



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 2027/2028

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1. Introduction

This policy explains when Wokingham Borough Council can provide travel assistance for children aged 5 to 16 who live in Wokingham Borough.

In most cases, parents and carers are responsible for making sure their child gets to and from school. The Council must provide help only where a child meets the eligibility rules set out in this policy. These include rules about:

- Distance from the nearest suitable school;
- Whether the walking route is safe;
- Extended rights for low-income families;
- Special educational needs, disability or mobility needs;
- Exceptional circumstances.

The policy explains how we assess applications and what support may be offered if your child is eligible. It applies to children of compulsory school age, including children with special educational needs or disabilities.

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

We want children and young people to become as independent as possible. Learning to travel safely and confidently is an important life skill. Where it is safe and appropriate, we will encourage and support independent travel, including for children and young people with SEND.

If you disagree with a decision about travel assistance, the policy details how you can appeal. This includes where we refuse travel assistance or where you believe the assistance offered is not suitable.

Once travel assistance has been agreed, it will normally remain in place unless something changes. This could include a change in your circumstances (for example, a change of home address), your child moving from primary to secondary school, or where the original decision was made in error.

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

2. The Council's Statutory Responsibilities

2.1. The law says that local councils must provide travel assistance for some children who meet specific eligibility rules. This does not mean that every child will receive free transport.

2.2. In some cases, the Council may also offer other travel options, such as paid-for seats or subsidised travel. These options are discretionary, so they are not guaranteed and will depend on availability and the circumstances at the time.

Promoting Sustainable Travel

2.3. Under Section 508A of the Education Act 1996, the Council must promote sustainable travel wherever possible.

2.4. Sustainable travel means choosing healthier and greener ways to get to school, where this is safe and practical. This could include walking, cycling, scooting, using public transport, or sharing journeys.

Providing Travel Assistance for Eligible Children

2.5. Under Section 508B of the Education Act 1996, the Council must provide travel assistance for children who meet the legal eligibility rules.

2.6. This applies to children of compulsory school age, usually aged 5 to 16, who meet one or more of the following criteria:

- They live too far from their nearest suitable school to walk;
- They have special educational needs, disability or mobility needs that mean they cannot reasonably walk to school, even with adult support;
- The walking route to school is not safe;
- They are from a low-income family and meet the extended rights rules.

The next sections explain these rules in more detail and how we decide whether a child qualifies.

3. Compulsory School Age and School Phases

3.1. 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, when they turn 16. This is known as compulsory school age.

3.2. 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.

3.3. Eligibility for free travel assistance 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 they attend the nearest suitable school and this is more than 2 miles from the home address.
- **For children aged 8 years and over:** Travel assistance is provided where they attend the nearest suitable school and this is more than 3 miles from the home address.

4. Children Under 5 years of age

4.1. There is no statutory duty to provide free travel assistance for children who are under compulsory school age. Compulsory school age begins on the prescribed day following a child's fifth birthday, so many children attending nursery or Reception before this point will not be covered by the statutory travel assistance duties. Parents and carers remain responsible for making suitable travel arrangements for children under 5.

- 4.2.** The Council may consider requests relating to children under 5 only where there are exceptional circumstances, but any support would be discretionary and not an automatic entitlement. Each request will be considered on its own facts, taking account of the child's age, individual needs, the journey involved, available options, and the efficient use of public resources.

5. National Guidance

- 5.1.** This policy follows [statutory guidance from the Department for Education](#). This guidance explains what councils **must do**, and what they should **consider**, when deciding whether a child is eligible for travel assistance.

6. Definitions

This section explains key words and phrases used throughout the policy. These definitions are included to help parents and carers understand how the Council assesses eligibility for travel assistance and how terms such as “home”, “nearest suitable school” and “available place” are applied when decisions are made.

6.1. 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.

6.2. 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 travel assistance, although the upper distance limits for extended rights are measured by the shortest road route.

6.3. 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.

6.4. An available place/place available

This means a school place that is available at the relevant point in the admissions process. For children applying during the normal admissions round, this is usually the position during the National Offer Day process. For in-year applications, this is the position when the application is considered. We will use the admissions information available at that time, including whether nearer suitable schools had places available.

6.5. Qualifying School

A qualifying school includes:

- Community schools, foundation schools, voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools;
- Academies (including those which are free schools, university technical colleges, studio schools and special schools);
- Alternative provision academies;
- Community or foundation special schools;
- Non-maintained special schools;
- Pupil referral units;
- Maintained nursery schools (where attended by a child of compulsory school age); and
- City technology colleges and city colleges for the technology of the arts.

6.6. Nearest

We determine the “**nearest**” school by straight-line distance. You can find your nearest schools and colleges by referring to the Government website <https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/Search>

6.7. Normal Admissions Round

The normal admissions round is the usual time when children start a new phase of school. In Wokingham this normally means:

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

7. Timing of assessment of eligibility

7.1. 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 and offers continue to be made from waitlists up until the end of August.
- **Primary and junior school applications:** Apply in November - January. Offers are sent out in early April and offers continue to be made from waitlists up until the end of August.

7.2. 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.

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

8. Nearest Suitable School

8.1. To qualify for free travel assistance, your child must attend their nearest suitable school. This means physically, the closest school that:

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

8.2. A school is only considered unsuitable if there is a physical reason your child cannot attend. For example: A secondary-aged child being placed in a primary school, or vice versa.

8.3. A school will not usually be treated as unsuitable because it does not match a family's preference.

8.4. For example, we cannot treat a school as unsuitable because of:

- Gender;
- Faith;
- School type, such as an academy or community school;
- Catchment or designated area, unless it is also the nearest suitable school with a place available;
- Reputation;
- Friendship groups;
- Ofsted rating;
- The courses, subjects, activities, or pastoral support offered.

8.5. This means we cannot provide travel assistance to a different school just because a family would prefer it.

9. Why It Is Important to List Your Nearest Schools

9.1. During the normal admissions round, we expect families to apply for their nearest suitable schools, including schools in neighbouring boroughs. Travel assistance is

based on the nearest suitable school with a place available, which may not necessarily be your catchment school (if relevant) or preferred school.

9.2. To be considered for travel assistance, 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

9.3. This means that if your child is not offered a place at the nearest suitable school, we can consider whether travel assistance should be provided to another school under this policy.

9.4. If you apply for only one school and your child is not offered a place, they may be allocated a school further away. In that situation, your child will not qualify for travel assistance if nearer suitable schools were available but were not listed on your application.

9.5. Please note that the nearest suitable school with a place available may not be your catchment or designated area school. It may also be in a neighbouring local authority area.

10. Attending More Than One School

10.1. 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, although there is no automatic entitlement to home to school transport for such provision, even if over the statutory walking distance for the family in question.

11. Nearest Suitable School and Children with SEND

- 11.1.** For children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), the nearest suitable school is the school named in the EHCP by the local authority.
- 11.2.** This is the school the local authority has decided can meet your child's special educational needs. We will then look at whether your child qualifies for travel assistance under this policy.
- 11.3.** If you asked for a different school to be named in the EHCP, and we had identified a nearer suitable school that could meet your child's needs, travel assistance may not be provided to the school you chose.

12. Statutory Walking Distances

- 12.1.** The Council must provide free travel assistance if your child attends their nearest suitable school and lives more than the legal walking distance from that school.
- 12.2.** The legal walking distances are:
 - More than 2 miles for children under 8 years old;
 - More than 3 miles for children aged 8 to 16.
- 12.3.** We measure these distances using the shortest safe walking route. This may include footpaths, bridleways and other pedestrian routes, not just roads.
- 12.4.** If your child lives within the legal walking distance, you are responsible for arranging how they get to school, including arranging for an adult to walk with them if needed. Your child may still qualify for travel assistance if another eligibility rule applies, such as extended rights for low-income families, an unsafe walking route, or special educational needs, disability or mobility needs that mean they cannot reasonably walk to school, even with adult support.

13. Extended Rights

13.1. Extended rights are extra travel entitlements for some children from low-income families. They are set by national rules and apply only where a child meets the low-income test and the relevant age, distance and school criteria.

13.2. Your child will not qualify for extended rights travel assistance just because they receive free school meals. From September 2026, more children may receive free school meals because the national free school meals rules are widening. However, the transport rules are different.

13.3. For transport, extended rights eligibility remains linked to the low-income threshold used for the targeted free school meals group. This means we need to check whether your child is in the targeted free school meals group, or whether a parent or carer receives the maximum level of Working Tax Credit.

13.4. **Targeted free school meals** mean children who meet the low-income free school meals rules used for transport eligibility. **This is the group that counts for extended rights travel assistance.**

13.5. **Extended free school meals** mean children who receive free school meals because the national free school meals rules have been widened. Being in this group does not automatically mean a child qualifies for extended rights travel assistance.

13.6. This means a child may receive free school meals but still not qualify for extended rights travel assistance.

13.7. If your child meets the low-income test, they will qualify for free travel assistance if one of the following applies:

- **Children aged 8 to 10:** They attend their nearest suitable school, and the school is more than 2 miles from home.
- **Children aged 11 to 16:** They attend one of their three nearest suitable schools, and the school is more than 2 miles but not more than 6 miles from home.

- **Children aged 11 to 16 attending a school chosen because of religion or belief:** They attend a school that is more than 2 miles but not more than 15 miles from home, and the school was chosen because of a parent or carer's religion or belief. There must also be no suitable school closer to home that meets the same religion or belief preference.
- 13.8.** Parents and carers do not need to submit a new application every year to continue receiving travel assistance under the extended rights criteria. We will review eligibility each year during the summer term.
- 13.9.** If your child no longer meets the extended rights criteria, travel assistance will end at the close of the summer term. We will write to you before this happens so that you have time to make other arrangements.
- 13.10.** The Council uses the national Eligibility Checking System to check whether a child meets the targeted free school meals criteria. To allow us to do this, you will need to provide your National Insurance number and date of birth on the travel assistance application form. We will use these details only to check whether your child meets the low-income criteria for extended rights travel assistance. If we cannot complete the check, we may ask you for further evidence.
- 13.11.** If you do not provide the information or evidence requested, we will not be able to assess your application under the extended rights rules. Your child will still be considered under the other eligibility rules in this policy.

14. Children attending schools on grounds of religion or belief

- 14.1.** Travel assistance to a faith school will only be provided if the school is your child's nearest suitable school, unless your child qualifies under the extended rights rules.
- 14.2.** If you choose a faith school when there is a suitable school closer to your home, your child will not qualify for travel assistance unless they meet the extended rights criteria for low-income families.

- 14.3.** When we consider whether a school has been chosen because of religion or belief, we will look at the schools listed on your school application. We expect the faith school to be listed above any non-faith schools if it is being chosen for religious or belief reasons.
- 14.4.** You will need to provide evidence that the application is based on a genuine religion or belief preference. This may include confirmation from a minister of religion or another appropriate faith or belief representative.

15. Parental Preference

- 15.1.** 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).
- 15.2.** 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.
- 15.3.** 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.

16. In-Year Applications (Outside the Normal Admissions Round)

- 16.1.** 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**

17. Safe Walking Routes

- 17.1.** If your child lives within the statutory walking distance of their nearest suitable school, the Council may still provide free travel assistance if the walking route is assessed as unsafe.
- 17.2.** A route is considered unsafe if a child cannot reasonably be expected to walk it safely, even when accompanied by an adult.
- 17.3.** We assess walking routes using the national guidance: “Assessment of Walked Routes to School” (published by Road Safety GB).
- 17.4.** A walking route may include:
- Footpaths, bridleways, and other pedestrian routes
 - Recognised roads and pavements
- 17.5.** 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.
- 17.6.** Factors Considered in Route Safety Assessments
- Road width, visibility, and sharp bends.
 - Presence and continuity of footpaths, verges, or safe walking areas.
 - 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).
- 17.7.** 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.

Please note that the above lists are illustrative and not exhaustive.

17.8. 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.

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

17.10. If a parent/carers 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

Consideration may then be given to offering travel assistance. Supporting evidence of the disability will be required.

18. Travel Assistance during the school day

18.1. 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.

18.2. This means the Council does not provide travel assistance for:

- Part-time attendance or trial placements
- "Settling in days" before starting normal school days
- Breakfast clubs or after-school activities

- Medical appointments during the school day
- Any other activities outside the standard school timetable, such as after-school clubs/activities.

18.3. If the school or another organisation arranges travel for activities outside the normal school day, parents and carers should use those arrangements or make their own. The Council will not provide extra travel assistance, individual journeys, or changes to existing arrangements for these activities.

19. Accompaniment and Route Accessibility

19.1. 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.

19.2. 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
- Other children attending different schools

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

19.4. It is important to note that, if a child is able to undertake the walk to school with suitable accompaniment in principle, then even if practical barriers to accompaniment exist in practice, the family will be expected to make 'other suitable arrangements' to enable their child's school travel.

20. Parents/Carers with Disabilities

- 20.1.** 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.
- 20.2.** 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.

21. Duration of Travel Assistance

- 21.1.** 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 home address
 - A change of school
- 21.2.** Families are responsible for informing the Council of any change in their home address.

22. Children Turning 8 years old

- 22.1.** 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.

23. Annual Reviews and Policy Changes

- 23.1.** All travel assistance is reviewed annually.
- 23.2.** If a child is no longer eligible, the Council will consider the impact on the child before making changes, aiming to avoid unnecessary disruption.
- 23.3.** 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.

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

24.1. 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

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

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

24.4. 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.

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

24.6. 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 34 "Supporting Independence and the Development of Self-Reliant Travellers."

25. Parental Preference and EHCPs

25.1. 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.

25.2. To qualify for travel assistance, the school must be the nearest suitable school that can meet your child's needs.

- 25.3.** If you choose a school that is further away than that offered by the local authority, you will be responsible for arranging and funding your child's travel.

26. Medical Evidence Required

- 26.1.** 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

- 26.2.** 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.

- 26.3.** 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.

27. Types of Travel Assistance provided

- 27.1.** 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

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

- A personal travel budget paid to parents who agree to make their own arrangements for transporting their child to school
- 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, in exceptional circumstances

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

28. Personal Budgets

28.1. If your child is eligible for free 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.

28.2. 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.

28.3. 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

28.4. 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.

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

29. Passenger Assistants

29.1. 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

29.2. 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.

30. Application Processing

30.1. 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.

31. 'Suitable' Travel Assistance arrangements

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

- Be safe.
- Be reasonably stress-free.
- Enable the child to arrive at school ready to learn.

31.2. When determining whether travel assistance is suitable, the Council will consider the individual circumstances of the child and the journey as a whole. This may include factors such as the child's age, special educational needs or disabilities, medical or mobility needs, the nature of the journey, and any support required during travel. The length of a journey will not typically be considered as a factor in determining the suitability of a transport arrangement, provided that one of the following apply:

- It is within the guideline journey times (see Section 32); or
- It is unavoidably in excess of these guidelines, due to the length of the journey from home to school; or
- A marginal increase in the journey times is caused by a child being on a shared route (i.e. where the substantial majority of a route's length is a factor of the distance from home to school, rather than it being a shared arrangement).

31.3. The Council will also have regard to the arrangements in place to support the safe and appropriate delivery of the service. This includes ensuring that transport providers, drivers and passenger assistants meet the standards required by the Council, including relevant safeguarding, training, licensing and contractual requirements.

31.4. The Council will assess each case on its individual merits and no single factor will determine whether travel assistance is suitable.

32. Journey Times

32.1. Government guidance recommends that:

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

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

33. Journey Times and Children with Complex Needs

33.1. 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

33.2. 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.

34. Supporting independence and the development of self-reliant travellers

34.1. The Council wants children and young people to develop the skills and confidence they need to travel as independently as possible. Where it is safe, suitable and reasonable, travel assistance may include arrangements that help build independence over time. This may include asking a child or young person to walk, with adult support if needed, to a safe pick-up point near their home rather than being collected from the home address.

34.2. Independent Travel Training may be offered where it is appropriate for the child or young person. The aim is to help them learn how to travel safely, confidently and as independently as possible, including by using public transport where this is suitable. Training is tailored to the individual and may include a range of skills, such as:

- Reading timetables and managing time
- Orientation and route planning
- Road safety and personal safety
- Buying tickets and accessing transport
- Communication and problem-solving
- Building personal confidence to manage journeys independently

Please note that this list is illustrative and not exhaustive. The skills covered will depend on the child or young person's individual needs, the journey they are being trained for, and the support they need to travel safely and confidently.

34.3. If the SEND Transport Team identifies that a child or young person may benefit from Independent Travel Training, an assessment will be carried out first. This will look at their individual needs, the proposed journey, any risks, and the support they may need. If training is appropriate, a personalised plan will be agreed. Training is usually delivered one-to-one and will continue until the child or young person is considered ready to travel safely and independently.

34.4. Where a child or young person is able to travel independently following training, the Council may review the travel assistance in place. This could mean that arranged transport is no longer needed, or that a different form of support, such as a bus pass, is more appropriate. Any change will be considered carefully and will take account of the child or young person's needs, safety, and ability to manage the journey.

35. Residential Schools

35.1. 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.

36. Spare Seat options for non-eligible children

36.1. 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](#) 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.

36.2. The cost of spare 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.

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

37. Exceptional circumstances, change of circumstances and other assistance

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

38. Change of address

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

38.2. 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.

38.3. The only exception is if closer schools (including those in neighbouring boroughs) do not have places available in your child's year group.

38.4. 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

38.5. 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.

38.6. 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

39. Years 10 and 11 – Special Consideration

39.1. 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.

40. Children living in temporary accommodation

40.1. 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.

41. Change of child's needs

41.1. From time to time a child's needs can change during the year. If the current Travel Assistance no longer meets 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.

42. Changing Schools

42.1. 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 will include the need to make a completely new application.

43. Managed Moves

- 43.1.** 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.

44. Travel Assistance to a Pupil Referral Unit or other education provider

- 44.1.** Parents and carers remain responsible for ensuring their child attends education, including where the child attends a Pupil Referral Unit, alternative provision, or another education provider. The Council will only provide travel assistance where the child meets the eligibility criteria in this policy.
- 44.2.** There is no automatic entitlement to travel assistance because a child is attending a Pupil Referral Unit, alternative provision, or another education provider. Eligibility will depend on the reason for the placement, whether the provision is the relevant place of education for travel assistance purposes, and whether the standard eligibility criteria are met.
- 44.3.** If a child is placed temporarily at a Pupil Referral Unit or alternative provision by a school, and remains on roll at that school, travel arrangements will normally be a matter for the school to discuss with the family. The Council will not usually provide separate travel assistance unless the child has a separate entitlement under this policy.
- 44.4.** Where a request is made for exceptional travel assistance, parents and carers will need to provide relevant evidence. This may include information from the Pupil Referral Unit, school, education provider, medical professional, social care professional, court order, or another appropriate source, depending on the circumstances.
- 44.5.** If travel assistance is agreed, it may be reviewed or withdrawn if the child's circumstances change, if they no longer meet the eligibility criteria, or if they regularly fail to attend the provision without good reason. If travel assistance is withdrawn, parents and carers remain responsible for ensuring their child attends education.

- 44.6.** Where a pupil has been permanently excluded and is placed at a new school, travel assistance will only be provided if the new school is the nearest suitable school agreed by the Council and is outside the statutory walking distance from the child's home.

45. Temporary Attendance at Alternative Provision

- 45.1.** If a pupil remains registered at their usual school but is temporarily required to attend another education setting because of a temporary exclusion, the Council will consider travel assistance to that temporary setting for the period of the exclusion. Travel assistance will only be provided where the pupil meets the eligibility criteria in this policy, and only for as long as the temporary arrangement is in place.

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

- 46.1.** 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.
- 46.2.** 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.
- 46.3.** Further information and advice regarding Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) and travel assistance can be found in the [EOTAS Policy](#)

47. Children we Care For

- 47.1.** For children we care for, decisions about school placement and travel will be considered as part of the child's wider care planning. This includes considering the child's welfare, stability, educational needs, and the views of the professionals involved. A child in care may attend a school that is not their nearest suitable school where this is considered necessary to support their wellbeing or avoid unnecessary disruption.

- 47.2.** Where a child moves into foster care or another care placement, and their current school is no longer the nearest suitable school from the new address, travel assistance may be considered to help the child remain at their existing school for a temporary period. This will only be considered where continuing at the current school is assessed to be in the child's best interests and where the foster carer or placement cannot reasonably make the travel arrangements.
- 47.3.** Any travel assistance for a child in care will need to be discussed with the child's Social Care team and considered alongside the child's care plan. Where support is agreed because of the care placement rather than because the child meets the standard eligibility criteria in this policy, funding will normally form part of the wider Social Care package.
- 47.4.** If the placement is expected to be long term, normally more than six months, consideration should be given to whether the child should move to a suitable local school. Any decision should take account of the child's best interests, educational progress, relationships, and the impact of any school change.

48. Other Circumstances

- 48.1.** 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.
- 48.2.** 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.

49. Travel Assistance provided in error

- 49.1.** Where free travel assistance has been provided in error, it may be withdrawn. This may include cases where an application was assessed incorrectly, where eligibility was granted based on information that was incomplete or inaccurate, or where later checks show that the child did not meet the eligibility criteria at the time the decision was made.
- 49.2.** Travel assistance may also be withdrawn where there has been a material change to the route to school, the availability of a nearer suitable school, or the information used to assess the application. For example, this may include changes to route safety, updated distance measurements, mapping corrections, or new information showing that a nearer suitable school was available.

50. When travel assistance will not be provided

- 50.1.** 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
- Where a child is on a part-time timetable that does not coincide with the beginning / end of the standard 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.

51. Behaviour on School Transport

- 51.1.** The Council wants all children and young people to travel safely and calmly. Parents and carers, schools, children and young people, transport providers, drivers, passenger assistants and the Council all share responsibility for helping school transport run safely and smoothly.
- 51.2.** Children and young people should be ready for their transport in good time and behave in a way that does not put themselves, other passengers, staff, road users or the vehicle at risk.

51.3. Children and young people are expected to follow the behaviour standards below when using school transport, taking account of their age, understanding and individual needs:

- Treat other passengers, drivers and passenger assistants with respect;
- Follow instructions from the driver or passenger assistant, especially in an emergency;
- Wear a seatbelt, harness or other safety equipment where this is provided and required;
- Remain seated while the vehicle is moving, unless told otherwise by the driver or passenger assistant;
- Keep noise and behaviour at a level that allows the driver to concentrate; and
- Avoid damaging the vehicle or interfering with doors, windows, seatbelts or safety equipment.

51.4. Bullying, harassment, hate speech, threatening behaviour, physical aggression, damage to property and verbal abuse will not be tolerated. Concerns may be reported to parents and carers, the school, the transport provider and, where necessary, other appropriate agencies.

51.5. Where behaviour is linked to a child's special educational needs, disability, medical needs or another known vulnerability, the Council will work with parents and carers, the school and the transport provider to consider reasonable support or adjustments. This may include a behaviour or travel support plan. However, the safety of the child, other passengers and transport staff must remain the priority.

51.6. If a child or young person's behaviour on transport causes a safety or wellbeing concern, the Council will investigate and take appropriate action. This may include speaking with the family, school and transport provider, issuing a warning, agreeing additional support, changing the travel arrangements, or withdrawing travel assistance for a fixed period or permanently. Where a child or young person bullies, threatens, harasses, or physically harms another passenger, travel assistance may be

withdrawn with immediate effect, depending on the seriousness of the incident, the risk to others, and the individual circumstances. If travel assistance is withdrawn, parents and carers remain responsible for ensuring their child attends school.

- 51.7.** The Council expects transport providers, drivers and passenger assistants to follow safeguarding requirements and report concerns appropriately. If parents or carers have concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or safety on school transport, they should contact the Travel Assistance team as soon as possible so the matter can be reviewed.

52. How to Apply: Pupils without an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

- 52.1.** Application forms are available on the Council's website: Travel assistance to school and college: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/schools-and-education/school-information-and-services/travel-assistance-school-and-college>
- 52.2.** The Community Transport Unit will assess each application once. If an application is refused, parents and carers may submit one Stage 1 appeal. If the Stage 1 appeal is unsuccessful, they may then submit one Stage 2 appeal. A new application should only be submitted if there has been a change in circumstances that may affect eligibility. If insufficient evidence of a material change of circumstances is provided with a new application, the application can be refused, at the Council's sole discretion, with no right of appeal.
- 52.3.** Parents and carers should apply for travel assistance as soon as they have accepted a school place. If they have appealed for a different school place, they should apply as soon as the appeal outcome is known.
- 52.4.** If parents and carers want their child to be considered under the extended rights criteria for low-income families, they must provide the information needed to check eligibility.
- 52.5.** Where applications are submitted promptly after a school place has been accepted, the Council will aim to confirm the outcome as soon as possible and, where travel

assistance is agreed, at least 21 calendar days before the start of the academic year.

52.6. Travel assistance will be reviewed each year to check that the support remains appropriate and that the child continues to meet the eligibility criteria for the next academic year. Reviews will usually take place during the spring term. As part of the review, parents and carers may be asked to provide updated information or submit a new application. Any required application must be submitted and assessed before the end of the summer term.

52.7. In-year transfers and newcomers to the area: Applications for Wokingham Borough schools can usually be considered up to six weeks before the school place is needed. Parents and carers should apply for travel assistance as soon as a school place has been confirmed, so that eligibility can be assessed and, where applicable, suitable arrangements can be made before the child starts school.

52.8. **Retrospective payments will not be made. The Council will not reimburse parents or carers for transport costs incurred before travel assistance has been formally approved. Any agreed support will start from the date confirmed by the Council, and families remain responsible for travel arrangements and costs before that date.**

53. How to Apply: Pupils with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

53.1. 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.

53.2. **Retrospective payments will not be made. The Council will not reimburse parents or carers for transport costs incurred before travel assistance has been formally approved. Any agreed support will start from the date confirmed by the Council, and families remain responsible for travel arrangements and costs before that date.**

54. Complaints

- 54.1. 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.
- 54.2. In the first instance please contact the Community Transport Unit (CTU) via email to CTU.Group@wokingham.gov.uk. If further to this your issue has not been resolved, please follow the Complaints Procedure.

55. Complaints Procedure

- 55.1. Complaints about the provision of Travel Assistance will be investigated in accordance with the Council's Complaints Policy.
- 55.2. The complaints policy can be found at: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/contact-us/complaints-and-compliments/>
- 55.3. This does not apply to complaints about a refusal to grant travel assistance, which will be dealt with through the Travel Assistance Appeals procedure (see below).

56. Appeals

- 56.1. 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 assistance. Most Wokingham children are not eligible for free travel assistance.
- 56.2. There are strict eligibility criteria set out in national law and the Council's Travel Assistance Policy. If you believe the policy has not been applied correctly, you may ask for the decision to be reviewed. You must contact us in writing within 20 days of receiving your initial outcome.
- 56.3. The Council does not provide interim or temporary travel assistance while parents or carers are waiting for a Stage 1 or a Stage 2 appeal to be heard or decided. Parents and carers remain responsible for making sure their child attends school regularly,

including arranging travel to and from school until such time as the Council has agreed to provide travel assistance. When accepting a school place, parents and carers should therefore consider how their child will get to and from school. Where an application and Stage 1 appeal have both been considered and the child has been found not to be eligible for travel assistance, that decision will remain in place while any Stage 2 appeal is awaiting consideration.

57. Stage 1 – Review of decision

- 57.1.** If you do not agree with the Council’s decision about your child’s travel assistance, you can ask for the decision to be reviewed at Stage 1. This may include where travel assistance has not been awarded, or where you believe the type of assistance offered is not suitable for your child’s needs.
- 57.2.** You will need to clearly state the specific parts of our Travel Assistance Policy which you believe have not been applied correctly and include or attach any relevant information to support your case.
- 57.3.** The decision will be reviewed by a Senior Officer within 20 working days, and you will receive a detailed written notification of the outcome of the review.
- 57.4.** 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 of 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 travel 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 travel assistance with the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Transport 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 travel assistance 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 travel assistance with the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Transport Team.
- The criteria for travel assistance for low-income families is set nationally, so this will have been looked at already in your original application for travel assistance. We cannot reconsider decisions on this basis as the rules are set by government.

57.5. Complete an online appeal form which can be found on our website: Appeals and complaints

58. Stage 2 Appeal

58.1. 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.

58.2. 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.

58.3. No member of the appeal panel will have been involved in the original decision to decline Travel Assistance.

58.4. 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.

58.5. You can request a stage 2 appeal by emailing:

- democratic.services@wokingham.gov.uk

58.6. **Following the outcome of a stage 2 appeal**, you have a right of complaint to the LGSCO 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.

58.7. The LGSCO can be contacted at:

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman PO Box 4771
Coventry CV4 0EH
Helpline: 0300 061 0614.
www.lgo.org.uk

59. Not eligible for school transport?

59.1. If your child is not eligible for travel assistance, 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.

59.2. Modes of travel can include:

- Walking

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

59.3. For more information on alternative travel options and to explore public transport services, please visit the My Journey website.

60. Key Contacts

- **COMMUNITY TRANSPORT UNIT (CTU):**
schooltransport@wokingham.gov.uk
- **SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND) TRANSPORT TEAM:**
SENDTransport@wokingham.gov.uk