

E. Home to School/College Transport Policy

1. Introduction

This policy has been produced by Bridgend County Borough Council to comply with the requirements of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 to make available information about its policy and the arrangements it puts in place to transport learners from home to school and from home to college.

It is the intention of Bridgend County Borough Council to provide a reliable system of transportation that will seek to carry learners safely, punctually and in reasonable comfort.

In all cases, the efficient use of resources will dictate the mode of transport provided (subject to any special needs requirements). Transport may be provided by means of contracted school transport services or existing public transport services such as bus, minibus, train, taxi, etc.

2. Provision of free transport

There is a statutory duty placed upon the local authority (LA) to provide learners with free transport to the nearest suitable school if they reside beyond 'walking distance' to that school. In Bridgend the term nearest suitable school applies to the local catchment area school and this can be an English medium, Welsh medium, voluntary aided or maintained special schools.

However, where, as a result of parental preference, pupils attend a school other than their catchment area school, it must be understood that parents accept full responsibility for transport costs and arrangements.

The Welsh Government has defined the statutory 'walking distance' as two miles for primary aged learners and three miles for learners of compulsory school age receiving secondary education.

Bridgend County Borough Council has, from September 2016 chosen to change its policy in line with the Welsh Government's statutory distances of two miles for primary age pupils and three miles for pupils in secondary schools of statutory school age. Distances will be measured by the nearest safe, available, walking route from home to school. The LA uses a dedicated geographical information system (GIS) to measure these distances and ensure accuracy.

The changes are as follows:

- Primary School pupils will be provided with free transport if they attend their catchment school and live 2 miles or more from the school;
- Secondary School pupils (including post-16 pupils) will be provided with free transport if they attend their catchment school and live 3 miles or more from the school.

- Post 16 pupils living 3 miles or more from Bridgend College will also receive free transport, via public transport service pass.

When the policy comes into effect from September 2016 pupils who are below the new threshold for free transport and are already in receipt of free transport prior to September 2016 will maintain the free transport until they transition to the next stage of education or leave the school.

Pupils starting either primary or secondary school in September 2016 who are below the new threshold for free transport already but have a sibling in that school in receipt of free transport, will also receive free transport until they transition/leave that school.

Pupils who are not eligible for free school transport may be able to purchase a seat on a school bus (if surplus seats are available) and the cost of this seat will increase to £1.90 per day (£361 per annum) as of September 2016.

Home to school transport will be arranged to coincide with the start and end of the normal school day and shall be provided during the school term time. No transport is provided for breakfast clubs, after school clubs or summer schools.

Where the LA has arranged for a learner to attend an out of county residential school, transport will only be provided at the start and end of each half term. Transport, except for learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN), will normally be provided from pick-up points at approved bus stops on the nearest public transport route to the learner's home.

3. Nursery aged Learners

There is no statutory obligation on LA's to provide transport for nursery-aged learners. However, Bridgend has chosen to use its discretionary power to provide free transport for nursery aged learners subject to the Council's distance qualifying criterion of 1.5 miles. Therefore, nursery aged learner would travel on the same contracted vehicle as those learners of statutory school age. Where they attend on a full time basis (Nursery Two) they travel to school at the beginning of the school day and home at the end of the afternoon session. However, where schools offer places on a part-time basis to 3 year old learners (Nursery One) it is the responsibility of parents to either collect their child at the end of the morning session or ensure their child is transported to school for the afternoon session, depending on the mode of attendance.

4. Looked after children

The same age and distance criteria apply to children 'looked after' by the LA as to children who are not looked after. However, if the LA determines that a looked after child should attend a school other than their catchment area school then transport to and from that school will be provided.

5. Special arrangements - hazardous routes

A route is considered to be available if it is safe (as far as reasonably practicable) for a learner without a disability or learning difficulty to walk the route alone or with an accompanying adult if the learners age and levels of understanding requires this.

In determining the comparative safety of a walking route, the LA conducts assessments of the risks that children might encounter along the route between home and school.

All assessments will follow the Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance June 2014. As routes are reviewed, provision may be withdrawn where for example, identified hazards have been mitigated against. This will then be classed as an identified and available safe walking route. Parents will be given at least one term advance notice of the withdrawal of transport and any withdrawal will normally be implemented to coincide with the start of an academic year.

6. Transport to Welsh medium schools

Learners attending the nearest Welsh medium school receive free transport in accordance with the LA's agreed policy on walking distance and safe routes (see paragraphs 2 and 5).

7. Transport to voluntary aided schools

Learners attending the nearest voluntary aided school of the parent's denomination receive free transport in accordance with the LA's agreed policy on walking distance and safe routes (see paragraphs 2 and 5).

8. Learners with Special Educational Needs/Disabilities

Free transport is provided for all learners who attend special schools, pupil referral units and learning resources bases that are not located within their catchment school in accordance with the LA's agreed policy on walking distances.

Learners with Special Educational Needs who attend mainstream schools, and who do not otherwise qualify for free transport, may qualify for free transport if their application is accompanied by appropriate evidence which is confirmed by the LA's Inclusion Service.

Learners with disabilities (as defined by the Equality Act 2010) may be entitled to assistance with transport from home to an appropriate school/college even though the LA's agreed criteria on safe walking distances are not met. Such provision is subject to approval by the LA's Inclusion Service. Any such referrals must be supported by appropriate evidence.

The mode of transport provided will be dictated by the needs of the learner.

9. Cross border arrangements

Transport may be provided to eligible learners attending schools in neighboring local authorities, where such attendance is consistent with the LA's admission policy e.g Tonyrefail Comprehensive School for learners living in Evanstown and Dolau Primary (Welsh unit) for learners living in Pencoed.

10. Over subscribed schools

If a learner cannot be admitted to his/her catchment school and, as a result, has to attend another school beyond the walking distance from their home, then transport will only be provided to the next nearest suitable school. This may not be in accordance with the preferred school of the parent/carer and in such circumstances the parent/carer will be responsible for transport costs and arrangements.

11. Transport on medical grounds

Transport to and from school may be provided for short periods on the recommendation of an appropriate Health/Medical Officer and will be subject to confirmation by the LA. Where agreed this provision will be subject to regular review.

12. Special arrangements – payments to parents/carers

The Council may agree in special circumstances to a parent/carer transporting their child to and from school and then receiving reimbursement of petrol expenses. Such cases are considered individually.

13. Special arrangements – applications for use of LA discretion

Parents/carers are advised that if they consider there are special circumstances, they may make an application to the Council to consider exercising its discretion to assist with the provision of transport for learners who are not otherwise eligible for free transport.

Every application is considered on its merits. The Council does not maintain a list of circumstances which support the provision of discretionary transport; however, to assist parents/carers, the following are examples of such circumstances:

- where a learner has had to change address, to move to a different area of the county borough to escape a domestic violence situation;
- short term emergency situations which necessitate a learner having to move to a different area of the Borough;

- where a learner has a medical condition which requires transport to be made available in the short term (eg broken leg).

Parents should contact Learner Support Services (Tel. 01656 642637) for further advice on how to make an application.

14. Paying places scheme

From time to time it is possible that the numbers to be carried by the LA will be below the capacity of the vehicle being used. In such cases the LA will make the spare capacity available to children who live below the limit listed in paragraph 2. Paying places are allocated on an annual basis and it must be understood that the provision of this facility does not represent an obligation on the LA and, being entirely dependent on the capacity of the vehicle used, may result in withdrawal of the facility at relatively short notice.

The LA also reserves the right to withdraw a paying place in cases where the parent/carer refuses to pay the charge and furthermore the LA will take into account a parent's/carer's previous payment record when considering a new application. Where a parent/carer has refused/failed to pay in previous years this may result in the new application being refused.

Parents/carers are advised to contact the Transport Co-ordinating Unit. (Tel. No. 01656 642653) regarding the availability of paying places.

15. Transferring to another school – transport arrangements

Learners whose families move to an address outside the catchment area of the school attended will not continue to be provided with free school transport if that move takes place during primary education, or in years seven, eight or nine of secondary education.

Applications made on behalf of pupils who move in years 10, 11, 12 or 13, will be considered individually, and if approved, a bus pass would normally be provided.

16. Monitoring and complaints procedure

All vehicles will be available for random checks by the traffic commissioners or other appropriate body, when required. Any complaints received by the LA from parents concerning services or vehicles will be immediately investigated. In the event of the complaint being upheld, the necessary and appropriate steps will be taken in accordance with the contract as a matter of priority. Parents/carers should contact the Transport Co-ordinating Unit. (Tel no 01656 642653). e-mail: schooltransport@bridgend.gov.uk

The LA will, on unspecified days, undertake random checks on contracts, to ensure that the contracts are being complied with.

17. Transport from home to college

All learners aged 16 years, 17 years or 18 years on September 1st and who are attending their first course of full-time study at a further education college in that academic year, will be entitled to free transport subject to them:-

- living beyond the three mile distance criterion;
- attending the nearest college to their home that provides the course.

The usual mode of transport for college students is by bus/train.

18. Travel Behaviour Code: Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008

As part of the above Measure the Welsh Government has introduced “The Travel Behaviour Code” to promote safe travel for all children and young people, by setting out the standards of behaviour required by learners when travelling between home and school.

The Code, which has been issued to all learners, encourages schools and local authorities to work proactively with learners, their parents and the community to promote positive behaviour. The Code also allows the LA to temporarily withdraw transport in circumstances where a learner has misbehaved while travelling to school/college.

The LA will follow the procedures outlined the Code if it considering withdrawing transport.

The discretionary elements of the Council’s policy are subject to review and may be discontinued. Any proposed changes will be subject to consultation with learners and parents and, if agreed, will usually apply from the start of a school year and will have regard to the Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance – June 2014.