

# Home to School Travel

For children and young people with special educational needs

# POLICY

## MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

### POLICY FOR ASSISTANCE FOR HOME TO SCHOOL TRAVEL FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SIGNIFICANT SPECIAL NEEDS

#### 1. POLICY STATEMENT

The Council is committed to ensuring that each child can fulfil their potential. The aim of this policy is that all children and young people with significant special educational needs should lead lives that are as independent and as free from restriction as possible and that each child is supported to achieve independent travel wherever practicable thus contributing to achieving the Five Outcomes for children and young people as follows:

- To be healthy
- To stay safe
- To enjoy and achieve
- To make a positive contribution
- To achieve economic well being

This policy explains the entitlement to travel assistance for children and young people that have significant special educational needs. The Council's general policy on travel to and from schools and other establishments is available separately.

The policy sets out the criteria for eligibility to travel assistance, how parents/carers may apply, how decisions are made and how parents/carers may appeal against decisions that they are unhappy with.

The policy is intended to provide clarity for parents/carers facing a wide range of circumstances, and to ensure that children with particular and significant needs are appropriately supported. However, it is the legal responsibility of parents and carers to ensure that their children attend school regularly.

If Manchester City Council agrees to provide travel assistance it will be provided in a safe and cost effective manner taking account of the child's specific needs and with regard to the best use of the Council's resources.

The Council is also committed to reducing traffic congestion, improving road safety and reducing the environmental impact of vehicle journeys by promoting alternative forms of travel, such as walking, cycling and use of integrated public transport. The Council works closely with schools to develop School Travel Plans that help to achieve this aim and, wherever possible, in the provision of travel assistance the Council will consider travel options for 'eligible children' that lead to reducing the number and length of vehicle journeys.

The majority of Manchester pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) do not receive or require specialised travel assistance from the

Council. Wherever possible the Council expects parents/carers of pupils with an SEN Statement to make arrangements for their child to attend school in the same way as for parents/carers of pupils without a Statement, as this is an important factor in developing the pupil's independence, social and life skills.

The Council also has a duty to ensure that **all** arrangements make best use of the Council's resources and has a nominated Travel Coordination Manager to oversee the application of this policy and the allocation of travel assistance, working closely with parents/carers, schools and other agencies.

## **2. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COVERED BY THIS POLICY**

This policy applies to all children and young people who are resident within the city of Manchester and for children in the care of Manchester City Council and who:

have significant special needs, a disability or mobility problem such that it is not possible for them to travel between home and school independently and;

are of statutory school age, which is between five years of age and up to the last day of the school year when the child reaches sixteen years of age. In some circumstances this policy will cover pre-school age children and young people up to nineteen years of age.

## **3. ENTITLEMENT TO TRAVEL ASSISTANCE**

### ***Parent/carer responsibility***

The parent/carer is legally responsible for ensuring their child/children attends school regularly. The Council will assist parents/carers with travel arrangements at the beginning and end of each school day or for weekly and termly boarding schools, at the beginning and end of the week/term where children and young people have significant special educational needs, a disability or mobility problem such that travel assistance is essential.

**Travel assistance will be agreed for pupils (with special educational needs) where:**

The pupil lives further than the statutory walking distance between home and school, which is over 2 miles for children under eight years of age **or** over three miles for children aged eight years old and over **and** the child has a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) **and** the Council has determined and named the school in the Statement as being the nearest available school that is able to meet the needs of the child.

The parent/carer has a preference for a school on the grounds of a recognised religion or belief **and** there is evidence of adherence to that religion **and** the first preference was for a denominational school **and** the denominational school is the nearest available for the pupil's age group **and** the denominational school can meet the needs of the child.

**Travel assistance will not be agreed where:**

The pupil is not attending their local mainstream school, or the closest special provision and the school is one of parental preference (except when the preference is on religious or belief grounds – see above).

Where the parent/carer has requested that a school is named within a Statement of SEN that is not the nearest available school able to meet the child's needs as deemed by the Council.

**Travel assistance may be agreed when:**

The pupil lives within the statutory walking distance but is unable to walk relatively short distances to school owing to disability or mobility problems (these may include temporary medical conditions) **and** family circumstances make it impossible for the parent or carer to take the child to school.

A child is of pre school age and has undergone an assessment for a Statement **or** there is clear evidence that a child has significant special education needs **and** the Council has recommended a place at a specially resourced nursery unit **and** this unit is over two miles away from the home address.

A young person is over the statutory school age of sixteen and has mobility difficulties of such severity that it is impossible to travel independently between home and school/college. Assistance may be provided in specific circumstances where:

- a) the young person is under eighteen years of age or older if they started a course of further education before their nineteenth birthday and are still participating in that course **and**;
- b) they are attending the nearest appropriate school/college **and**;
- c) they are following a full time course leading to or working towards a recognised qualification.

Decisions will be based upon clear medical/specialist advice, evidence of need and parental circumstances.

#### **4. APPLYING FOR TRAVEL ASSISTANCE**

The parent/carer must make a formal application for travel assistance before any assistance is considered. Each application will be processed as quickly as possible. The Council may request the provision of written evidence from education specialists and/or medical experts.

During the application process it remains the legal responsibility of the parent/carer to ensure that their child attends school regularly.

In most cases, travel assistance will be coordinated by the Council's Travel Coordination Unit. In some cases this responsibility may lie with specific

named schools/colleges. Therefore parents/carers should check the local arrangements at their child's school or college before making an application for travel assistance to the Council.

### **The Application Process**

The application process is designed to be as simple as possible whilst ensuring that full consideration is taken of the specific needs of the child. For these reasons parents/carers should allow up to 30 days from the date of application to the start of any approved travel assistance.

If the application appears likely to take longer due to specific circumstances beyond the control of the Council, the parent/carer will be notified by the Council and an estimation of the actual time needed to process the application will be given.

The application process is dealt with in three stages;

**Stage 1** – Parent/carer completes a Travel Assistance Application Form. This application form can be obtained from;

- i. [www.manchester.gov.uk/info/40/special\\_educational\\_needs-transport/1856/travel\\_coordination\\_unit/2](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/40/special_educational_needs-transport/1856/travel_coordination_unit/2)
- ii. the Council's Customer Services Centre 0161 219 6400
- iii. the information pack issued during your child's SEN assessment

Once this form has been completed it should be returned to Travel Co-ordination Unit, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Universal Square, Devonshire Street North, Manchester. M12 6JH. initial evaluation will then determine whether assistance is likely to be approved. The parent/carer will be informed of the outcome within 5 days of receiving the application.

**Stage 2** – This stage will include the gathering and evaluation of written evidence and parental circumstances. It will usually include consultation with the school/college concerned, caseworkers and any other relevant specialists, and the parent/carer. It is possible at this stage, following further gathering of evidence that the application is declined.

Where the application is approved an appropriate travel solution will be identified. On completion, a written assessment will be issued to the parent/carer detailing the proposed level and type of assistance offered by the Council. This must be signed as agreed by the parent/carer and returned to Travel Co-ordination Unit, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Universal Square, Devonshire Street North, Manchester. M12 6JH. by post or by e-mail to [hometoschool@manchester.gov.uk](mailto:hometoschool@manchester.gov.uk)

This stage will normally be completed within 15 working days following Stage 1 or sooner, depending on the complexity of the circumstances.

**Stage 3** – The Council will make arrangements to provide the travel assistance. This will start no later than 5 working days from receipt of the signed (by parent/carer) travel assessment proposal. The parent/carer will receive confirmation of the arrangements together with service standards and relevant contact details of the service provider.

## 5. HOW ENTITLEMENT TO TRAVEL ASSISTANCE WILL BE DECIDED

It is the responsibility of the Council to decide the travel assistance necessary in the case of each child. The decision will take into account matters such as the pupil's age, their needs, the nature of the route to school and family circumstances.

All applications for travel assistance will be considered in relation to Council policies concerning travel to and from school, school attendance policies and the legal responsibilities of the Council and parents/carers.

Specific consideration **will be** given to:

- a) Evidence that a child's special needs or medical condition prevents the child from walking to school or using public transport.
- b) Evidence that there would be health and safety risks to the child or others if they travelled to school without support.
- c) Evidence that the parent/carers' individual circumstances prevent them from taking or accompanying their child/children to school or college. For example, if a child has other siblings attending schools not local to the SEN provision offered or if the parent/carer is disabled.

Consideration **will not normally be** given to:

- a) Personal circumstances such as parents/carers attending work or looking after other children not of school age.
- b) Personal circumstances when considering drop off/collection points and times.
- c) Help with attendance issues. Parents/carers are legally responsible for ensuring their child/children attends school regularly.

## 6. TRAVEL ASSISTANCE REVIEWS

The need for travel assistance will be reviewed on a continuing basis and at least once per year. Wherever possible the review will be undertaken following the child's statutory annual SEN Statement review. Any changes will be implemented from the beginning of the next school term, or sooner by mutual agreement.

Also, if there is a significant change in circumstances, such as a change in school or home address, or a change in parent/carer circumstances, or a change in the child's needs, a review may be undertaken. It is the responsibility of the parent/carer to promptly notify the Council's Travel Coordination Manager of any changes in circumstances that may affect the provision of travel assistance.

Where travel assistance is provided for temporary medical needs, a review date based on medical evidence will be set when the travel assistance is agreed. Where this is not possible, all arrangements will be reviewed in relation to the specific circumstances.

## 7. APPLICATION APPEALS

If an application for travel assistance is **not** approved by the Council, or the parent/carer disagrees with the type of assistance offered, there is a right of appeal. Appeals should be made within 15 working days of the decision being received by the parent/carer.

The appeal should be made in writing, setting out the exact nature and grounds of the appeal.

The appeals process has two stages:

**Stage 1** – The Head of Service will consider the appeal. The appeals form is available from the Council's Customer Service Centre 0161 219 6400.

Within 5 working days of the receipt of the appeal form, the parent/carer will receive confirmation that the appeal is under review. Further evidence may be requested to support the appeal and consultation with caseworkers and professional bodies may be required. A decision and notification will be made within 10 working days from receipt of the appeals form.

If the parent/carer remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they should notify the Council in writing within 15 working days of receiving the appeal decision.

**Stage 2** – If the parent/carer is dissatisfied with the outcome of the appeal at Stage 1 the appeal moves to Stage 2. The appeal will be reviewed independently from the service.

A stage two review will consider the evidence gathered and the reasons for the decision being made. A decision will be made within 15 working days of receiving the Stage 2 request will be made. In some cases a meeting with the parent/carer may be necessary.

During the appeal stages, travel assistance will not be provided **or** a change to existing travel assistance will not be instigated.

## 8. TRAVEL ASSISTANCE SOLUTIONS AVAILABLE

Once travel assistance has been agreed, a travel solution assessment will be undertaken to help determine the safest form of travel for the pupil that best meets their special educational needs.

Priority will always be given to travel assistance solutions that help to develop travel independence skills, so, as the child grows older, they are better equipped to lead independent lives.

The following options will be considered when assessing the optimum travel assistance solutions. Over time innovative solutions may be developed and therefore the options considered are not necessarily limited to those described below;

- 1 **Travel pass** - All pupils with a Statement of SEN are entitled to receive a travel pass for use on public transport.
- 2 **Independence travel training** - Independence travel training, focused on the needs and capabilities of a pupil, can increase independence by developing their personal, social and life skills. By working closely with parents/carers, the child and the school, travel training will contribute to greater independence for the child and thus will always be given priority as an option when considering suitable solutions.
- 3 **Walking buses** - The Council is keen to reduce the amount of vehicle journeys in and around the City and, especially at peak times, reduce traffic movements in close proximity to schools. A pupil may be allocated a space on a walking bus scheme. These involve several pupils walking to and from school under the guidance and protection of a qualified Travel Assistant.
- 4 **Reimbursement of mileage costs** - Parents/carers may be able to support their child in travelling to school, either in the capacity of Travel Assistant or Driver of their own car. In such circumstances the Council may remunerate the costs of travel by paying a mileage allowance at the prevailing rate set by the Council and in force at the time.
- 5 **Escorted public transport** - It may be possible for a pupil to travel on public transport if they have some assistance. The Council may provide a Travel Assistant to accompany the pupil and help build a level of independence over time.
- 6 **Transport vehicles** - In exceptional circumstances the Council may provide a vehicle to transport a child to and from School. Where vehicles are provided, these may be from the Council's own fleet of vehicles and drivers, or vehicles and drivers provided by a suitably qualified, registered, commercial provider working to contractual standards set by the Council.



Whenever possible, pupils will travel together in mini-buses. These will be specially adapted to meet the needs of those pupils travelling on them. Each route will be planned on the basis of school start and finish times and the shortest possible route for all children travelling on a particular vehicle.

Pupils will be picked up and dropped off at a convenient location, within a reasonable distance from their home, in many cases from recognised bus stops.

- 7 Home pick up** - A home pick up and drop off will only be made where it is deemed essential due to the child's significant needs.
- 8 Taxis and private hire vehicles** - Under very exceptional circumstances the Council may transport pupils in separate taxis or private hire vehicles based on the assessed needs of the child.
- 9 Provision of Travel Assistants** - A Travel Assistant may be provided to accompany a pupil to school whether using public transport or on Council provided transport. The Council, where appropriate, may remunerate a parent or carer to act as a Travel Assistant for their child. Escorts will only be provided where they are necessary for the safe operation of vehicles and/or the care of children. This will be determined during Stage 2 of the Assessment Process

## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

Further information about our service standards for travel assistance can be obtained by contacting the Customer Service Centre 0161 219 6400

# **APPENDIX B**

## **Home to School Travel**

# **SERVICE STANDARDS**

## ASSISTANCE FOR HOME TO SCHOOL TRAVEL FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SIGNIFICANT SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS

### **SERVICE STANDARDS**

These service standards are intended to provide clarity for parents/carers in relation to the travel assistance solutions offered to children with special educational needs.

Underlying these standards is the principle that, if Manchester City Council agrees to provide travel assistance, it will be provided in a safe and cost effective manner, taking account of the child's specific needs and with regard to the best use of the Council's resources.

#### **1 Service Personnel**

It is recognised that the quality of travel assistance to and from school can often affect the emotional welfare and behavioural characteristics of a child. All Drivers and Travel Assistants undertaking the service will show understanding and empathy with the children, the parents and the school staff. They will treat children with respect and in a dignified manner appropriate to the child.

All Drivers and Travel Assistants will greet passengers and parents politely and ensure that all passengers travel in comfort and safety.

All Drivers and Travel Assistants will have undergone a training programme and will be in receipt of Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks.

Travel Assistants will be provided as part of travel assistance solutions where they are necessary to support the safe operation of vehicles or safe walking buses and the care of children.

The Council recognises that in certain situations change can be unsettling. As a result the Council will make every effort to ensure the same Driver and/or Travel Assistant is used on a regular basis. This may not always be possible due to illness, holidays, retirement and staff resignations. Changes may also be necessary from time to time to ensure the efficient use of Council resources. In these circumstances the Council will provide a period of notice wherever possible and, where practicable, put in place a transition plan that minimises the distress to the child.

#### **2 Vehicles**

All transport will be provided in accordance with contractual standards and legislation.

All vehicles will be properly licensed and roadworthy, and will offer the standards of comfort and safety as prescribed in relevant Statutory Law.

Regular monitoring of quality and service standards will take place on all vehicles.

Vehicles will have specialist wheelchair access and wheelchair tie down and occupant restraint systems where necessary.

### 3 Travelling times

The Council will endeavour to ensure that pupils arrive at school fit to learn and recognises that the length of the journey to school can affect this aim. We expect the maximum length of journey for a pupil will be no more than 1 hour. On occasions there are factors outside the Council's control e.g. unforeseen traffic congestion or bad weather that may affect these.

These journey times do not apply where pupils are travelling to schools and colleges outside the city of Manchester.

In certain circumstances it may be necessary for the Council to vary planned routes and this may affect pick up and drop off times. Where this is the case the Council will provide 5 working days notice to parents/carers.

### 3 Vehicle waiting times

To keep journey times down to an absolute minimum and ensure that all pupils arrive at school on time, all vehicles will adhere to strict waiting time limits as follows:

- a) If a child is not ready, or not at the agreed pick up point, the vehicle will wait for a maximum of 2 minutes after the agreed pick up time and then move off. If this means the child is unable to travel on the organised vehicle, the parent/carer is then responsible for ensuring that the child gets to school on time.
- b) If the vehicle arrives early for a pick up it will wait until the official set time and then a further 2 minutes before moving off. If this means the child is unable to travel on the organised vehicle, the parent/carer is then responsible for ensuring that the child gets to school on time.
- c) If the vehicle arrives late for a pick up it will move off as soon as all the children have boarded.
- d) When a vehicle arrives at a pick up or drop off point, the horn will **not** be sounded.

If more than two occurrences of delay are caused by parents/carers or children not being available at the official time, travel assistance will be reviewed and may be suspended or permanently withdrawn. In such circumstances parents/carers will be responsible for ensuring their child's regular attendance at school

### 4 Absences

Where a child cannot attend school or college on any particular day due to illness it is the parents/carers responsibility to;

- a) Contact the Council's Travel Coordination Unit the night before travel is required, if it is known that the child will be off school the next day or;

- b) Contact the Council's Travel Coordination Unit as early as possible in the morning of the day their child is due to travel, if the child has only just begun to show signs of illness.

When travel assistance is cancelled due to illness, ***it will only be reinstated*** when the parent/carer notifies the Travel Coordination Unit. This advice should be given on ***the day before*** the child is due to return to school.

Where parents/carers, on more than two occasions, fail to cancel travel assistance for their child before it arrives, the child's transport provision will be reviewed.

Travel assistance will be reviewed, and may be suspended for a period of time or permanently withdrawn, if it becomes apparent that vehicles are not being cancelled with sufficient advance warning. Parents/carers will be responsible for ensuring their child's regular attendance at school in such circumstances.

## **6. Making alternative arrangements**

In the event that a parent/carer is unable to meet their child at the specified time and location, transport providers are instructed to take children to the nearest place of safety and notify a Children's Services Social Worker.

Parents/carers must provide an emergency address, located within one mile of their home address or the pick up point, where their child can be dropped off.

At times, parents/carers may need to make emergency alternative arrangements for the handover of their child to a nominated responsible adult. In these cases parents/carers must notify the Travel Coordination Unit and make suitable arrangements to ensure their child's safety.

Where emergency arrangements are put in place on more than two occasions, travel assistance will be reviewed and may be suspended or permanently withdrawn. In such circumstances parents/carers will be responsible for ensuring their child's regular attendance at school.

In circumstances where vehicles are delayed or late arriving the parent/carer should contact the transport provider directly. These details will be provided on commencement of the travel assistance or following a change in provider. If there are more than 3 instances of a vehicle being late in any 4 week period the Council's Travel Coordination Unit should be contacted. The Travel Coordination Unit will take steps to directly address the situation with the provider.

## **7. Extra journeys**

The provision of travel assistance extends only to journeys to and from school at the beginning and the end of the school day. Travel assistance is not provided on any other occasions, for example, travel between schools, sports facilities, for work experience, other curriculum activities and medical appointments.

Where a child attends more than one school, they may require additional transport.

The school, which is the child's main school, will be responsible for arranging and meeting the cost of such transport.

Where a child is based full time at a school, but visits other schools or a Pupil Referral Unit, the school where the pupil is 'on roll' will be responsible for arranging transport and for the cost of such transport. Parents/carers should, in these circumstances, address any issues directly to the child's school

### **8. Travel Assistance for parents/carers to attend meetings/events**

Where a parent/carer is required to attend school for a meeting/event, it is their responsibility to make their own travel arrangements. However, subject to the following conditions, parents/carers may be allowed to travel on their child's vehicle:

- (a) Permission is granted by the Travel Coordination Unit prior to the journey (**this is essential for insurance purposes**);
- (b) There is a spare seat available on the vehicle;
- (c) The vehicle is not diverting from its regular route.

### **9. On vehicle medical assistance**

Travel Assistants are trained in basic First Aid and receive additional training specific to the child's needs where necessary. However, in the event of an emergency, Transport Assistants and Drivers will contact 999 to request a paramedic crew.

Children are not permitted to consume food or drinks whilst on board a vehicle. This standard will be enforced to ensure the continuing safety of children whilst travelling.

### **10. Safeguarding children**

The nominated Child Protection Officer will be advised of any safety issues that may be encountered during the provision of travel assistance. The nominated officer will take appropriate action to safeguard the child as deemed appropriate and in line with Council procedures. The school, social workers and other agencies may be contacted depending on the individual circumstances.

### **11. Expected behavioural standards for children**

As a result of their special educational needs, any child may experience behavioural difficulties as a direct result of their particular needs. In these cases the Council will make every effort to work with the schools, parents and transport providers to manage instances where the child exhibits these extreme behaviour characteristics. Wherever possible these considerations will be taken into account when determining an appropriate and safe form of travel assistance. Advice will always be sought from the child's school regarding whether the bad behaviour is directly linked to the special educational needs and appropriate action accordingly taken.

It is however recognised, that general poor behaviour, not directly attributable to a child's particular special educational needs and circumstances, cannot be taken into

account when determining an appropriate safe travel plan. It is therefore paramount to have and to enforce clear standards of acceptable behaviour in the interests of ensuring a safe journey for all pupils and staff as well as other road users.

In consultation with schools, the Council may be required to instigate permanent or fixed periods of exclusion from travel assistance. Parents/carers will be responsible for transporting their children during any period of exclusion and ensuring their child's regular attendance at school.

When considering whether to exclude any child from travel assistance the Council will require written statements from Drivers and Travel Assistants in relation to the alleged bad behaviour. Consultation will also take place with the relevant Head Teacher and other relevant specialists.

The application of any sanctions as detailed below does not prejudice the rights of any individual to instigate criminal proceedings against a person resulting from bad behaviour.

**1. Verbal abuse:**

The first instance of offensive verbal abuse to staff, other passengers or the general public will result in a formal warning

The second instance of verbal abuse will result in a written warning.

The third occurrence will result in a five-day exclusion from travel assistance.

**2. Vandalism:**

The first instance of vandalism to a vehicle will result in five-day exclusion. The costs of making good the damage will be charged to the parent/carer.

The second instance of vandalism will result in permanent exclusion from travel assistance. The costs of making good the damage will be charged to the parent/carer.

**3. Physical abuse:**

The first instance of physical abuse will result in a two-week exclusion from travel assistance pending full investigation. Travel assistance may be reintroduced when the Head Teacher and The Travel Coordination Manager are both satisfied (and in line with school's specific behaviour policies) that the child's behaviour has improved satisfactorily – Any further occurrence of physical abuse will result in permanent exclusion from travel assistance.

**12. Complaints/comments and questions**

The Council is constantly seeking ways to improve the quality of services and encourages feedback from parents/carers, children and young people and

school staff.

If you have a complaint, a comment or a question related to the provision of travel assistance or these service standards, please direct these to the council's customer service centre 0161 219 6400.