

School Travel Assistance Policy

Children up to 16 years of age in compulsory education

Academic Year 2026/2027

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Statutory guidance	3
Southwark council's policy	3
Children covered by this policy	4
Eligibility criteria	5
Travel assistance for children under compulsory school age (aged under five)	5
Travel assistance for children at primary or secondary school (aged five to 16)	5
Travel assistance offer	7
Travel options	7
Independent travel training	9
Applications.....	10
Where travel assistance may not be provided	11
Reviews	12
Appeals.....	13
Feedback	14
Further information.....	14
Application form.....	14
Contact details.....	15
Additional information	15
Glossary.....	15

Introduction

This document outlines Southwark Council's (the council) policy in respect of free school travel assistance for children of compulsory school age (aged five to 16) and those children under five. It covers the period up until the end of the academic year in which the child turns 16. It gives guidance about how the council fulfils its legal duty as a local authority in providing school travel arrangements for its residents.

Home to school travel is an integral part of the school system. It ensures no child of compulsory school age is prevented from accessing education by a lack of transport or the cost of transport.

This policy explains how applications for school travel assistance can be made, how the council determines eligibility and how applicants may appeal against decisions that they are unhappy with. The council offers several different types of travel arrangements to assist eligible children in attending school, more of which will be explained later in this document.

Statutory guidance

The principles of this policy are based on the Department for Education's (DfE) [statutory guidance](#) under which local authorities must have regard to when carrying out their duties in relation to travel assistance and sustainable travel.

The guidance considers Transport for London's (TfL) free transport offer an acceptable form of travel assistance, as long as the needs of the child have been taken into account. Given the borough's excellent transport infrastructure, the council expects that this is sufficient to meet the needs of most children who live in Southwark.

Southwark council's policy

The council is committed to ensuring that children and young people have access to good quality travel information and arrangements, which promote their independence, well-being and will be of greatest benefit to the environment.

Parents/carers are responsible for making sure their child attends their education provision. This includes arranging any necessary travel arrangements to and from school and/or accompanying their child, as necessary.

Most children living in Southwark do not receive or require travel assistance to get to school. Generally, the council believes that the majority of children will be able to walk or travel on free public bus transport to school. We recognise however, that not all children will be able to do so without additional support.

Where a child meets the criteria for travel assistance, the council will seek to put in place the most appropriate, sustainable and cost-effective arrangements.

The council is committed to providing support for eligible children that enables them to develop

independent travel skills that will assist them with taking part in education, life, and leisure activities within their community. It is our aim to move away from transport practices that don't encourage children to develop independence skills, such as door-to-door taxi or bus services.

The council will always aim to support children to walk or use public transport independently by the age of 16, or earlier if at all possible. Where travel assistance is provided, and to support their travel independence, regular reviews will take place at key stages of the child's progression through the education system. We expect families to support us in this aim.

As a local authority, the council is committed to safeguarding and this is particularly prevalent when children are receiving travel assistance. Safeguarding means protecting a person's health, wellbeing, and human rights; enabling them to live free from harm, abuse, and neglect. In most instances, the most effective way to ensure the safeguarding of a child on their journey to/from school is for their parents/carers to provide travel arrangements for them. Where this is not possible and the council provides travel assistance on a council contracted vehicle, the council has implemented vetting processes ways to ensure the safeguarding of children.

Finally, the council is committed to reducing traffic congestion, improving road safety and reducing the environmental impact of vehicle journeys by promoting the use of alternative forms of travel, such as walking, cycling and use of integrated public transport. In this regard, the council has adopted the [Streets for People](#) strategy which sets out how the council is moving away from favouring cars and, instead, freeing up space for [walking](#), public transport and [cycling](#) and works closely with schools to develop School Travel Plans that help to achieve this aim.

When assessing applications for travel assistance, the council will have due regard to any relevant protected characteristics of the child, in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.

The council has developed the policy using a joint approach with key partners: parents/carers; schools/colleges; disability groups; sustainable travel; travel safety officers and TfL and it will be reviewed annually.

Children covered by this policy

This policy applies to all children who are Southwark residents. The child must also be:

- under compulsory school age – aged under five
- at primary or secondary school – aged five to 16

If a family has moved out of Southwark to another local authority, even temporarily, it is the responsibility of the new local authority to provide travel arrangements, even if the child remains in a school located in Southwark.

Eligibility criteria

Travel assistance for children under compulsory school age (aged under five)

There is no legal requirement for the council to provide travel assistance to and from school or nursery for children under compulsory school age (under the age of five). The council expects parents/carers to take the child to school or nursery.

There is no automatic support for children in this category.

However, the council may use its discretionary powers to provide travel assistance for children who:

- are of preschool age;
- who may already have an EHC plan or who are being assessed; and
- are placed in a specialist nursery provision for full time education.

Assistance will only be provided to those children with the most severe needs and who need a specialist vehicle to get to that provision and have no other form of transport available to them.

Each application will be considered and decided on its own merits.

Travel assistance for children at primary or secondary school (aged five to 16)

Eligibility Criteria

Statutory guidance outlines specific circumstances in which a local authority is required to provide children with travel assistance or support. To qualify for assistance from the council, children must meet defined eligibility criteria, which are based on the following factors. Travel assistance will be provided for any children being educated in alternative arrangements where they are eligible in accordance with the statutory provisions.

Distance

Children of primary or secondary school age, are eligible for travel assistance (free of charge), if their nearest suitable school is:

- a distance from home of more than two miles if the child is below the age of eight
- a distance from home of more than three miles if the child is between eight and 16 years of age

Ordinarily, the expectation is that children that meet these criteria will take advantage of TfL's free

bus scheme. When a child reaches eight years of age and has previously received travel assistance on the grounds of distance, assistance will be withdrawn if they live less than three miles from school. This is normally from the beginning of term after their eighth birthday.

Extended rights

Children of primary or secondary school age will be eligible for free transport under 'extended rights' where the child is entitled to free school meals, or their parents are in receipt of the maximum level of Universal Credit (with an earned income of no more than £7,400) and:

- the nearest suitable school is beyond two miles from home (for children who have reached the age of eight but are not 11)
- the school is between two and six miles (if aged 11-16 and there are not three or more suitable schools closer to home)
- the school is between two and 15 miles from home and is the nearest school preferred on the grounds of religion or belief (if aged 11 -16)

Ordinarily, the expectation is that children that are eligible under the extended rights criteria will take advantage of TfL's free bus scheme.

Children of compulsory school age with SEND

Children of primary or secondary school age, attending the nearest suitable school, and who have a special educational need, disability or mobility problems, and who cannot reasonably be expected to walk to school because of these problems or associated health and safety issues related to them, will be eligible for assistance. Children that fall within this category will have their eligibility assessed on an individual basis.

Safety

Travel assistance will be provided if the nearest suitable school is nearer to home than two miles (for children under eight years old) or three miles (for children over eight years old) but the child cannot reasonably be expected to walk the route because it is deemed by the Travel Assistance Team to be unsafe to walk, either accompanied or unaccompanied.

Exceptional circumstances

In addition to the eligibility criteria, due regard will always be given to any preference an individual may have for a particular institution based on their religion or belief and any special educational needs or disability the child or young person has.

The following factors may also be taken into account in assessing applications for travel assistance. This list is not exhaustive and applications are not limited to these factors. Applications relating to these factors will not automatically be awarded assistance

- A parent/carer's special needs or medical condition that may prevent them from being able to accompany the child and it is reasonable to expect that the child requires accompaniment
- Health and safety risks to the child or others that are likely to apply if they travelled to school without support, and it is reasonable to expect that the child requires support

Third party views that state that the child cannot reasonably be expected to walk or travel by public transport, will be given very little consideration and weight unless they are supported with evidence which explains why, in their professional opinion, the child cannot reasonably be expected to walk or travel by public transport, accompanied if necessary.

When submitting a claim based on a child's medical conditions, where they do not have SEN, recent written evidence from a medical specialist consultant (not a general practitioner) must be provided stating:

- What medical or mental health condition the child has and how this affects their ability to walk or travel to or from school
- The child cannot walk or travel to or from school
- How long the situation is likely to last

When submitting a claim based on parent/carer's medical condition, recent written evidence must be provided from a hospital consultant (or other appropriate independent professional but not a general practitioner) stating that the parent/carer is unable to accompany their child who requires accompaniment to or from school. The written evidence must include:

- What medical or mental health condition the parent/carer has where they are the only adult responsible for taking the child to school and how this affects their ability to accompany the child to or from school
- Confirmation that the sole parent/carer responsible for taking a child to school cannot walk or travel the distance to or from school
- How long the situation is likely to last

Travel assistance offer

Travel options

The council's Travel Assistance Team will decide on the type of travel support provided to eligible children of compulsory school age. They will take into account information and advice from relevant professionals, and information recorded in the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) if relevant.

Wherever possible, the Travel Assistance Team will also choose a travel option that improves the physical well being and independence of those who use them and/or the environmental well being of the borough.

The council considers public transport as a safe and suitable method of transportation for most children to travel to school. As a resident of a Southwark, all children under the age of 16 are entitled to free travel on buses to facilitate this.

In instances where a child is not eligible for travel assistance and/or their application has been declined, the council will expect them to walk or travel to school (accompanied if necessary) using provisions in place by TfL.

[Find further information on London's free bus scheme for children under 16 on the TfL website here](#)

Where this option may not be suitable for a child, the council operates several different schemes to provide support for children to allow them to attend their place of learning. These services can be accessed upon application and only if certain criteria are met.

Other types of assistance that can be considered include:

- **Information and advice:** The Travel Assistance Team will provide advice on safe routes to travel, and how to travel safely.
- **Hire or trial a bike:** The council offers a number of bike hire or trial schemes. More information is available at [Hire or trial a bike | Southwark Council](#)
- **Free cyclist training sessions:** The council offers training to beginners, or those wanting to get back on the road, as well as having specially adapted bikes available for training children with SEND. They also recommend suitable cycle routes for children. More information is available at [Free cycling lessons | Southwark Council](#).
- **Free children's scooter training:** The council offers training to children whose parents wish them to use a scooter to travel to school through a school-based programme that includes playground activities and downloadable resources, which can be tailored to pupils. More information is available at [Road Safety and Sustainable Travel | Southwark Schools](#).

If a child's application for school travel is successful the council will use its discretion to offer one of four travel options, based on the specific needs of the individual:

- **Travel card (TfL or National Rail):** A travel card can help an adult accompany a child to school on public transport.
- **Independent Travel Training:** Students in Year 6 with Special Educational Needs/Disabilities will be assessed for independent travel training. The training provides children with the confidence to travel safely and independently to their education provision. If the council does not consider a child ready for Independent Travel Training, they will inform the parent/carer when this will be reviewed. More information on independent travel training is available below.
- **Personal Budget:** Parents/carers may receive a Personal Budget to enable them to make their own arrangements for the child to get to school. The number of miles the child lives from their school determines the amount provided. If there is more than one child

attending the same school, and both are eligible for a Personal Budget, the amount for the second and subsequent children will be reduced. Occasionally, the council may provide a fixed Personal Budget towards a local taxi arranged by the parent/carer.

- **Vehicles:** Exceptionally, the council may transport children in taxis or private hire vehicles. The decision to do this will be based on an assessment of needs. Where a vehicle is provided, it will be scheduled to drop off and pick up **at the start and end of the school day.**

Travel arrangements for children with special educational needs, disability or mobility problems can be particularly complex to make. Shorter journeys may be particularly desirable, perhaps because a child's special educational needs or disability mean they become distressed while travelling, but a child may need to travel a long way to school that is able to meet their needs and one vehicle may need to collect several children.

It is down to the discretion of the council to decide which of these options is most suited to the needs of the child, as well as the best use of the council's resources.

Independent travel training

The council's Independent Travel Training (ITT) offer as a form of travel assistance helps develop the skills to lead truly independent lives. As a council, we are committed to developing the methods and practices we use that enable us to attain this key principle. We aim to do this in conjunction with children, parents, and schools, to ensure the travel assistance we provide caters for the specific needs of the children living within the borough.

Independent Travel Training provides children with Special Educational Needs the skills and confidence to make the journey to school independently by walking or on public transport.

There are many benefits for children after completing the programme:

- Increased confidence and independence
- Decreased reliance on specialist transport and parents/carers
- Improved contribution at school/college
- More opportunities to go out with friends and join clubs
- More opportunities to go to college or find a job

The programme takes approximately six weeks, but this is dependent on the child and their individual needs. Each child has a Travel Trainer, who completes four modules of training with them:

- Learning the journey and foundation travel skills
- Personal safety and problem solving
- Journey practice and learning alternative routes
- Building confidence and becoming independent

Over time and when they are ready, the child will complete more of the journey on their own until they are travelling safely and independently.

The Travel Assistance Team will assess a child's suitability for training at the following stages:

- Year 6 – children already in receipt of assistance who have low level needs
- Year 7 onwards – all new applications received and who are assessed as eligible for assistance will have their suitability for the programme determined
- Year 9 onwards – all those in Year 9 and in receipt of assistance will have their suitability for the programme reviewed, and thereafter annually, if appropriate to do so

The Travel Assistance Team will follow a three stage process in determining suitability for the programme. Progression through the stages is dependent on the outcome of the previous stage:

- Stage 1 – consideration of latest EHCP/Annual Review to determine whether needs likely to prevent participation on programme. If appropriate, other professional bodies involved with children may be approached for their view on suitability
- Stage 2 – meeting with parent/carer and child to discuss travel needs
- Stage 3 – the travel trainer accompanies the child on public transport to assess their travel needs

At the end of each stage, the Travel Assistance Team will make a decision on suitability. They will explain the rationale for their decision in writing to the parent/carer and if appropriate, the school. If a parent/carer does not agree with the decision, they may appeal.

Applications

Applications for travel assistance are dealt with by the council's Travel Assistance Team.

Applications for those starting school for the first time in September, transferring to secondary school or if their current travel assistance is due to expire, should be made by the LAST FRIDAY OF JUNE that same year. We cannot guarantee that assistance will be in place at the beginning of September for eligible children whose applications were received after the deadline.

After receiving an application, an assessment will be made as to whether the child is eligible to receive travel assistance from the council, as per the eligibility criteria, on a case by case basis taking into account the individual circumstances and the impact travel assistance will have on the educational outcomes of the child.

The period for which travel assistance is awarded under the ~~Exceptional Circumstances~~ will be dependent on the individual circumstances of the applicant, and may be for a fixed time period, or ongoing with an agreed review frequency.

All decisions will take statutory guidance and legislation into consideration.

The process once the Travel Assistance Team receives a completed application for travel assistance is outlined below.

Stage One

When the Travel Assistance Team receives an application for assistance, they will send an acknowledgement within three working days of receipt. This will be quicker if the application is submitted electronically.

Stage Two

The Travel Assistance Team will look at whether the child should get travel assistance. They will do this by looking at the information given in the application and the child's EHCP/Annual Review against the eligibility criteria. If they do not have enough information to make a decision, ~~they will arrange a meeting with the parent/carer and/or school and/or~~ arrange to accompany the child on public transport or walking. If the parent/carer refuses to engage in this process, a decision will be made on the information available.

The Travel Assistance Team will write to the applicant with their decision. If they have decided that the child is not eligible for assistance, they will explain the reasons why.

If travel assistance has been agreed, the Travel Assistance Team will explain to the parent/carer about the type of travel assistance that will be given. In making a decision about the type of assistance, the Travel Assistance Team may need to gather more information from the parent/carer, the school and/or the child's EHCP co-ordinator.

The Travel Assistance Team aims to complete stage two of the process within 20 working days of acknowledging an application for assistance.

Where travel assistance may not be provided

Parents/carers are responsible for making sure their child attends school. This includes arranging any necessary travel to and from school or accompanying their child, as necessary. If the child lives within statutory walking distance and is only able to walk to school, if accompanied, there is an expectation that the parent/carer will accompany them. When assessing eligibility for assistance, the Travel Assistance Team will consider whether there are good reasons why the parent/carer, or someone chosen by them, is unable to accompany their child.

Some examples that the council would not ordinarily see as exceptional (in their own right):

- Single parent families
- Parents that work
- Having other children to look after and/or at other schools
- Parents/students unable to drive or having access to a car
- Students in wheelchairs

Parents' working patterns or caring responsibilities are not considered good reasons.

If it is the parent/carer's choice to send their child to a school that is further away from home than a nearer suitable school, the parent/carer is expected to arrange travel for the child and pay any associated costs.

The council only normally provides assistance to and from school at the start and end of the school's or place of learning day. The Travel Assistance Team is not able to consider requests to transport children to breakfast clubs, after-school clubs, or school trips.

If the council receives an application for a child that has already successfully completed the travel training programme, they will not normally be eligible for assistance. The council will consider any exceptional circumstances advised for individuals on a case by case basis.

If a place of learning or training is named in Section I of a child's EHCP, and the child or their family indicated (either in the plan or in an SEN tribunal proceedings) that they will provide travel assistance to the child to enable them to attend, the council may consider this when assessing an application for travel assistance and it may be taken as grounds for refusing an application.

A child may be eligible because of temporary mobility problems but, due to the short-term nature of some mobility problems, it may not always be practicable for the local authority to make travel arrangements before the child has recovered.

Reviews

Periodically, the Travel Assistance Team will review eligibility and/or the type of assistance the child is receiving. Reviews are carried out because as a child gets older, their needs can change. The Travel Assistance Team needs to ensure that the type of assistance in place remains appropriate to meet needs and/or to look at ways in assisting the child to achieve independence.

If the parent/carer refuses to engage in this process, a decision will be made on the information available. In some cases, the review may result in the withdrawal of assistance or a change in the type of assistance provided. Whenever possible, the Travel Assistance Team will look towards the child progressing towards more independent travel.

New applications need to be submitted to the Travel Assistance Team:

- whenever there is change of school/educational establishment
- when a child moves from primary education to secondary education (only need to re-apply if the child is physically moving to another school or another site). Applications must be received by the last Friday of June to guarantee travel assistance will be in place for eligible children by the first day of term in September if agreed
- when a young person finishes Year 11 but is remaining in education. Applications must be received by the last Friday of June to guarantee travel assistance will be in place for the eligible young person by the first day of term in September if agreed

It is the responsibility of parents/carers to inform the Travel Assistance Team when the child has changed home address. They may decide to re-assess the child's eligibility or the assistance offered as a result of the change.

Appeals

A decision can be appealed by completing and returning to the Travel Assistance Team within 20 working days of the decision, an appeal form. The form should be used to explain the reasons for disagreeing with the decision.

While the appeal process is open no new travel assistance will be given, or no changes will be made to existing arrangements.

Appeal forms can be found at [Travel assistance | Southwark Council](#) or by phoning 020 7525 5121.

Once the Travel Assistance Team receives the appeal form, the following steps will be taken:

Stage one

- an acknowledgement letter will be sent within three working days
- an officer will put together the information that the decision was based upon. An Assistant Director of the Education Division of the Children's and Adults' Services Department will look at that information alongside the reasons for appeal
- an Assistant Director of the Education Division of the Children's and Adults' Services Department will write, with a decision, within 20 working days of receiving the appeal form. The decision will explain whether the appeal was upheld or not. If the appeal is upheld, they will explain how matters will be put right

Stage two

- if unhappy with the Assistant Director's decision, the Travel Assistance Team must be written to within 20 working days, explaining the reasons for disagreeing with that decision. That letter will be acknowledged within three working days
- an officer will put together all the information the original and stage one appeal decisions were based on. This information will be considered by a panel comprising three independent members, one of whom is independent of the council, and all of whom will have had no previous involvement with the case
- within 40 working days of requesting a stage two appeal, a member of the panel will write with their decision. If the appeal is upheld, they will explain how matters will be put right within five working days of their decision

Stage three

- if unhappy with the way the stage one and stage two appeals have been handled, a complaint can be put to the Local Government Ombudsman
- this must be done within 12 months of becoming aware of the matters that gave cause to the complaint – in most cases this will be 12 months from the date of the original decision

The Local Government Ombudsman contact details are:

- 0300 061 0614
- [Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#)

Following an unsuccessful appeal, the Travel Assistance Team will not accept a further application for travel assistance for the same child unless there has been a material change in the child's circumstances.

A diagram of the appeals process is included in **Appendix 1**

Feedback

Whatever decision is made on a case, the Travel Assistance Team wants to give the best possible level of customer service.

If you would like to tell us about your experience of the service (good or bad), you can do so by contacting the Social Care and Education Complaints Team by any of the following means:

- The council's website at [Make a complaint about children's social care | Southwark Council](#)
- By email: sscomplaints@southwark.gov.uk
- By post to:
Customer Resolutions Team (Social Care and Education)
FREEPOST, RTJL-XAZG-ZRTU
2nd Floor, Hub B. 160 Tooley Street
PO Box 64529
London SE1P 5LX

Further information

Application form

- Applications can be completed and submitted online at [Apply for travel assistance | Southwark Council](#) (hard copy application forms can be downloaded by following the same link)

- When following the links, please be aware that there is a separate form for post 16 applications
- Completed hard copy application forms can emailed to travelassistance@southwark.gov.uk or posted to:

Travel Assistance Team 4th Floor,
Hub 2
PO Box 64529
London, SE1P 5LX

Contact details

- [Travel assistance team](#)

Email address: travelassistance@southwark.gov.uk

- [Southwark information advice and support team \(SIAS\)](#)

SIAS are available if people want support to complete the application form. Their contact details are:

Email address: SIAS@southwark.gov.uk

Additional information

- Recommended walking and cycling routes
[Cycling in Southwark | Southwark Council](#)
[Walking in Southwark | Southwark Council](#)
- Places in Southwark that offer specialist and post-16 education
[Education | Southwark Local Offer](#)

Glossary

appeal	someone appeals when they disagree with the way in which a decision was made. The reasons for appeal are looked at by someone in higher authority than the original decision maker. That person will decide whether the original decision should change or not
applicants	parents, carers, schools or even children or young people can make an application for travel assistance
home	a child's or young person's 'home' is the place where he/she is habitually and normally resident, the registered address or the address that is agreed on the EHCP

independent travel training	personalised training to teach a child or young person to travel to and from school or their place of learning
learning disability	a general term that refers to individuals who find it harder to learn, understand and communicate
learning difficulty	refers to individuals who have specific problems with learning as a result of either medical, emotional or language problems
nearest suitable school	taken to mean the nearest qualifying school with places available that provides education appropriate to the age, ability and aptitude of the child, and any SEN that the child may have
place of learning for young adults of sixth form age	learning or training at a school; further education institution; a council maintained or assisted institution providing higher or further education; an establishment funded directly by the DfE; learning providers delivering accredited programmes of learning which lead to positive outcomes and are funded by the council (e.g. colleges, charities and private learning providers).
post 16	includes both learners of sixth form age and those with learning difficulties / disabilities up to the age of 25
qualifying school	a school maintained by the local authority (community, foundation, voluntary aided or voluntary controlled school); school approved under section 342 of the Education Act 1996; pupil referral unit; city technology college, a city college for the technology of the arts, an Academy school or an alternative provision academy
resident	a child's or young person's principal residence is an address in the borough. If the child or young person resides equally between both parents, the principal home address will be considered to be the address at which the child is registered, whilst attending school, with their GP and, if applicable, the address of the parent who is in receipt of Child Benefit or Child Tax Credits for the child or young person
sixth form age	young people who are over 16 years of age but under 19 or continuing learners who started their programme of learning before their 19 th birthday (years 12, 13 & 14)
special educational need/disability	refers to children who have learning difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for them to learn than most children of the same age
statutory school age	children, aged 5 to 16 - pupils attending reception up to, and including, year 11

Transport policy statement for children up to 16 years of age in compulsory education

Department Responsible: Travel Assistance Team

Contact details: *TBC*

Document first release: *TBC*

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