

Education Transport

This leaflet provides information about Suffolk County Council's Education transport policy and the arrangements for home-to-school and college transport

Revised October 2009

Introduction

This leaflet provides a summary of the arrangements Suffolk County Council has decided will apply to home-to-school (and college) transport. Like all Local Authorities Suffolk County Council must provide free home-to-school transport in certain situations, and can extend transport provision beyond the legally required minimum. This document brings together the County Council's policies on home-to-school/college transport, and explains how they work in practice.

Applications for home-to-school/college transport are considered individually, taking into account the relevant legal requirements and the circumstances of each applicant. The policy and the ways in which it is put into practice have been determined in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Education Act 1996, particularly Sections 444 and 509, the subsequent Education Act 2002 and the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Transport for children of compulsory school age

Free Travel

The general policy of Suffolk County Council is that free transport is provided only for children of compulsory school age (5 years up to 16 years) who:

- are under 8 years of age and live two miles or more from the school; or
- are 8 years of age and over and live three miles or more from the school.

The ages are taken at 1 September in each school year.

Transport will be made available to the catchment area school or, if applicable, to a suitable school which is nearest to the pupil's home. Free travel may also be offered if the catchment area school is full and a place has been offered by the County Council at another school which is over the distances mentioned above. Transport is not provided to independent schools, unless it is an independent special school named in a statement of special educational needs.

For families on low income, that is to say eligible for free school meals or in receipt of maximum working tax credit, this entitlement for free school transport is extended to those children who:

- are aged between 8 and 11 and live two miles or more from the school;
- are aged between 11 and 16 and attend one of their three nearest schools, which is 2 miles but not more than 6 miles from their home; and
- are aged between 11 and 16, attend a school on the grounds of their religion or belief and live 2 miles but not more than 15 miles from the school.

Discretionary Travel

The Education Act permits the County Council to have a discretionary travel scheme as a part of its general transport policy. The scheme operated in Suffolk may provide assistance to children who do not otherwise qualify for free travel, by using spare seats on journeys the County Council has arranged specifically for children entitled to free travel. However, this scheme does not extend to the offer of seats on public transport journeys or to other vehicles that have not been hired as a whole to carry out school transport journeys solely for the County Council.

Parents whose children do not otherwise qualify for free home-to-school transport, and who would like them to travel on the transport can apply by contacting Suffolk Passenger Transport. Contact details are shown on page 6 of this leaflet.

Where the offer of a seat can be made, travel is conditional on the parents/carers accepting the terms and conditions of the offer and making a termly contribution toward the cost of the transport. The availability of a seat is reviewed termly.

For Suffolk resident families the payment is waived in certain circumstances – receipt of Income Support, Income Based Job Seekers Allowance, or Tax Credit (in some cases), being the principal means test.

In addition, applications for exemption from the charges by those in receipt of certain other benefits or a low income will be considered. Only a maximum of two children in any family are charged; third and subsequent children are exempt from the charge. **In all cases the full terms and conditions of the discretionary travel scheme and the payment and exemption arrangements are set out when the offer of a seat on transport being arranged by the County Council is confirmed.**

Transport for under 5s

Children who begin school on a full-time basis in the term in which they reach 5 years of age will have free (*or discretionary*) travel made available in accordance with the arrangements and policy for children of compulsory school age set out above. Under normal circumstances free home-to-school transport is not provided to other children under statutory school age who attend school on a full or part-time basis. However, exceptions to this policy may be made in respect of young children with special educational needs (*Please see the section on “Special Educational Needs Transport”*).

Special Educational Needs Transport

Free transport for pupils with special educational needs may be provided, without reference to their age and the distance between home and school, where it is accepted by the County Council that transport is necessary to enable them to have access to the specialist provision set out in their Statement of Special

Educational Needs. (See also the section about “Transport For Students at Sixth Forms and Colleges”).

Transport on Denominational Grounds

In considering applications for home-to-school transport, the County Council takes account of parents’ wishes for denominational religious education. Specific arrangements for children of Roman Catholic families attending Roman Catholic Aided schools is available as a separate policy leaflet.

Transport for Students at Sixth forms and Colleges

The County Council and its partner organisations have developed a discretionary policy for home-to-school and college transport assistance for Post-16 students. These arrangements meet the requirements set out in the legislation and in other guidance that is from time to time provided.

Under this policy, to be eligible for help with daily transport between home and the school or college, students must

- be over compulsory school age but under 19 years (or be completing a course begun prior to the 19th birthday) and be undertaking an approved full-time course of further education;
- live at least 3 miles away from the school or college;
- be normally resident in Suffolk.

We are able to make travel assistance available to:

- The 6th form centre at the school that serves the area where the student lives (the “catchment area” school).
- The local college of further education in Suffolk.
- Additionally, travel assistance may be available if the student is undertaking an approved full-time course at a school or college of further education other than those which serve the local area. However, assistance in these circumstances is subject to the home-to-school or college journey time not exceeding 75 minutes. We assess “journey time” by calculating the door-to-door time by the use of public transport. This assessment will take into account any walking time to the pick-up point, time gaps in public transport connections, walking time from any set down point to the school or college, and so on.

Please note that transport assistance for students with special educational needs may be provided without reference to the minimum distance and other criteria set out in this part of the transport policy, where it is accepted by the County Council

that transport is necessary to enable the student to have access to the education provision.

The post-16 transport policy is available separately.

How the Policy is Implemented

Calculation of Home-to-School and College Distances

In order to establish whether or not there is an entitlement to home-to-school or college transport assistance and in accordance with requirements set out in the legislation, home-to-school and college distances are measured by the nearest available walking route from the gate or access to the pupil or student's home to the gate or access to the school or college. The type of route we measure is one with a hard surface available for all-the-year-round use. We maintain detailed records of home-to-school and college distances. Of course, when new enquiries are made we will carry out further distance checks to add to our records if that is necessary.

Arranging Transport

Having established the needs within an area, a timetable and a route are drawn up and the required vehicle size is assessed. For pupils and students who qualify for assistance from the County Council, transport will normally be provided from the general area where the pupil or student lives to the school or college, and return, at times that coincide with the normal school/college day.

Competitive quotations to match our requirements are then sought from transport operators. All operators have been assessed and approved before inclusion on our tender list. All potential contractors have to accept the terms and conditions of contract set by the County Council. These include the various legal and operating requirements as well as the requirements set out in connection with the specific journey.

The arrangements we make will usually be by use of public transport services, specially contracted vehicles or the County Council's own vehicles, depending on the type of contract which has been let (*see the note below*). In a few exceptional circumstances other types of arrangement might need to be made.

Subsequently, the transport that has been put in place is regularly monitored and action is taken if problems are uncovered. Adjustments to the arrangements to reflect changed needs are made as necessary when they occur.

Parents should note that other than the driver, no additional supervision is provided on Suffolk County Council transport, with the exception of those journeys carrying children with Special Educational Needs, where on expert advice, a passenger assistant is provided if required.

All drivers and escorts are required to have a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check.

Smoking is strictly forbidden on all the transport services the County Council arranges for pupils and students. It is also a requirement that when on the

vehicle pupils and students must behave properly at all times and not do anything that might put the driver, the vehicle or other passengers at risk. Misbehaviour or damage caused to a vehicle may result in the Travel Pass being withdrawn by the County Council, the school or the operator.

Note: Public transport services refer to “season ticket” type arrangements on public transport facilities including registered local bus and rail services. Contracted vehicles refers to road transport passenger vehicles operating on a “closed” basis where the County Council has hired the vehicle as a whole to carry out a specific journey solely for passengers designated by the Authority.

Travel Passes

As a part of the information we use to assess entitlement to transport, we have a database of pupils and students provided by schools. It is, therefore, vitally important that the details of an individual pupil or student, which are held at the school are correct – particularly in relation to the home address, post-code and date of birth.

Each pupil or student who is allocated to a transport service arranged by the County Council will normally be provided with a Pass which authorises travel on that journey. Passes are not transferable to other journeys and should be carried at all times. The companies who provide us with transport have clear instructions to check passes regularly and to allow only those who can produce a valid Pass to ride under the arrangements made by the County Council. We tell them to exercise discretion, particularly at the beginning of each new term, **however it is important to emphasise that pupils and students must carry their Pass each day.**

Details of the timetable applicable to each of the journeys are available by contacting Suffolk Passenger Transport– **the address and contact details are shown below.**

Exceptions to the General Transport Policy

Suffolk County Council’s general policy on entitlement to transport has been summarised in this leaflet. The County Council sets that policy and staff have no discretion to amend its application.

However, if a child falls outside the terms of the free travel policies but the parents believe their circumstances justify special consideration they are entitled to make written representations to a Committee of the Council. The members of this Committee take final decisions in those areas where the County Council has discretion to provide home-to-school and college transport.

Further Information

The County Council produces a booklet each year about our schools and this includes some general information about transport. This booklet, “**Schools in Suffolk**”, is available from local schools or the Local Area Offices.

If you need clarification about any matter in this leaflet, further information about home-to-school/college transport in Suffolk, or a copy of the leaflets listed below, you can contact us at:

**Passenger Transport Unit
Suffolk County Council
Endeavour House
8 Russell Road
IPSWICH
Suffolk
IP1 2BX**

Tel: 0845 606 6067

E-mail: transport.services@suffolk.gov.uk

The following leaflets are available from the Education Transport Service

- Discretionary transport scheme
- Transport for children with additional needs
- Transport to Roman Catholic Aided Schools
- Post-16 transport policy
- Exceptions to the General Transport Policy