

Mainstream Home to School Travel Policy

This sets out our policy on home to school travel arrangements for children and young people aged 5 to 16 who attend mainstream Newcastle schools. Separate policies are available for children and young people with additional needs, and for post-16 students.

This policy includes information on the eligibility criteria for travel assistance, how to apply, and what you can do if you are unhappy with the decision.

Very few pupils in Newcastle are entitled to free home to school transport. Parents and carers are advised to read this policy carefully before you apply for a school place, if help with travel costs could be important to you.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Parents and guardians have a legal duty to ensure that their children attend school regularly and are able to get there and back safely. Newcastle City Council will only make arrangements for free home to school travel for pupils who meet the legal entitlement.
- 1.2. Walking, cycling and the use of public transport will be promoted with a view to improving road safety, developing independence, encouraging health benefits from increased activity and exercise and reducing traffic congestion and associated pollution.
- 1.3. It is the responsibility of the parent or carer to ensure that their child gets to and from school at the required time each day, and to accompany them if necessary. A parent or carer's social or work commitments are not a consideration when considering eligibility for free school travel.
- 1.4. This policy is intended to facilitate attendance at school and is not intended to cover any travel between educational institutions during the school day; or any travel to and from social or child care arrangements or at other times. It is the responsibility of parents to make any such arrangements.
- 1.5. Free travel will be provided to eligible pupils in the form of a travel pass which is valid for a return journey from home to school on school days on the bus and metro.

2. Entitlement to free school travel for children aged 5 to 16

The Council has agreed changes to free home to school travel entitlement that will take effect from September 2014. The new entitlements are set out below.

2.1. Primary age children aged 5 to 11:

- 2.1.1. Children aged under 8 who are attending their nearest suitable Newcastle school, where the distance from home to school is over the statutory walking distance of 2 miles.
- 2.1.2. Children aged 8 to 11 who are attending their nearest suitable Newcastle school, where the walking distance from home to school is over the statutory walking distance of 3 miles.
- 2.1.3. Children aged 8 to 11 from low income families who are attending their nearest Newcastle school, where the distance from home to school is over the statutory walking distance of 2 miles.
- 2.1.4. Children from low income families with a proven faith who are attending their nearest Newcastle faith school where the walking distance from home to school is between 2 and 15 miles.
- 2.1.5. Children from low income families who were in receipt of free travel in 2013/14* who are attending their nearest Newcastle faith school where the walking distance from home to school is between 2 and 15 miles. These children will not be required to provide proof of faith.

2.2. Secondary age children aged 11 to 16:

- 2.2.1. Children who are attending their nearest suitable Newcastle school, where the distance from home to school is over the statutory walking distance of 3 miles.
- 2.2.2. Children from low income families, who attend one of their three nearest Newcastle schools, where the walking distance from home to school is between 2 and 6 miles.
- 2.2.3. Children from low income families with a proven faith who are attending their nearest Newcastle faith school where the walking distance from home to school is between 2 and 15 miles.
- 2.2.4. Children from low income families who were in receipt of free travel in 2013/14* who are attending a Newcastle faith school, where the walking distance from home to school is between 2 and 6 miles. These children will not be required to attend their nearest faith school or provide proof of faith.

2.3. Unsafe routes:

- 2.3.1. Children who are attending their nearest suitable Newcastle school where the distance from home to school is less than the statutory walking distance but the route to school is considered unsafe for the child, accompanied as necessary, to walk with reasonable safety.

* If the child's circumstances change (such as moving house or school) between assessments, this extended criterion will no longer apply and the application will be assessed under criteria 2.2.1-2.2.3.

- 2.3.2. Route safety is determined based on national guidelines for assessing safe routes to school. These guidelines are based on existing legislation, best practice, health and safety and case law. The guidelines are explicit that the responsibility for getting a child to school lies with their parents. Local authorities cannot assess a route to school as unsafe because of perceived dangers which could arise if a child was unaccompanied. The assessment must be undertaken for a child accompanied as necessary. Safety assessments for walked routes to school can only take account of the nature of the highway and provision of crossing facilities, not personal safety considerations. A route would not fail to qualify as safe because of dangers which could arise if the child was unaccompanied.
- 2.3.3. If routes become assessed as safe due to road improvements, entitlement to transport will end for those currently receiving free transport on safety grounds.

3. The application process

- 3.1. The easiest way to apply is online at **www.newcastle.gov.uk/freeschooltravel**
A colour passport size photograph of the pupil must be uploaded at the time of application. Alternatively, paper application forms are available.
- 3.2. Applications will usually be processed within ten working days subject to the required information being submitted.
- 3.3. Permits for free travel are valid for a period of one academic year and are issued free of charge. There is a charge of £5 for a replacement pass payable to Newcastle City Council if the permit is lost or damaged.
- 3.4. Entitlement for pupils will be assessed annually. A new application must be submitted for each school year. It is the parents' or carers' responsibility to do this and to ensure that we are notified of any relevant change of circumstances.

4. Appeals procedure

- 4.1. Parents or carers who have an application for travel assistance refused have the right to have their application reviewed. Applicants should write requesting a review of the decision to:

Admissions and Information team
Newcastle City Council
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 8QH

- 4.2. The appeals procedure can be used to describe the exceptional circumstance of students who wouldn't typically be eligible for Free School Travel. The local authority will review this information on a case by case basis and will use its discretion as to whether we will uphold an appeal based on the information provided.*

*The local authority has revised the 2015 Home to School Travel policy based on feedback provided by the Local Authority Ombudsman. October 2019

5. General notes and definitions

- 5.1. References to the 'nearest school' mean the state school nearest to home with available places at the time that places were allocated, that provides education appropriate to the age, gender and ability of the pupil. It is identified by considering whether the child would have qualified for a place at the school, regardless of whether it was named on the admission application form. We do not pay for travel to independent schools.
- 5.2. Distances are measured along the 'nearest qualifying route' using an electronic route mapping software application. The measurement is from the centre point of your home to the centre point of the school, based on roads and pathways which can be accessed by the child accompanied as necessary.
- 5.3. Home, for the purposes of establishing entitlement to free school travel, is the permanent address at which the pupil lives with a person who has parental responsibility. It is not the address of a relative or child-minder. Where there is joint residency, the address used is the one the child lives at most of the time. If a child spends time equally with both parents, then it will be the address which is closest to the school. In the event of a dispute the address of the person in receipt of child benefit will be used to assess entitlement.
- 5.4. To establish 'proven faith', proof will be required that your child is baptised or a dedicated member of another faith (church) recognised by Churches Together in England. This information will be sought from your child's school, based on evidence you provided them to support your child's application for a school place.
- 5.5. We do not make any distinction between schools which are single sex or mixed sex schools when determining which is the nearest available school of the religion or belief, or lack of belief, of the parent /carer of the pupil. Measurement will be made to the nearest available Newcastle school of the religion or belief, or lack of belief, not to the parent's preferred school.
- 5.6. Low income families are defined by the Education and Inspections Act paras 9-14 of Schedule 35B as those where the children are entitled to free school meals or where the parents are in receipt of the maximum level of Working Tax Credit. Parents are required to provide proof of income if they are not currently in receipt of free school meals. Please note that we are not currently aware of the full implications of Welfare Reform and introduction of Universal Credit and how the government will redefine eligibility, and will need to revise our criteria accordingly.
- 5.7. The definition of school includes settings at which pupils might receive education under section 19 (1) of the Education Act 1995 and includes pupil referral units.
- 5.8. Parents have a right in law to state a preference for a school for their children, but that does not carry with it a right to free transport.
- 5.9. Our policy only applies to pupils living in Newcastle. It does not include pupils from other local authorities who are attending schools in Newcastle.
- 5.10. We do not provide free travel where families move house and wish their child to remain at their current school, if there is a closer suitable school to the new address with available places.

- 5.11. If a pupil is in receipt of free travel and moves to another address, the child's entitlement will be reassessed using the policy in place at the time of the move. Eligibility may change in these circumstances.
- 5.12. We do not provide any home to school travel arrangements for children under the age of five as they can travel free on public transport.
- 5.13. There is no sibling link in the home to school travel policy, nor do we take account of feeder school arrangements.
- 5.14. Children in the care of the local authority are assessed under the normal terms of this policy.
- 5.15. When we provide free travel, or pupils use school bus services, parents are responsible for the safety and care of their children on the journeys to and from school.
- 5.16. Behaviour on transport that endangers other pupils, the driver or other passengers will not be tolerated. Transport operators and the local authority will withdraw travel support in the case of serious or persistent poor behaviour for either a fixed period or on a permanent basis.
- 5.17. Pupils aged between 5 and 16 years who do not qualify for free travel may apply for a smart card (POP card) for travel at a reduced rate from Nexus travel centres.