

Slough Borough Council Home to School (5-16) Travel Assistance Policy

Travel Assistance policy for children of compulsory school age (5-16)

Department Responsible: xxxxx Contact details: xxxxx Document first release: xxxxx

Introduction

This document sets out Slough Borough Council's Home to School/College Travel Assistance Policy and describes how the Council fulfils its duties and exercises its discretionary powers under the Education Act 1996. The policy explains the criteria for eligibility for travel assistance for pupils to their school for children of compulsory school age (5-16 years old) and for young people aged 16 to 19 and 19 to 25. It describes how parents and carers can apply for travel assistance and how decisions are made. It sets out how parents and carers may appeal against decisions that they believe do not comply with this policy.

Policy Statement

Slough Borough Council (the Council) is committed to ensuring that all pupils have a great start to life, are safe and healthy and have access to high quality education so that they are able to achieve their full potential. The Children and Families Act 2014 commits partners to work together to develop services which strengthen the abilities and resilience of children and their families to be independent.

The Council is also committed to meeting the educational needs of as many children and young people as possible within local schools. In many cases, this will mean that pupils can walk or cycle to school with their parents or carers. This policy sets out how we will help the small number of pupils who find it difficult to travel to school without some assistance.

The Council will continue to deliver our statutory responsibilities to meet the travel needs of children and young people, enabling them to access their place of education. This support will be targeted at those children and young people who have significant additional needs or are deemed extremely vulnerable.

We want to support parents and carers to fulfil their responsibility to ensure their school-aged children attend school regularly and to make any necessary arrangements to ensure that they attend school. Those children and young people not in receipt of travel assistance from the Council can use a wide range of forms of travel in Slough, accompanied as necessary, including bus, train, concessionary fares, walking and cycling. We also want to support schools to promote safe routes to school and safe travel skills through their regular curriculum.

The Council has a duty under s.508A of the Education Act 1996 to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport. This requires the Council to have a strategy to develop sustainable travel and transport infrastructure and to promote these modes of travel.

Aims and Objectives

The council has the following aims and objectives when assessing transport / travel support:

- Social integration of children and young people whatever their needs
- Support and develop Independence and resilience for children and young people with SEND and their families
- Environmentally sustainable travel
- Efficient use of public resources

Eligibility

All pupils

Parents and carers have a legal duty to ensure that their statutory school-aged children (age 5-16) attend school regularly and to make any necessary arrangements to ensure that they attend school.

A child is of compulsory school age from the start of term after their fifth birthday up until the last day of the academic year in which they are in year 11. This applies to both children with and without an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

There are four core categories of eligible children:

- statutory walking distances
- unsafe walking routes
- extended rights
- special educational needs, disability and mobility problems

Children below the age of 5 will not be eligible for free travel assistance between their home and school.

For pupils in year 12 and above (post-16 year olds), there is a separate policy (Linked to be added).

Statutory walking distances

The Council will provide free home to school travel assistance for children of compulsory school age to the nearest suitable school from their home address who meet the 'qualifying distance' criteria which is:

- 2 miles or more for children below the age of eight, measured by the shortest walking distance between the home and the school
- 3 miles or more for children aged 8 and above, measured by the shortest walking distance between the home and the school

Children who live between 2 and 3 miles from their school will cease to be entitled to free travel from the start of the term following their eighth birthday.

If the child/family qualify for free school meals or they are in receipt of maximum Working Tax Credit then please refer to the Extended Rights section below.

Further detail on eligibility is dealt with in the application section below.

Unsafe walking routes

The Council will provide travel assistance if it determines that a child cannot reasonably be expected to walk to the nearest suitable school because the nature of the route is deemed unsafe

to walk. The Council regularly assesses walking routes using the “Road Safety GB Guidelines on Assessment of Walked Routes to School.” Routes that have been determined to be unsafe will be kept under review and support will be withdrawn when the walking route is no longer deemed to be unsafe. The Council will expect a parent or carer to accompany the child along a route which would otherwise be classified as being unsafe and will not provide travel assistance if this accompaniment will make the route safe.

Extended rights

Children from low-income families are entitled to additional support in certain circumstances. This applies to pupils who are entitled to free school meals, or those families who are in receipt of the maximum level of Working Tax Credit (WTC).

Children above the age of 8, but under the age of 11, from low-income families will be entitled to travel assistance to their nearest suitable school if the shortest walking distance between their home and the school is more than two miles.

Children aged 11 and over (years 7 – 11) from low-income families will be entitled to travel assistance if they attend one of their three nearest suitable schools where they live between two miles (measured by the shortest walking distance) and 6 miles (measured by the shortest road route) from their school.

Children aged 11 and over (years 7 - 11) from low-income families who are attending their nearest designated faith school preferred on the grounds of religion or belief will also be entitled to travel assistance if their school is more than two miles (measured by the shortest walking distance) but not more than 15 miles (measured by the shortest road route) from their home.

Application Process

How to Apply

All requests for travel assistance for children without an EHCP must be made via the Council portal.

For children and young people with an EHCP families can contact the Travel Assistance Team on 01753 875708.

The Council will look to complete the assessment of applications in a timely fashion, aiming to put in place travel arrangements for those entitled at the earliest opportunity. However, it may take up to 6 weeks to process and families should be prepared to make their own interim travel arrangements if necessary.

During periods of high demand, such as the build-up to the new academic year, timescales for processing applications may be extended. Families are advised to apply for assistance with travel at the earliest opportunity to ensure arrangements are in place when they are required.

Assessing travel assistance entitlement for compulsory school age children

In all cases, a child/young person must be attending the nearest suitable school (or one of the three nearest suitable schools under the extended rights eligibility). This is defined as a school that has spaces available that provides education appropriate to the age, gender, ability and aptitude of the child, and appropriate to the child's EHCP where one exists.

Types of suitable schools considered under this policy are:

- community, foundation, trust, voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- academies or alternative provision academies
- free schools
- community or foundation special schools
- non-maintained special schools
- pupil referral units
- maintained nursery schools
- city technology colleges, city colleges for the technology of the arts and university technical colleges
- Independent schools where this is named on a child's EHCP or is the nearest of two schools named.

For mainstream applications processed during the normal school admissions round, a school will be determined as having a vacancy if a place would have been offered according to the allocations made on the national offer day, assuming the parent either made or could reasonably have made an application. For applications made after the normal admissions round and those made during the school year, a school will be determined as having a vacancy if, at the point of processing the child's school application, a place could have been allocated to the child.

When a child cannot be offered a place at the nearest school to the home address, the Council will, subject to the criteria set within this policy and the qualifying distance being met, provide assistance with travel to the next nearest school with space to admit. For travel arrangements to be provided in this instance the parent must provide evidence that they have applied for and been refused a place at the school which is the nearest school for their home address and any other schools closer than the school offering admission.

Where a school operates on multiple or split sites, the assessment of nearest qualifying school will take account of the sites used to prioritise admissions (as defined in each school's admission arrangements), regardless of which year groups are educated at which site or which site a child might attend.

How walking distance is measured

Walking distances are calculated using the shortest available walking route from the home address to school. If families believe that the walking route measured is not available to walk they should request a review of the route.

The legal definition of an 'available walking route' is a route along which a child, accompanied as necessary, can walk with reasonable safety to school.

Where a school operates on a temporary site and that school's permanent/current site is deemed to be a child's nearest qualifying school, the home to school walking distance will be measured to the school's temporary site to determine if the child lives over the statutory walking distance and is eligible for travel assistance. Eligibility will be reassessed at the point a child ceases to be educated at the temporary site.

Distances will be measured using the Council's CapitaOne System (and supported by other Council GIS systems) from the address point of the pupil's house to the nearest school gate available for pupils to use when measuring to a school, as set by Ordnance Survey.

Route safety assessment

Where a parent/carer believes the assessed walking route to be unsafe, they should write to the Travel Assistance Team outlining the aspect of the route they believe to be unsafe. The identified aspects of the route will then be reviewed by the team. Review of the routes will use the 'Road Safety GB Guidelines on Assessment of Walked Routes to School' to assess suitability.

Extended Rights

Parents who believe they meet the Extended Rights criteria and are therefore eligible for assistance with travel to school must include with their application evidence of the child's entitlement to free school meals or the family's receipt of maximum level of Working Tax Credit (WTC) with their application form.

A child who has been assessed as eligible for travel assistance by meeting the Extended Rights criteria will have their entitlement reviewed each academic year to ensure that the child continues to meet the necessary criteria.

If a child ceases to be eligible for free school meals or a family ceases to be entitled to the maximum level of Working Tax Credit during the academic year for which travel assistance has been awarded, travel assistance will continue until the end of that academic year.

If the child is applying for travel assistance to a school of faith under Extended Rights eligibility, then the parents must also provide supporting evidence regarding their genuine adherence to their religion or belief and this will normally be confirmed by asking their religious leader to sign the application form.

Special educational needs, disability and mobility problems

Where a child with special education needs, a disability and/or mobility problems does not meet the other three eligibility criteria but has identified specific needs/circumstances that may mean it is unreasonable to expect the child to walk to school (accompanied by an adult as necessary), then an assessment based on their individual needs and circumstances will be undertaken.

In determining whether a child cannot reasonably be expected to walk between home and school, the Council will consider whether the child could reasonably be expected to walk if accompanied and, if so, whether the child's parent or carer can reasonably be expected to accompany their child. The expectation is that a child will be accompanied by a parent or carer.

When assessing entitlement for travel assistance for a child with SEND or mobility problems, the Council will consider the individual needs of each child. This may include taking professional advice from educational psychologists, medical officers and teachers and consulting with parents and carers before arriving at a final decision.

Consideration will also be given to the child's physical and medical requirements including any disabilities they may have. The findings and decision will be recorded on a travel assistance assessment form.

The following factors will be taken into consideration when assessing travel assistance entitlement:

- the age of the child
- the distance of the child from school to home
- whether the child is physically able to walk the journey to school
- whether the walking route is appropriate for the pupil and their specific needs and allows them to arrive in a fit state to be educated
- whether a child's emotional and behavioural difficulties will create a clear health and safety hazard to themselves or others on the journey to school
- the SEND of the child
- the efficient utilisation of resources
- any other individual circumstance

This is not an exhaustive list. It is not presented in any particular order and is for guidance only. Meeting one or more of the criteria does not automatically entitle a child with SEND to travel assistance.

The fact that a child has an EHCP or attends a special school does not automatically entitle him or her to travel assistance.

Eligibility for travel assistance is related to the child's needs. Assessment may take into account the need for travel assistance due to some family circumstances. Factors identified in an application will be considered when determining eligibility for home to school travel assistance and deciding on the type of travel assistance to be provided.

Other family circumstances, such as parents and carers attending work or looking after other children cannot be considered when determining eligibility.

Extenuating circumstances

Recognising that the Council's discretionary powers should not be unreasonably fettered by its general policy, the Council will consider and may agree requests for home to school travel assistance where there are considered to be extenuating circumstances that prevent a child accessing their school unless travel assistance is put in place. If the parent believes extenuating circumstances exist and assistance with travel is necessary, then information and evidence must be provided when applying for assistance in order for this to be considered.

The overriding expectation is that parents should undertake their legal responsibility to get their child(ren) to and from school and as such the Council will need to be satisfied that the parent has demonstrated why they, for social, medical, financial or personal reasons cannot undertake this duty.

The determination will be based on evidence received to support the case whether travel assistance is necessary in order for the child to receive an education. Consideration will be given as to whether the circumstances could have reasonably been foreseen by the parent/carer. For example, moving to temporary accommodation owing to flood damage cannot be foreseen, whereas choosing a school other than a child's nearest school and realising following this decision that assistance with travel is not available could be foreseen.

Where it is decided that a child does not qualify for assistance with travel based on the presented needs/circumstances then it remains the parent/ carer's responsibility to ensure school attendance or consider transferring the child to a more local school.

In all cases the decision whether to exercise discretion will be taken on a case by case basis.

Special consideration and appeals

Parents/carers of children who live in Slough and who wish to appeal a decision about one of the following, may apply for their case to be considered at a travel assistance case review:

- the travel arrangements offered
- their child's eligibility

- the distance measurement in relation to statutory walking distances
- the safety of the route

During an appeal about an application for travel assistance, travel arrangements will not be provided to the child/young person. Where the appeal concerns a change to existing travel arrangements, then the previously agreed travel arrangements will continue until the review is complete.

The Council operates a two-stage appeal process as detailed below:

Stage one: Review by a senior officer

- A parent has 20 working days from receipt of the local authority's home to school travel assistance decision to make a written request asking for a review of the decision.
- The written request should detail why the parent believes the decision should be reviewed and give details of any personal and/or family circumstances the parent believes should be considered when the decision is reviewed.
- Where this is possible, within 20 working days of receipt of the parent's written request a senior officer reviews the original decision and sends the parent a detailed written notification of the outcome of their review

Stage two: Review by an independent appeal panel

- A parent has 20 working days from receipt of the local authority's stage one written decision notification to make a written request to escalate the matter to stage two.
- Within 40 working days of receipt of the parents request an independent appeal panel considers written and verbal representations from both the parent and officers involved in the case and gives a detailed written notification of the outcome (within 5 working days).

Withdrawal of assistance provided in error

Where a child has been awarded in error, Slough Council has the right to withdraw this after first considering the circumstances of each case to determine whether there are exceptional reasons for provision to continue.

Consideration cannot be given to those who simply cannot meet their parental responsibility to get their own child to school following the removal of assistance. This would have been expected to have been taken into account at the time of admitting the child into school, as would have been the case had the error not been made. Where it is decided to withdraw transport, one term's notice is given.

Provision of false or inaccurate information

When submitting an application, the parent will sign a declaration confirming the accuracy of the information. The parent is also under a duty to notify the Council of any changes in circumstances. If it later transpires that the information is incorrect or updating information has not been provided, then notice will be given and the travel assistance will cease immediately. The Council will also take steps to recover the cost of travel assistance provided as a result of this inaccurate

information. If the information has been provided fraudulently, the Council's corporate anti-fraud team will investigate to determine whether a criminal prosecution should be commenced.

Discretionary Travel Requirements

Children below the age of 5

Children attending Reception classes

Ordinarily and in accordance with the Council's statutory duty, children under the age of 5 will not be entitled to travel assistance between their home and school. However, the Council will consider travel assistance applications for children below statutory school age in extenuating circumstances. Where a parent/carer believes that there are extenuating circumstances that warrant a child being provided with assistance with travel before they turn five years of age, they should complete the appropriate application form and provide supporting evidence of the case.

A child becomes of compulsory school age at the start of term after their fifth birthday.

Pre-school children with SEND

Local authorities do not have a duty to provide or arrange free travel for children who have not yet reached compulsory school age and who are attending a pre-school setting. However, the Council will consider travel assistance applications for children below statutory school age in extenuating circumstances.

Where a parent/carer believes that there are extenuating circumstances that warrant a child being provided with assistance to support their travel to School (before they turn five years of age), they should complete the appropriate application form and provide supporting evidence of the case.

If the Council agrees to provide travel assistance it may request a contribution towards costs with travel arrangements subsidised by the Council.

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 and the child comes within the eligibility criteria above.

Travel Assistance Provision Options

Forms of Travel Assistance

The Council will review the travel needs of all eligible children and decide the most appropriate form of assistance that will be provided. In accordance with the Council's strategic aims, the form of travel offered will reflect the most appropriate use of public funds to ensure cost effective provision is in place, will seek to promote independence and to be environmentally sustainable, whilst also meeting the needs of the child.

In accordance with national guidance, a journey to school for eligible children should be suitable, safe and reasonably stress free to enable the children to arrive at school ready for a day of study. To this end it is considered reasonable that journey times each way for children are as follows:

- 45 minutes for primary aged pupils
- 75 minutes for secondary aged pupils

However, it is recognised that adhering to journey times may not always be possible particularly in rural areas. It may be deemed acceptable for a trip to exceed these journey times if it is considered that the additional time does not place undue stress, strain or difficulty on the pupil, which would prevent them from benefitting from the education.

Where children with special educational needs, disability or mobility problems are present, then journey times may sometimes need to be longer and more complex, although the Council will ensure that it does not extend routes for such children unnecessarily with appropriate measures in place to address any implications for doing so.

Subject to meeting the eligibility criteria of this policy, the following assistance will be considered (in the following order):

1. provision of a travel pass for the pupil;
2. provision of independent travel training;
3. provision of a travel bursary;
4. payment of car mileage/travel reimbursement for the pupil's parent(s) (with parental consent);
5. Provision of a cycling allowance (with parental consent)
6. Provision of a suitable escort to enable a pupil to walk a short distance (with parental consent)
7. provision of a travel pass for pupil and parent;
8. provision of a shared vehicle without escort (using collection point if appropriate);
9. provision of a shared vehicle with escort (using collection point if appropriate);
10. provision of an individual vehicle without escort;
11. provision of an individual vehicle with escort.

The provision of an individual vehicle with or without escort should be exceptional and only where it has been demonstrated that other modes of assistance are not suitable.

Other bespoke travel options may be considered and offered where individual needs enable travel, and the development of travel skills and independence, e.g. Travel Buddy.

All travel assistance will be reviewed as part of the annual review of needs and if appropriate as part of an early review. Travel assistance may be withdrawn or amended if circumstances have changed, or the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Panel considers the withdrawal appropriate as an encouragement to independence or the offer is no longer the most economical mode of travel.

Provision of Passenger Assistants

A passenger assistant will only be provided following the outcome of an assessment of the child's Special Educational Needs and/or medical needs in order to meet the needs of the children travelling to and from school. This determination will be made by the Travel Assistance Team taking into account:

- A child's medical needs, particularly where rescue medication is required.
- Where an individual child's needs create a clear danger or health and safety risk to themselves and other passengers on the vehicle.
- Where an assessment of the children on the vehicle and the journey to be undertaken highlight a clear danger or health and safety risk to all passengers on the vehicle.

The consideration for passenger assistants will be made based on evidence received from all relevant parties and will be reviewed regularly, where appropriate and whenever a contract is re-tendered.

Travel training

Local authorities have a duty to encourage, enable and assist the participation of young people with learning difficulties or disabilities up to the age of 25 in education and training. Independent travel training aims to achieve this.

Independent travel is a valuable skill for preparing for adulthood, an essential employability skill, and provides greater opportunities for young people, not least increasing confidence in their abilities and reducing their sense of reliance on family members.

In line with the Council's aims and objectives to support independence and prepare young people for adulthood, and where appropriate employment.

The Council will work in partnership with education establishments and other individuals to identify young people who could benefit from ITT and contact their families to invite them to take part in ITT.

The Council will also contact young people and their families who will be transitioning from statutory education into post-16 and above to invite them to take part in ITT.

An ITT assessment will be carried out in the home, with the support of the family, to confirm the suitability of the young person for the ITT programme, taking into account the following criteria:

- existing level of independent travel skills
- the likelihood of the pupil being eligible for SEN travel assistance under the 16 to 19 & 19-25 policy
- the age of the pupil
- the distance between home and school
- the SEND of the pupil
- the route which the young person would need to undertake
- journey times using public transport and the complexity of the journey
- the frequency of the journeys required

This assessment would take place before the pupil undertakes the ITT programme, which would last for approximately four to six weeks. During the programme, the pupil will travel to and from their education or training provision each day with their dedicated one to one ITT trainer.

During the period when a pupil is taking part in the ITT, this will be their travel assistance offer. At the end of the ITT programme, the Council will review the pupil's progress with the family to decide if it is appropriate for the pupil to continue to travel independently. If it is not appropriate for the pupil to travel independently, their previous travel assistance offer will be reinstated. Although it is expected that the majority of young people would benefit from ITT, it is acknowledged that for some young people, due to the nature of their SEND, ITT will not be appropriate.

Travel Bursary

This is an allowance that can be provided by Slough Council to parents of children who are eligible for travel assistance.

A parent may choose to accept the travel bursary in lieu of arranged travel assistance by the Council. This enables families to make their own arrangements to facilitate travel and access to education. A travel allowance will only be offered where it is less expensive than any alternative form of travel assistance.

Any arrangements made by the parent using the travel allowance are the responsibility of the parent.

The travel bursary is calculated on shortest walking route (return journey) between the home and the school at 45p per mile.

Where there are two or more children living at the same address and attending the same school and the travel bursary has been agreed for one child, additional bursary payments will not be provided for the other children as all children would be expected to travel together.

If the parent transports siblings to different schools the bursary due would be based on the shortest walking route between home, school A and school B, and return.

The travel bursary is paid over 10 months (October to July) if the child is entitled from the start of the school year. Parents will need to nominate a bank account before any payments are made.

The travel bursary is based on the child's attendance being over 80% for the full year. Attendance records will be requested from the school at the end of each term. If the child shows poor attendance in the Autumn or Spring terms then the parent may be transferred to the standard travel reimbursement option. Alternatively, if the child's attendance is below 80% then the final month's payment will be reduced.

If a parent is in receipt of the travel bursary but is temporarily unable to transport their child to school due to a short-term illness or medical condition, temporary assistance may be provided. However, this may take up to 6 weeks to put in place.

Car Mileage/Travel Reimbursement

Where a child is entitled to travel assistance, the Council can provide a fuel allowance for parents to take their children to and from school, where it is more cost effective than providing contracted or arranged transport.

The Council would pay parents (where their child attends/travels daily) two return journeys at 45p per mile.

For example, where a family reside 5 miles from the school, each return journey is 10 miles:

2 return journeys = 20 miles x 45p = £9 per day.

A typical term would be 65 school days = £585 per term.

Where a Car Mileage/Travel Reimbursement is provided, parents are required to submit claims for payment on a monthly basis, confirming journeys made and attendance.

Upon receipt of the completed claim, the Council will then review and check the details. If details are correct, then payment will be made.

Car Mileage/Travel Reimbursement, based on the above, are paid where the parent agrees to receive such an allowance. Where the amount paid is at 45p per mile, this is considered to cover the full cost to the parent of transporting their child in their own vehicle.

Collection points

Collection points are like bus stops, where the Council identifies designated pick-up and drop-off locations for the pupil to meet the bus or taxi rather than offering a door-to-door service. This reduces the time needed for the route to pick up the pupils and supports children and young people to become more independent and better prepares them for adulthood.

Using a collection point will not be possible for some children and young people with the most complex SEND needs, and in some cases parents' own mobility or disability may impact on them being able to accompany their child to a collection point. Where this is the case, the ambition for the service is to improve the range of options available for families to take responsibility for their own children's transport where this is desired and appropriate. In such circumstances, the Council will carefully consider and assess the individual child's needs as well as the mobility and or disability of their parents.

Where a collection point is allocated, it is the parent's or carer's responsibility to make sure that their child travels to and from the collection point and transfers to and from the vehicle safely.

For parents who are temporarily unable to take their child to a collection point, no temporary assistance will be provided in those circumstances. This is because the child's special educational need or disability has not changed and the transport service from the collection point is still available.

All collection points will be within a one-mile walking distance of the home and will be assessed in advanced for their suitability.

- wherever a bus stop can be legally used as a collection point, it will be
- minibuses can stop to collect and drop off on yellow and double yellow lines; vehicles cannot stop on red routes, white zig zags (near a zebra crossing) or school keep-clear hatchings
- the driver always plans not to cause obstructions to other road users while making a drop off or collection and will try to stop in parking areas or bays
- collections or drop-off are always made kerb side
- each collection point is physically assessed before being used in service; a driver will go out and access to see if the location is safe (for example, a well-lit public location, not too close to a junction or on the brow of a hill)
- the drivers complete dynamic risk assessments at the time of collections or / drop offs in the eventuality of any changes (new road layouts, another road user in the stopping space) and will slightly adjust the collection point if it is unsafe to stop

Weekly/Fortnightly boarding placements

Transport will be provided to take children to school on a Sunday evening, or Monday morning, as directed by the school and to collect children to take them home at the end of the designated school week, or earlier as directed by the school for planned or unplanned early closures.

Termly residential placements

12 single journeys from home to school and school to home will be provided each academic year. This will consist of trips required at the start and end of each term, and at other school closure times, i.e. half term breaks.

Permanent (52 week) residential placements

12 single journeys from home to school and school to home will be provided each academic year. These are at the discretion of the parents, school and child and need to be booked at least 10 days in advance through our Travel Assistance Team.

Any additional trips will be the responsibility of the parent. Where there is a risk of a placement breakdown the Travel Assistance Team may consider providing reimbursement of fuel or public transport costs in order to support additional trips on a short term basis so that the child can be supported back into full time boarding.