

Frequently Asked Questions on Home to School Transport Policy Review

November 2011

1. Why is Buckinghamshire County Council reviewing home to school transport?

The County Council has been spending about £17.4m each year on home to school transport. The vast majority of this expenditure is incurred because it is required by law, but the County Council's policy is more generous than the statutory minimum and that of other Local Authorities. The Council is therefore proposing to draw entitlement to free and subsidised transport closer to the statutory entitlement.

We have to make savings of £1.4m and if this doesn't come from home to school transport, it will possibly impact more directly on children's services.

2. What is the legal (statutory) entitlement?

The legal entitlement is for free transport and is based upon:

- Distance and/or
- Special Circumstances
 - Special Needs or Disability
 - Low income
 - Safety of walking route

There is no direct entitlement linked to:

- Catchment
- Religion
- Type of School [Grammar/Upper, male/female]

Category	Statutory Entitlement
Pupils up to the age of 8 (year 3)	Free transport to the nearest qualifying school if it is more than 2 miles walking distance from home
Pupils between the ages of 8 and 16 (years 4 to 11)	Free transport to the nearest qualifying school if it is more than 3 miles walking distance from home.
Pupils from low income families aged between 8 and 11 (years 4 to 6)	Free transport to the nearest qualifying school if it is more than 2 miles walking distance from home.
Pupils from low income families aged between 11 and 16 (years 7 to 11)	Free transport to one of the three nearest qualifying schools if it is between 2 and 6 miles away. Or the nearest school preferred by reason of a parent/carer's religion or belief that is more than 2 miles by the shortest available walking route and not more than 15 miles away.
Pupils with Special Educational Needs or disability or mobility problems	Free transport to the nearest qualifying school, where the pupil lives within the statutory walking distance from school and where due to their special needs or disability they are unable to walk in reasonable safety even when accompanied.
Pupils living within the statutory walking distance but who are unable to walk in safety to school because of the nature of the route	Free transport to the nearest qualifying school, where the pupil lives within the statutory walking distance from school and where, due to the nature of the route, they are unable to walk in reasonable safety even when accompanied.

1 The phrase "qualifying school" is defined as meaning, *inter alia*, "a community, foundation or voluntary school... or an Academy" (see paragraph 15(2) of Schedule 35B to the 1996 Act). So far as we are aware, therefore, all grammar schools and upper schools within Buckinghamshire would fall within the definition of a "qualifying school".

2 Entitled to free school meals or whose family is in receipt of maximum working tax credit.

3. Are other Councils changing home to school transport policies?

Yes, most Local Authorities have either changed their policies already or are about to do so, bringing them in line with statutory (national) requirements.

4. What are the proposals?

The proposals can be viewed in full online in the Have Your Say part of our website ([www.buckscc.gov.uk/school transport](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/school%20transport)) or in a printed copy of the consultation document.

The main proposal being consulted on is to only provide free home to school transport to the nearest eligible school, based on the 2 or 3 mile distance criteria as detailed in the table above.

5. Will people living in close proximity experience very different impacts if this policy change is introduced?

Yes that will happen and is already the case now. Whenever there is a threshold of entitlement there will always be residents, even in the same street, who are on either side of an entitlement threshold. For example there are, by law, thresholds by age at 8 and at the end of statutory school age, [the end of year 11] and thresholds by distance at 2 and 3 miles. There are thresholds by income in the legislation and also a differential impact of these thresholds according to the local configuration of schools e.g. Grammar and Upper, e.g. mixed, boys and girls. Therefore because of both the statutory entitlement and the particular configuration of schools that we have in Buckinghamshire, there will always be different entitlements and this could even occur between children in the same family.

6. How do I work out which is my nearest school?

For a guide as to which is the nearest school, parents can visit the government's website <http://schoolsfinder.direct.gov.uk/> which gives an online calculator to help you work this out. If you do use it, you should be aware that it is based on straight line distances and that for the purpose of transport eligibility the Council uses the actual route of travel (in most cases this will make little difference to which is your closest school).

Parents need to be aware that their nearest school may not be their catchment school. The implication of that is that you might have a lower priority for admission for your nearest school, but if you do secure a place you would have the normal transport entitlement.

7. Will you treat nearby schools as being on the same site for the purposes of determining transport?

This will be considered where schools literally are on the same campus. Because the legislation is based on a distance rule it is inevitable that the addresses of schools or pupils will fall either side of the distance line even though those addresses are in close proximity. There is no way of avoiding this irrespective of any way that a distance rule can be set.

8. What is meant by the phrase "a school that you are eligible to attend"?

- 1) The school must be appropriate by age
- 2) The school must be appropriate in terms of whether it is a special school or mainstream school
- 3) A pupil must meet the entry criteria for a Grammar school for that school to be deemed their nearest school
- 4) We generally consider that an upper school is able to provide an appropriate education for a grammar qualified pupil.
- 5) A pupil must be of the appropriate gender to attend a single sex school

9. Will I get transport to the nearest school and then be able to make my own way to a further school?

This is not proposed.

- 10. What happens if my nearest school does not have a place? If the Council has not allocated my child a place in the nearest school because it is full and has instead allocated a place in the next nearest school, will the changes affect that child?**
Provided that the school allocated is over the 2 miles (up to age 8) or 3 miles (age 8-16) distance criteria, we will provide transport to that school. A diagram in the consultation document illustrates this.
- 11. How much are the charges likely to be?**
Families whose children don't qualify for free home to school transport will be able to apply for spare seats on buses (subject to availability). This proposal could result in a spare seat costing between £10 and £12.50 per school week, per child.
- If the extension to the main proposal is implemented, the cost for those paying for home to school transport could double from an estimated £10-£12.50 per school week to £20-£25 per school week, per child.
- 12. Why do you not sell spare places on taxis and minibuses?**
Because places on taxis and minibuses cost up to ten times more per pupil our objective is to minimise their use. If we sell places on taxis and minibuses it stops us from regularly reviewing and adjusting the capacity to keep the costs as low as possible. If we charged parents the full cost of a place on a taxi or minibus it would be prohibitively expensive for the vast majority and if we charged the standard bus fare we would be giving that pupil a substantial subsidy on an arbitrary basis. This would be unfair.
- 13. Can parents of school pupils who may lose entitlement to free places be guaranteed a spare seat on a bus?**
No, as is the current situation, spare places cannot be guaranteed. It may be possible for parents to purchase a spare seat on a bus, if places are available. Please note that, as now, bus routes may change and pupils need to be able to reach a suitable bus stop. We cannot guarantee that there will be spare places available. We will only sell spare seats on a return journey basis.
- 14. Why doesn't everyone pay an administration charge?**
For pupils with a statutory entitlement our advice is that this would be illegal, therefore the administrative charge is only proposed for those who do not have a statutory entitlement but who have already been granted transport under the existing policy. This is part of the arrangement proposed for phasing the changes.
- 15. I already have a child at school, will these changes affect them also?**
Possibly - one option being considered is to charge those in year groups not affected by 'incremental changes' i.e. years 2-6 and 8-11 an administration fee of approximately £2-2.50 per school week.
- 16. What happens if my nearest school is not in Buckinghamshire? Will I have to pay for my child's transport?**
The proposal is to provide transport to your nearest eligible school, including those across the county boundary. If that school is over the 2 miles (up to age 8) or 3 miles (age 8-16) distance criteria you will qualify for transport.

- 17. Do all pupils with special educational needs or from low income families automatically get free home to school transport?**
No, the statutory criteria still need to be met. For pupils with special educational needs this would generally need to be assessed on a case by case basis. Families on low income this [defined as eligible for free school meals or whose family is in receipt of maximum working tax credit] have some additional statutory entitlements as set out in the previous question.
- 18. The front page of the consultation says that pupils with special needs attending special schools are not affected but could pupils with special needs attending mainstream school be affected?**
Yes, because the distance rules still apply for special needs students and these proposals would change the current operation of the distance rules. Students obtaining transport because of their special needs will usually be obtaining transport because either a) their special school is beyond the statutory walking distance or b) they are unable to walk the statutory walking distance.
- 19. What if the most appropriate school for my child is a single sex school? Will you transport him/her to the nearest single sex school in those circumstances?**
No, in considering the most appropriate school transport law considers appropriateness by age (primary/secondary) and appropriateness with respect to it being a special or mainstream school. It does not consider appropriateness by gender.
- 20. Why don't you just give pupils passes for public buses?**
Experience to date is that this would not be cheaper and if large number of pupils were put on the public network at specific times of day there would neither be current capacity nor sufficient incentive for contractors to increase capacity just for peak times. However there are routine discussions with public bus and train operators and this is kept under review.
- 21. How will you save any money if parents decide to get their children to school by other means and don't buy seats on school buses?**
Money is also saved by removing capacity on school bus network by running fewer buses, fewer routes and smaller vehicles.
- 22. Does this consultation apply to sixth formers?**
No, the consultation is solely in relation to pupils up to and including year 11.
- 23. If flat rate fares are introduced will this also affect post 16 fares?**
Yes if there is demand for this but a final decision has not yet been made. A flat rate fare for post 16 would be higher to reflect the existing higher fare rates for post 16 students. This reflects the age difference in fares charged on public transport.
- 24. Will it still be possible to get transport even though we live under the required distance from the school, if there is no safe walking route from our home to the school?**
Yes as long as it is to the closest school.
- 25. The distance rules [2 miles up to 8, 3 miles 8 and over] are inadequate and dangerous on certain routes for younger children.**
This distance is set in legislation. There is provision for assessing whether there is a safe walking route, and if there is not the distance rule can be waived.

26. Can I change my admission choices once a final decision is made on the 27th February 2012?

During the allocation process we alerted parents to the possibility of charges, but until the consultation is complete it is not possible to say exactly what the policy decision will be. The first round of secondary school allocations are public on 1 March 2012 and will be made on the basis of the preferences you expressed by the closing date. Preferences can be amended after that date for subsequent allocation rounds, and/or you could appeal for a place at your closest school should you wish to. It will not be possible to advise those pupils who are still eligible for free home to school transport of this until after the allocation and consultation outcomes are public.

27. When will the details be finalised?

We are aiming to have the final details confirmed to parents affected by the latter part of the Spring Term.

28. Have you considered other ways of saving money?

Yes, a large number of options have been considered, many of which came from discussions at meetings with parents in the summer. Some of these suggestions are included in the consultation questions. Some suggestions were investigated but discounted because they would not necessarily save money.

For example a cycle allowance was considered. However if there are 50 pupils on a bus and 5 choose to cycle it will not be possible to run a smaller vehicle so the cost will be as now plus the cost of 5 cycle allowances i.e. it would be more expensive. Also many parents commented that cycling is best for pupils who are under the three mile distance and they do not qualify for transport anyway.

29. How can I contact the County Council with questions about the proposed transport changes?

If you have a general question not covered by these FAQs please e-mail it to schooltransport@buckscc.gov.uk and it will be considered for inclusion in the next edition of FAQs. Please note that we cannot answer questions about individual cases, as we are unable to answer these until the policy is determined in February.

We are encouraging parents to complete the survey either online or by using a paper copy if you do not have access to the internet (supplies of printed copies are being sent to schools by the end of next week so please ask at the school office)

There are lots of notes in the survey to help you to understand how the proposals will work if they are implemented and there is space at the end of the survey to put forward suggestions or comments.

You are also welcome to attend one of the 18 parents' meetings being held around the county. There are two meetings being held per night except for 23 November when there is just one meeting planned. A meeting for the Missenden area is still being confirmed – details will be available as soon as they are known. (see dates below).

30. What can I do if I do not find an answer clear?

Come along and talk to us at one of the meetings.

31. What can I do if I have a question not on the FAQ list?

Come along and talk to us at one of the meetings or email it to us and we will consider it for addition to the next edition of FAQ's

32. Questions about the current operation of transport or eligibility under the current policy will continue to be dealt with as now during the consultation period and you should contact 01296 387439.

You will need to Press 1 to speak to Amey Client Transport about the current operation of the service or if you have a query over your child's current transport.

To find out more about eligibility for the current policy, Press 2 and your call will be forwarded to the schools transport admissions team.

33. We live in Downley and our children currently go to Holmer Green School. With the proposed changes, there would be no bus to Holmer Green or Sir William Ramsey Schools. Can you confirm that for existing pupils there will still be transport for them, whether paid or unpaid?

There is no intention as part of this policy change to take routes out of the system. However, it should be noted that both the routes and the sizes of vehicles on them routinely change as demand is re-assessed each academic year. Therefore if in the future there was not sufficient demand for a bus on a route, the configuration of routes would have to be changed.

The Council cannot (and currently does not) guarantee that there will always be a school bus route from all locations.

Dates for the parents' meetings across Buckinghamshire:

Date	Venue	Time	Venue	Time
Wed 23-Nov-11	<u>The Grange School, Aylesbury</u> (HP21 7NH)	5-7pm		
Wed 30-Nov-11	<u>Great Marlow School, Marlow</u> (SL7 1JE)	5-7pm	<u>Totteridge Community Centre</u> (HP13 6UH)	7.30-9.30pm
Thurs 01-Dec-11	<u>Wingrave Combined School</u> (HP22 4QG)	5-7pm	<u>John Colet School, Wendover</u> (HP22 6HF)	7.30-9.30pm
Wed 07-Dec-11	<u>Princes Risborough School</u> (HP27 0DT)	5-7pm	<u>Cressex Community School, Wycombe</u> (HP12 4QA)	7.30-9.30pm
Tues 13-Dec-11	<u>Iver Heath Junior School</u> (SL0 9QA)	5-7pm	<u>Denham Village Infant School</u> (UB9 5AE)	7.30-9.30pm
Tues 17-Jan-12	<u>Woodside Junior School, Amersham</u> (HP6 6NW)	5-7pm	<u>Chesham Town Hall, Council Chambers</u> (HP5 1DS)	7.30-9.30pm
Wed 18-Jan-12	<u>Burnham Upper School</u> (SL1 7LZ)	5-7pm	<u>Beaconsfield High School</u> (HP9 1RR)	7.30-9.30pm
Thurs 19-Jan-12	<u>Great Missenden CofE Combined School</u> (HP16 0AZ)	5-7pm		
Mon 23-Jan-12	<u>Sir Henry Floyd School, Aylesbury</u> (HP21 8PE)	5-7pm	<u>Haddenham Community Junior School</u> (HP17 8DS)	7.30-9.30pm
Wed 25-Jan-12	<u>The Buckingham School</u> (MK18 1AT)	5-7pm	<u>The Winslow Centre</u> (MK18 3RB)	7.30-9.30pm
Thurs 26-Jan-12	<u>The Grange School, Aylesbury</u> (HP21 7NH)	5.30-7.30pm		