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Travel assistance policy for 16–19-year-olds with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) 2025-26 academic year



Document purpose

This policy sets out how West Sussex County Council (“the Council”) will decide eligibility for travel support for learners aged 16 to 19 who have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

In formulating this policy, the Council has had regard to the statutory guidance on “Post-16 transport and travel support to education and training”.

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Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Local authority responsibility	3
3. Criteria for travel assistance	4
4. Contribution towards Post-16 travel assistance	4
5. Application process	5
6. How decisions are made	5
7. What happens if travel assistance is approved	7
8. Limitations of the travel assistance we provide	8
9. Occasions when travel assistance is not supplied or withdrawn.....	8
10. Operational practices and service limitations	9
11. Appeal process	10
12. Review of travel provision	11
13. Concessionary seat scheme (paid transport).....	12
14. 14. Policy changes	12
15. Complaints	12
16. Summary of the application process.....	13

1. Introduction

1.1. This policy explains the Council's statutory responsibility in respect of travel assistance for students aged 16 to 19. It states how to apply for travel assistance and how eligibility is determined and assessed.

1.2. This policy applies to students over compulsory school age but under 19 (or those who began a course of education or training before turning 19 and are still attending that course). This refers to those in school years 12, 13 and 14.

1.3. Separate policies set out the provision for children of compulsory school age and adult learners over 19 years of age. Find out more on our [home to school and college transport policy](#) webpage.

2. Local authority responsibility

2.1. Once young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) reach compulsory school leaving age, the help councils must give them with transport to school or college changes. They do not automatically get the free school transport that younger children are entitled to.

2.2. Statutory guidance states that if someone asks a council for transport assistance for a young person over 16 years old it must assess their situation and ensure that its decision to provide transport or other assistance is a reasonable one, taking account of all relevant matters. Councils are expected to target support at those who need it most. The Council is committed to providing travel assistance to post 16 students with SEND, when their SEND and circumstances mean that they could not otherwise access their placement.

2.3. The Council must prepare and publish an annual [Post-16 transport policy statement](#) specifying the arrangements for the provision of transport or other support that the authority considers it necessary to make to facilitate the attendance of all persons of sixth form age receiving education or training.

2.4. The law concerning education transport is set out in the Education Act 1996 (as amended) ("the Act"). The Act divides children and young people into three groups: children of compulsory school age; young people of sixth form age; and adult learners. For sixth form age students, if transport assistance is requested, this will be assessed and provided where necessary. Section 509AC(1) states that sixth form age is determined as those who are (a) under the age of 19; or (b) began a course of education or training before the age of 19 and continues to attend that course.

2.5. Statutory guidance from the Department for Education 'Transport to education and training for people aged 16 and over' (2019) states that local authorities may ask learners and their parents/carers for a contribution to transport costs for young people of sixth form age.

3. Criteria for travel assistance

3.1. The following gateway criteria must be met for an application for travel assistance to be considered.

- The student lives in West Sussex.
- The student has a current Education, Health and Care Plan.
- The student will be attending the equivalent of a full-time educational course which allows for appropriate progression. The definition of full-time education constitutes a minimum of 540 planned learning hours per academic year.
- The placement is the nearest suitable college to their home address and named in the student's EHC Plan.
- The shortest available walking route from home to school/college is three miles or more

3.2. If these gateway criteria are met, the Council will then consider the circumstances of the student and the family and their broader network, to assess whether it is necessary to provide transport for the student. The Council thinks it is reasonable for parents/carers to prioritise transporting the student over other commitments. Further information on how this will be considered can be found in section 6 below.

3.3. Students in the care of a local authority or a fostering agency are treated no differently from other students regarding eligibility for assistance with transport.

3.4. Medical exceptions may still be considered for applicants residing under 3 miles. Eligibility is assessed on a case-by-case basis to establish if a child cannot reasonably be expected to walk to school or college if residing under 3 miles. An application requesting a medical exception takes account of the child's physical ability to walk to school and any health and safety issues related to their special educational needs, disability or mobility problems. To assist in determining a child's physical ability, we will need to see medical evidence from a consultant confirming the medical condition and any relevant facts regarding or impacting upon mobility. We will also need to know how long transport assistance is required and an indication of what type of travel is appropriate. All cases where transport is agreed will be reviewed regularly unless it is a time-limited offer of support.

4. Contribution towards Post-16 travel assistance

4.1. Where a student of sixth form age meets the gateway criteria (listed above), parents will need to pay a contribution of £854 per year towards the cost of the transport assistance. This can be paid in instalments.

4.2. No contribution is paid if you have a low family income. To qualify as Low Income, the applicant must meet the same eligibility criteria as for [Free School Meals](#).

4.3. No contribution is paid if you opt for a fuel reimbursement claim i.e. personal transport budget, as your mode of transportation.

4.4. An invoice will be sent, and payment usually needs to be made in 7 monthly instalments. Payment will usually be made via Direct Debit except where another payment method has been agreed.

4.5. Transport will not usually be arranged until all relevant paperwork is received, this could include travel care plan, health and safety questionnaire, timetable and evidence of low-income status. Transport may be ceased if payments are not made on schedule - if this occurs the Council will first contact the parent/carer to try and avoid this action.

5. Application process

5.1. The quickest and most secure way to make an application is online using the [Post-16 transport application form](#). Alternatively, we can send you a paper copy of the form on request. Support with completing the application form can be provided by your assigned key worker.

5.2. A new application is required for everyone requesting 16-19 travel assistance whether the student is remaining in the same school or moving to a new place of learning. In addition, a new application is needed for each new course or placement or when the student moves home address.

5.3. Applications will be considered to determine if the gateway criteria as set out in section 3 are met. More information may be sought to help with the decision. Information on how the decision is made can be found in the next section.

5.4. On average it could take 20 working days for a decision to be communicated to the applicant. It can take additional time to reach a decision depending on the timing of the application and whether further information needs to be requested.

5.5. Reimbursements for travel costs incurred before an application is approved, and travel assistance arranged will not be made.

5.6. If you disagree with the decision, you can lodge an appeal. Further information on how to appeal can be found in section 11.

6. How decisions are made

6.1. All applications will be considered by a Children, Young People and Learning Coordinator. They will consider the individual circumstances of each case and will not apply blanket policies or make assumptions about accompaniment. They will consider whether it is reasonably practical in the circumstances of each case for parents/carers to accompany the student or make the travel arrangements themselves. Applications will be assessed on the evidence provided, but the officer may request additional information from the applicant or the student's school or college. The officer will consider whether it is necessary for the Council to provide travel assistance in each case, rather than the student or family making their own travel arrangements. In some cases, the officer will seek advice from the West Sussex Special Educational Needs Assessment Team (SENAT).

6.2. The officer will use the information provided in the application, any other email correspondence with the Council in relation to the provision of transport as well as verbal information provided during phone calls.

6.3. In considering the eligibility of the student to receive an offer and what offer should be made, the officer will consider the following and/or any other relevant factors:

- Nature of the journey for the student/family for example, the distance, likely journey time, and complexity of the journey by road, public transport or on foot; whether the journey could be reasonably made if the student is accompanied.
- Parent/carer/broader network availability to accompany for example, the current commitments of the parent(s)/carer(s) and broader network; whether the student's family or broader network is reasonably able to transport or accompany them, given all other factors. Parents/carers will be expected to prioritise transporting the student over other commitments such as (but not exclusively):
 - a) taking pre-school aged children to nursery
 - b) voluntary work;
 - c) undertaking work commitments that can reasonably be carried out at times other than at college start and end times, for example when self- employed or on flexible work contracts.

Unless doing so is unreasonable in all the circumstances.

- The student's needs relating to travel for example, whether the student has complex needs, and/or requires a second person on transport; if independent travel is a realistic goal, and whether this has been appropriately encouraged by the family.
- Other relevant factors, for example, the health of the parent/carer and the potential impact of providing transport or accompanying the student, given all other factors.

6.4. The following evidence may be required in addition to the travel assistance application:

- Recent evidence from a relevant health and/or educational professional regarding the SEND of the student and how this impacts on the need for travel assistance, their ability to walk or travel on public transport, accompanied or otherwise.
- Recent evidence from a relevant health professional regarding a parent/carer's health, if this means that they are not able to accompany or transport the student themselves.
- Evidence from the parent/carer's employer regarding their work commitments, to include working hours, days, times, location of work and distance in miles from home to work and from the placement to work.
- Written evidence to demonstrate other commitments, although broader caring responsibilities would not normally be considered as a reason why a parent/carer would not be able to transport the student, as the family would be expected to find alternative solutions in most cases.
- Occasionally a student will have more than one address, for example, because they live with parents who have different addresses.

In accordance with statutory guidance, travel assistance will only be provided from and to a single address at which the child is habitually and normally resident during the academic week. Where a learner splits their time equally between addresses, travel assistance will be assessed from the address which is registered with the college/sixth form as the home address or, prior to admission, the address used on the relevant college/sixth form admission application form.

7. What happens if travel assistance is approved

Applications are processed in three stages.

Stage one

Determining eligibility - officers will decide if there is an entitlement under the policy and aim to reach a decision within 20 working days of receiving an application. This may take longer depending on the complexity of the decision.

Stage two

Assessing needs on transport - an assessment will be completed detailing the student's needs on transport and any medical issues they may have to ensure they are safely transported. The time this takes will vary depending on the needs of the student. The applicant will be kept up to date with the progress of this stage.

Stage three

Setting up transport - an officer will determine which mode of travel is appropriate based on the needs assessment and then will set this up. This will take approximately 15 working days from the date of all relevant paperwork being issued, including student timetable. But it may take longer if the situation is complex, they will let you know if they think it will take longer to set up.

7.1. Whilst every effort will be made to complete the transport arrangements as quickly as possible, you will need to make your own travel arrangements until this is set up. We will not reimburse for any costs incurred during this time.

7.2. It is for the Council to identify the most suitable, cost-effective mode of transport to get pupils between home and college, taking account of any special arrangements to support the student's particular needs. Once this task has been completed, the Transport Coordination Group will contact parents by email or telephone to advise them of the arrangements. Parents are not able to choose which form of transport or specific vehicle their child will travel on. If you disagree with the type of assistance being offered, you should contact the Transport Coordination Group (email school.transport@westsussex.gov.uk or telephone 01243 753530) to discuss your concerns. If they are unable to resolve your query, you can then raise a complaint (see section 14).

7.3. Consideration will be given to the most suitable travel assistance for the student. This will be in the form of:

- Public transport i.e. bus or train pass
- Personal Transport Budget
- Minibus or taxi.

7.4. Independent travel training (ITT): ITT is the process by which a person learns to make a journey between two places on their own and in safety – in this case the journey between home and college. The training supports the student to gain additional independence by providing extra help or support to make journeys alone using public transport (and walking or cycling as necessary). Students will be considered for an assessment for their suitability for ITT and we expect parents/carers to positively engage with this process. Where students are assessed as being suitable for ITT and the student and/or their family/carer do not positively engage with ITT, an offer of travel assistance may be withdrawn. At the end of the ITT, the student will be assessed on their ability to travel independently. When the student has been assessed to have completed the ITT, and therefore able to travel independently, the travel assistance will be ceased or amended accordingly.

7.5. Personal Transport Budget (PTB): A family may be offered a [Personal Transport Budget](#) which provides financial assistance for families to organise transport to school/college.

7.6. Minibus or taxi: Where the Council will be providing the transport, the student will have their travel needs assessed for the provision of safe and suitable transport arrangements. This type of transport is shared with other students unless the needs assessment determines that this is not reasonable.

8. Limitations of the travel assistance we provide

8.1. Students will usually only be transported at published school/college start and finish times, and they may be expected to enable sharing with other students through early arrival or delayed collection if safe to do so; or students may need to arrive earlier or leave later than their taught hours in college.

8.2. An offer of travel assistance may be part-week or involve a pick-up or drop-off point, i.e. not door to door. This will, however, be assessed on a case-by-case basis, depending on the student's needs.

9. Occasions when travel assistance is not supplied or withdrawn

9.1. The Council will only provide travel assistance to get students to and from college at the beginning and end of the college's published day. It is the responsibility of parents, carers or colleges to arrange and pay for transport at other times.

9.2. Transport will not be provided for the following:

- Temporary addresses. This is a domestic matter for families to resolve.
- Journeys to and from other destinations. Transport is not offered to or from points other than the college/education centre and home or pick up/drop off points.
- To take account of work/business commitments or domestic difficulties of parents/carers.
- To accommodate attendance at college breakfast club, after-school activities or homework clubs.

- Before or after medical appointments
- To accommodate work experience or off-site educational placements
- For pre-course visits, 'taster' days or parents' evenings/visits
- In the event of sickness where a student has to be collected from college
- Specific exam timetables that start/finish outside of the normal college day
- College trips or educational visits

9.3. It is the Council's policy to withdraw any transport that has been issued in error. If we find it necessary to withdraw a student's transport, we will write to the parent/carer giving the full reasons. We will also give a minimum of 2 weeks' notice to enable time to make alternative arrangements.

10. Operational practices and service limitations

10.1. The Council's transport is shared with other students unless the needs assessment determines that this is not appropriate or reasonable. This will be determined by officers in the needs assessment stage. Requests for solo transport made by parents/carers will be considered on the basis of need. Examples of reasons for agreeing that a student needs to travel in a vehicle without other passengers are where it's agreed that the safety of the student, driver and/or fellow passengers would be compromised by sharing. This will be established during the needs assessment.

10.2. The Council cannot guarantee the travel arrangements e.g. passenger assistant/driver will stay the same throughout the college course. You will need to be prepared for this possibility although we will give as much notice as possible when making changes.

10.3. In the morning, you will need to have the student ready at the agreed collection time. Where required, it is the responsibility of the parent or carer to get the student into the vehicle and the college's responsibility to get the student from the vehicle into the building.

10.4. In the afternoon, you will need to make sure that a responsible person is at home to receive the student at the arranged time unless it has been agreed between the Council and parent/carer in advance that this is not necessary. Failure to make sure that a responsible person is at home to receive the student may result in the student being taken to a safe place. Costs associated with looking after or transporting the student due to a parent or carer not being ready to receive the student will be passed on to the family. It is also the parent or carer's responsibility to collect the student from the safe place or arrange and pay for their travel home.

10.5. Passenger assistants are provided on transport only when it is determined as being required for the needs of the student, and this requirement will be reviewed regularly. This will be determined by officers in the needs assessment stage. Requests for a passenger assistant made by parents/carers will be considered on the basis of need.

10.6. Expected behavior on college transport – Seat belts must be worn where fitted. In addition, students must not smoke or vape on college transport, drop litter inside

the vehicle, eat or drink in the vehicle or stand up or move around in the vehicle whilst it is moving. For some students the needs assessment determines that an additional harness is required for the safety of the student. In these situations, we would be unable to transport a student without the parent's agreement that a harness could be used.

10.7. All personal equipment, e.g. musical instruments, laptop, tablets, mobile phones etc., should be secured in a suitable bag. If a student causes damage to a vehicle, the operator may require parents to reimburse them for any repairs. If a student misbehaves persistently on a vehicle, the Council reserves the right to take appropriate action to protect other users of the service. This may involve, among other steps, asking the school/college to take disciplinary action against the student including issuing a temporary ban from transport.

10.8. Vehicle breakdowns - If the vehicle breaks down, the driver will call for assistance. Passengers must follow the instructions of the driver. It is normal for students to wait in the vehicle, with the driver and/or passenger assistant, until a replacement vehicle arrives.

10.9. Students sharing with other students may have to arrive early or have a delayed collection, if safe to do so.

10.10. You should also be prepared for unforeseen circumstances such as driver illness or vehicle breakdown and make contingency Plans in the event of transport not turning up or where there are unavoidable delays.

10.11. If the student attends a residential college and qualifies for travel assistance, this will only be provided at the start and end of each half-term or each week depending on the boarding arrangements. This will be made clear when the application is approved. We do not provide transport at other times or for parent/carers visits for meetings.

11. Appeal process

11.1. Applicants have the right to appeal if they disagree with the initial decision. The Council operates a two-stage appeal process.

Stage 1 appeal

A stage 1 appeal form needs to be completed to make an appeal.

All stage 1 appeals will be considered by the Assistant Director for Education & Skills. The Assistant Director for Education & Skills will consider the appeal form; any information provided in support of the appeal; the application form; supporting information provided with the application; and any other correspondence used by the officer to reach a decision.

We shall aim to provide you with a decision from your stage 1 appeal within 20 working days of receipt of the application. You will receive an email with the detailed reasoning for the decision. We will also inform you how to escalate your appeal to the next stage if you disagree with the outcome.

Stage 2 appeal

- A stage 2 appeal form needs to be completed to make a Stage 2 appeal.
- All stage 2 appeals will be considered by the Transport Appeal Panel ("the Appeal Panel"). This is made up of three elected County Councillors who are independent of officers and the Stage 1 appeal process. The Appeal Panel will consider the original application, and the appeal forms together with any supporting documents or information provided to WSCC in relation to the application or the appeal. The Appeal Panel will also consider all verbal information made by the learner/parent/carer (such as via phone calls) where it is provided before the deadline for the meeting. The Appeal Panel may have questions during a hearing and in that situation, they may ask for the supporting officer to seek clarification by making a telephone call to the learner/parent/carer.
- The Appeal Panel will meet within 40 working days of receipt of the application. Within 5 working days of the meeting, you will be informed of their decision with the detailed reasoning in writing. We will also inform you how to escalate your complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) if you consider that there was a failure to comply with the procedural rules or if there were any other irregularities in the way the appeal has been handled.
- If the Appeal Panel is not satisfied it has enough information to reach a decision it may send a letter containing its provisional view on a stage 2 appeal and/or requesting further information. This is called a 'minded to' letter. Where necessary, this letter will be sent within 5 working days of the Appeal Panel meeting. A minded to letter is an opportunity for the appellant to comment on the Appeal Panel's provisional view of the stage 2 appeal, to answer any questions or points of clarification raised in the letter and to provide any further information requested. The letter will set out how long you have to respond to it, but this is usually 7 days. The Appeal Panel will then meet to finally determine your stage 2 appeal taking into account any response to its minded to letter.

11.2. More information about the appeals process, as well as the appeal forms can be requested by contacting Post16Travel@westsussex.gov.uk.

11.3. See paragraph 15.3. for details about how to complain about the service received in relation to travel to school or college

12. Review of travel provision

12.1. A new application must be made if the student moves to a new home or other circumstances change.

12.2. Failure to inform us of a change of circumstances may result in having to pay back costs incurred by the Council.

12.3. The mode of travel assistance being offered will also be reviewed regularly to make sure that the service provided continues to be appropriate for the student's needs and the most cost effective for the Council.

13. Concessionary seat scheme (paid transport)

13.1. Where it is decided that travel assistance will not be provided by the Council, the adult learner/parent/carer may be able to apply for a vacant seat: This is only possible for some routes to colleges, and we can only give seats on our existing vehicles where there are spaces available and where the proposed addition does not negatively affect existing travelers or the safety of the vehicle. This means we are not able to offer a seat to everyone.

13.2. The charge for the 2025/26 school year is £854 per year (reviewed annually). If you choose to pay in two instalments (Direct Debit or cheque), they will be due in October 2025 and January 2026. If you opt to pay in seven instalments (Direct Debit only), they will be collected monthly from October 2025 to April 2026.

13.3. It may be necessary for the child to get themselves or be taken to an existing stop. If a change is made to the shared route which means that the cost of the vacant seat increases, this increase may be passed onto the adult learner, or the offer of the vacant seat withdrawn. We will have to withdraw the vacant seat offer if we need the seat for someone else who qualifies for free transport or if we no longer have anyone on the route that qualifies for free transport. WSCC will give as much notice as possible however the minimum notice given will be one week.

14. Policy changes

14.1. The Council reserves the right to make minor amendments or corrections to this policy without consulting on them.

14.2. If the Council makes any change to this policy which is assessed as likely to have an impact on current and prospective students, the Council will inform the immediately affected families at the earliest opportunity. Such changes may include, but are not limited to, changes required by the impact of further cost saving requirements placed upon the Council and further limitations on the support given.

15. Complaints

15.1. The Council is here to help and support the people of West Sussex. Services are provided as efficiently as possible and it is expected that staff are helpful, polite and explain things clearly whether on the telephone, in writing or via an online meeting.

15.2. Sometimes things go wrong, and parents or carers may not be happy with the service they have received. We welcome comments, good and bad, as an opportunity to put things right and improve our services. Parents should let us know if they feel that the Council has failed to do something, done something wrong or acted unfairly or impolitely. We cannot investigate matters that are subject to the two-stage appeals process.

15.3. Complaints regarding the service provided on a vehicle organised by the Council, or concerns about transport arrangements should be directed to:

Email: school.transport@westsussex.gov.uk or telephone 01243 753530

15.4. Full details regarding the [Councils complaints procedure](#) can be viewed online.

16. Summary of the application process

16.1. A summary of the overall process follows:

Apply

- Applicants should review our gateway criteria set out in section 3.1.
- Use the online form to apply.
- We can post you a paper form if you prefer.

Application considered

- An officer will consider the application form and any supporting evidence.
- We may contact you to find out more about the learner and their circumstances.
- We aim to inform you of a decision within 20 working days of receipt of the application form, but some applications can take longer to process.

Decision

- You will be informed in writing of the officer's decision.

Needs assessment

- If the officer determines that transport is necessary, a needs assessment whilst travelling will be completed.

Organise transport

- On completion of the needs assessment, it can take up to 15 working days from the submission of a timetable for suitable transport to be organised.
- Parent notified of the travel arrangements.

Stage 1 appeal

- If you disagree with the decision, you can request a Stage 1 appeal.
- Complete a Stage 1 appeal form.
- All Stage 1 appeals are considered by the Assistant Director for Education & Skills
- You should receive a decision within 20 working days of receipt of the application form.

Stage 2 appeal

- If you disagree with the Stage 1 decision, you can request a Stage 2 appeal.
- Complete a Stage 2 appeal form.
- All Stage 2 appeals are considered by the Transport Appeal Panel.
- The Appeal Panel will meet within 40 working days of receipt of the application form.
- You will receive a written decision from the Appeal Panel within 5 working days of the hearing