Assistance has been secured, and at least 21 calendar days before the start of the Academic Year.

**Travel Assistance arrangements will be reviewed on an annual basis, to ensure that any Assistance provided during the Academic year remains appropriate and that eligibility criteria for the forthcoming Academic year are met. Reviews will be carried out in the Spring of each academic year. One possible outcome of these reviews is that Parents/carers/Carers may be asked to re-apply for Travel Assistance support. Applications will need to be submitted and assessed before the end of the summer term in the Academic Year.**

### 22.3 In year transfers or newcomers to the area

Applications for Wokingham Borough schools are considered 6 weeks in advance of the school place being required. Parents/carers and carers should apply for travel assistance as soon as they have a school place confirmed.

### 22.4 Pupils with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

Parents/carers will still have to complete an application form, but they should include evidence of additional needs, including why they believe it is unreasonable for them to accompany their child to school, where this is appropriate.

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## 23. Complaints and Appeals

## 23.1 What is the difference between an appeal and a complaint?

Complaints arise when you are unhappy about something, for example, you may feel you have not been dealt with properly or in a professional manner, that information given to you was incorrect or that there has been an unacceptable delay.

In the first instance please contact the Community Transport Unit (CTU) via email to [CTU.Group@wokingham.gov.uk](mailto:CTU.Group@wokingham.gov.uk). If further to this your issue has not been resolved, please follow the Complaints Procedure.

With an appeal, you may be perfectly happy with the way that you have been treated but feel that the wrong decision has been made and would like it re-examined. For these issues, please follow the Appeals Procedure.

## 23.2 Complaints Procedure

Complaints about the provision of Travel Assistance will be investigated in accordance with the Council's Complaints Policy.

The complaints policy can be found at: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/contact-us/complaints-and-compliments/>.

This does not apply to complaints about a refusal to grant transport, which will be dealt with through the Transport Appeals procedure (see below).

## 23.3 Appeals procedure

The law states that as a parent / carer, it is your responsibility to get your child to school. Only in a small number of cases does the Council have to provide help. Most Wokingham children are not eligible for free school transport.

There is strict eligibility criteria set out in national law and the Council's Home to School Travel Assistance Policy. If you believe the transport policy has not been applied correctly, then you may ask for the decision to be reviewed. You must contact us in writing within 20 days of receiving your initial outcome.

### 23.3.1 Stage 1 – Review of decision

You will need to clearly state the specific parts of our Home to School Transport Assistance Policy which you believe have not been applied correctly and include or attach any relevant information to support your case.

The decision will be reviewed within 20 working days, and you will receive a detailed written notification of the outcome of the review.

### **23.3.2 Before submitting an appeal, please bear in mind the following:**

- If you have chosen a school for your child which is not the nearest school to where you live, it is your responsibility to consider how to get your child to that school
- If you live within the statutory walking distance to school, it is your legal responsibility to make sure your child is accompanied on a journey where that is appropriate. We are unable to consider your work or other personal commitments as a reason for you to be unable to accompany your child yourself. If it is assessed that your child can safely walk to school if accompanied, then you will not be eligible for transport assistance
- If your appeal relates to a medical issue, you will need to provide documentary evidence of this alongside the appeal form when you submit it
- If your child has a statement of special educational needs, you should discuss school transport with the special educational needs and disabled (SEND) children's team
- If you've chosen a school for your child which is not the nearest school to where you live, it's your responsibility to consider how to get your child to that school. The nearest suitable school for transport purposes means physically, the nearest qualifying school the pupil is eligible to attend where there is an available place that provides education appropriate to the age, ability and aptitude of the child, and any SEND that the child may have. This may include schools in neighbouring Boroughs such as Reading, Bracknell and Hampshire for example.
- It is your legal responsibility to make sure your child is accompanied on a journey where that's appropriate - we are unable to consider your work commitments as a reason for you to be unable to accompany your child yourself
- If your child has a Statement of Special Educational Needs, you should discuss school transport with the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Transport Team
- The criteria for assistance with school transport for low-income families is set nationally, so this will have been looked at already in your original transport application - we cannot reconsider decisions on this basis as the rules are set by the government.

### **23.3.3 How to make a Stage 1 Appeal**

You should complete the [appeal request form \(PDF\)](#) and email it to:

[schooltransportappeals@wokingham.gov.uk](mailto:schooltransportappeals@wokingham.gov.uk)

### **23.3.4 Stage 2 - Appeals Panel**

If you remain unhappy with the decision made at Stage 1, you will have 20 working days from the receipt of the Council's decision to make a request to escalate the matter to Stage 2 appeal.

Within 40 working days of receipt of your request, an independent appeals panel will consider written and/or verbal representations from both the parent and officers involved in the case and will give a written notification of the outcome within 5 working days.

No member of the appeal panel will have been involved in the original decision to decline Travel Assistance. It is outside of the School Transport Appeals Panel's role to review the Policy itself. The Panel is also unable to consider school admission matters. If you decide to submit a Stage 2 Appeal, we ask that you clearly explain why you believe that the reasons for refusing your Stage One Appeal (provided within the Stage 1 Appeal Review outcome letter) do not comply with the Council's Home to School Travel Assistance Policy.

### **23.3.5 How to make a Stage 2 Appeal**

You can request a stage 2 appeal by emailing [democratic.services@wokingham.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@wokingham.gov.uk)

### **23.3.6 Not eligible for school transport?**

If your child is not eligible for home to school transport, there are other ways to get to school. Travelling actively to school provides the perfect opportunity for children to learn about their local area, expand their social networks and feel independent.

Modes of travel can include:

- Walking
- Scooting
- Cycling
- Park and striding (parking at least a 5-minute walk from your final destination)
- Public transport

For more information on alternative travel options and to explore public transport services, please visit the [My Journey website](#).

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## 24. Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

You have a right of complaint to the LGO if you feel that there was a failure on the part of the Authority to comply with procedural rules or there was an irregularity in the way the appeal was handled.

The LGO can be contacted at:

Local Government Ombudsman  
PO Box 4771  
Coventry  
CV4 0EH

Helpline: 0300 061 0614.

[www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)

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## 25. Key Contacts

**COMMUNITY TRANSPORT UNIT (CTU):**

[schooltransport@wokingham.gov.uk](mailto:schooltransport@wokingham.gov.uk)

**SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND) TRANSPORT TEAM:**

[SENDTransport@wokingham.gov.uk](mailto:SENDTransport@wokingham.gov.uk)

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