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Mainstream Home to School Travel Policy

This policy sets out Newcastle City Council's 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.

- [Special Educational Needs Disability \(SEND\) Travel Support](#)
- [Post 16 Transport statement](#)

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.

Parents and carers are advised to read this policy carefully before applying for a school place if they will be dependent on free travel to school.

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1) Introduction

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.

Parents and guardians have a legal duty to ensure that their children attend school regularly and are able to travel there and back safely. Newcastle City Council will only make arrangements for free home to school travel for pupils who meet the entitlement set out in this document.

Newcastle's Home to School Travel policy is based on the statutory requirements detailed in the DfE's Travel to school for children of compulsory school age - Statutory guidance for local authorities January 2024 document.

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.



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 taken into account when considering eligibility for free school travel.

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 childcare arrangements or at other times. It is the responsibility of parents to make any such arrangements.

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.

Free School Travel is not provided for students who travel to independent schools.

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

Students who meet the below categories (2.1 – 2.5) will be eligible for Free School Travel, under Newcastle City Council's Free School Travel policy.

2.1) Primary age children under 8 years old

- Students who are attending their nearest suitable Newcastle school, **and**
- the walking distance from home to school is between 2 and 6 miles

2.2) Primary age children aged 8 to 10

- Students who are attending their nearest suitable Newcastle school, **and**
- the walking distance from home to school is between 3 and 6 miles

or

- Students from a low income family (see low income definition), **and**
- who attend their nearest suitable Newcastle school, **and**
- the walking distance from home to school is between 2 and 6 miles

2.3) Secondary age children aged 11 to 16


- Students who are attending their nearest suitable Newcastle school, **and**
- the walking distance from home to school is between 3 and 6 miles

or

- Students from a low income family (see low income definition), **and**
- who attend one of their nearest 3 suitable Newcastle schools, **and**
- the walking distance from home to school is between 2 and 6 miles

or

- Students from a low income family (see low income definition), **and**
- who attend their nearest Newcastle faith school, **and**
- are attending the school because of a proven faith reason (see proven faith definition below), **and**

- 
- the walking distance from home to school is between 2 and 15 miles

or

- Students who attend a suitable Newcastle school, **and**
- all available schools are over a walking distance of 3 miles

or

- Students from low income family (see low income definition), **and**,
- who attend a suitable Newcastle school, **and**
- all available schools are over a walking distance of 2 miles

2.4) Excluded and Fair Access students

- When a child has either been excluded from school and are subsequently attending alternative provision or placed in a school through the Fair Access Panel, this provision will be classed as the nearest suitable school.
- To be eligible for Free School Travel the student will need to meet the age-related distance criteria from sections 2.1 - 2.3.

2.5) Successful appeal students

- Children who have had a travel appeal upheld will be eligible for one academic year so long as their circumstances haven't changed since the appeal.

3) Unsafe routes

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.

If routes become assessed as safe due to road improvements, entitlement to transport will end for those currently receiving free transport on safety grounds.

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, will be considered as eligible where the alternative safe walking route is over the statutory walking distance.

To challenge the safety of a route an appeal will need to be made and evidence provided demonstrating why the route is unsafe.



4) The application process

The easiest way to apply for Free School Travel is online at www.newcastle.gov.uk

A colour passport size photograph of the pupil must be uploaded at the time of application. Alternatively, paper application forms are available.

Applications will usually be processed within twenty working days subject to the required information being submitted during an academic year.

For applications to be processed for the first week of a new school year forms must be submitted before 31 July. Applications for a new school year will be processed during the summer holidays and are not subject to the aforementioned twenty working days.

Permits for free travel are valid for a period of one academic year and are issued free of charge.

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 the School Admissions Team is notified of any relevant change of circumstances.

5) Two Stage Appeals procedure

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.

Stage one (Conducted by a senior officer)

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 by:

[Completing an online appeals form](#)

or

email to:


admissions.information@newcastle.gov.uk

or

post to:

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

A parent has 20 working days from receipt of the refusal for Free School Travel to ask for a review of the decision.



Within 20 working days of receipt of a request a senior officer will review the original decision and send a detailed written notification of the outcome.

The senior officer will review the decision on the basis of entitlement, distance measurements, route safety and any exceptional circumstances.

Stage two (Conducted by an appeals panel)

A stage two appeal will be assessed and reviewed by a panel of three members who have the knowledge, skills and experience to ensure that the local authority complies with its statutory duties. These panel members will be independent of the original decision-making process.

They will make a decision considering both the needs of parents and of the local authority and ensure that children are not placed at unnecessary risk.

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.

Information collected from stage one about entitlement, distance measurements and route safety will be provided to the appeals panel for this information to be checked and reviewed.

Parents must provide a written statement detailing, in full, the circumstances of the student requiring Free School Travel and should include additional evidence with the statement. For exceptional circumstances to be considered, the written statement must include why the student's circumstances are significantly different to their peers.

In limited circumstances the local authority will allow a parent/ carer to present their case at a virtual/ in person meeting instead of providing a written statement.

Within 40 working days of receipt of a parent's written statement an appeals panel will review the information provided and make a decision.

The panel may ask for additional information to be provided by the applicant if it is felt necessary for an appropriate decision to be made.

A detailed written notification of the outcome will be provided to the parents within 5 working days of the panel's decision.

6) Local Government Ombudsman

In the written notification of the stage 2 appeal process the local authority will make it clear that there is a right of complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman, but only if complainants consider that there was a failure to comply with the procedural rules or if there are any other irregularities in the way the appeal has been handled. If the complainant considers the decision of the independent panel to be flawed on public law grounds, the complainant may also apply for judicial review.



7) Definitions

Low income

Low income families are defined by the Schedule 35B of the Education Act 1996. Parents are required to provide proof of income if they are not currently in receipt of free school meals.

Proven faith

To establish 'proven faith', ranking information used in the school admissions process will be used to identify whether a place was secured in a school due to having a proven faith. Where the religious characteristics of a student changes after a child is admitted to a school, parents are requested to send evidence in with their application so the local authority can check whether this information would have been considered by the school to secure a school place.

Nearest suitable school

References to the 'nearest suitable 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, had a parent applied. 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. A child's nearest suitable school may be a school that hadn't been applied for. It might not be their feeder school and might not be the same school as their older brothers or sisters.

It is not expected that student would switch between the different tier systems in Newcastle. Only schools within the student's current tier system are used as suitable schools.

Home address

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. Where there is shared custody of a child, the address used will be where the child lives most school days. If time is shared equally with both parents, the address used will be the address closest to the school. You can't apply for free travel to a childminder or relative's address. Only one address can be used on a travel pass, a student can not have more than one pass.

Walking route

We measure distances to walk to school using an electronic route mapping software application. This uses information from Ordnance Survey, who are the national mapping agency. We include overpasses, underpasses, bridleways, pedestrian-only streets, footpaths and roads.

Distances are measured from the centre point of your home to the centre point of the school grounds. It doesn't matter which school gate is used.

Walking routes are measured using an electronic route mapping software.



School

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.

8) General notes

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.

We will not provide Free School Travel to students over the age of 16 at the start of the academic year. Offset students over the age of 16 will not be eligible for a travel pass but may be eligible through the post 16 policy.

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.

Whether or not a student could attend a single sex school, due to the gender of the student, will be left to the discretion of that school.

Our policy only applies to pupils living in Newcastle. It does not include pupils from other local authorities who are attending schools in Newcastle.

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.

If a pupil is in receipt of free travel and moves to another address, the child's entitlement will be reassessed using the policy using the child's new address. Eligibility may change in these circumstances.

There is no sibling link in the home to school travel policy. We do not consider the feeder arrangements of schools.

Children in the care of the local authority are assessed under the normal terms of this policy.

When we provide free travel, or pupils use school bus services, parents remain responsible for the safety and care of their children on the journeys to and from school.

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.

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.