

Home to School travel policy

Introduction

We are consulting on a new home to school travel policy for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Hackney. Hackney's new proposed policy will, where possible, encourage pupils and students with SEND aged 16 or more to gain greater independence.

This document explains home to school travel, summarises the main changes to the new policy and shows how you can have your say on the new policy.

Who gets home to school travel?

Councils must provide free home to school travel for all children of compulsory school age (between 5 and 16 years of age) who qualify. For many, this is if they live outside the 'statutory walking distance' (2 miles between home and school for those aged under 8 and 3 miles for those aged 8 and over). Some children may be entitled to free travel if they live within the statutory walking distance. These include children with special educational needs, a disability and mobility issues which means that they cannot reasonably be expected to walk to school. (Children of compulsory school age don't need an Education Health and Care plan to qualify for travel support).

In London, free travel for children of school age is provided by Transport for London (TfL). So, nearly everything that Hackney spends on home to school travel is to support children with SEND.

Councils can also provide travel support for children and young people who are not of compulsory school age (this is called discretionary travel). Hackney Council supports students aged 16 and over, with or without SEND, some adult learners (if they have an Education Health and Care plan) and some parents of pre-school age children who have special needs.

Background

The budget for home to school travel in the current financial year is £5.8 million. But, as was the case with many other authorities, in Hackney there was an overspend of £1 million the year before (2022/23) because of rising demand and big increases in costs in the sector, particularly after Covid.

The number of pupils on transport rose from 610 in 2021 to 720 (+18%) at the end of summer term 2023. There were 238 pupils travelling on the Council's own school buses, 352 on private hire taxis and minibuses and 130 pupils where their parents/carers had accepted the offer of a personal travel budget, where the Council pays them to take their children to school.

The average cost of travel per pupil is over £9,300 a year. If a pupil is on transport throughout their time at school, that will cost well over £100,000. That said, Hackney spends below average on home to school travel compared with other London boroughs. And, while nearly every young person on a school bus or taxi in Hackney will have an Education Health and Care plan (EHCP), less than a quarter of young people with EHCPs in Hackney actually use home to school transport.

Why propose a new policy?

Councils must publish their home to school travel policies and should keep them under review. Last summer, the Department for Education published new guidance that tells councils what they must do by law and what they should do to develop good practice in home-to-school travel.

Our new policy document:

- Brings our current policies into one place – there are separate policies for young people with SEND, both of compulsory school age and for those aged over 16; and for young people without SEND, again of compulsory school age and over 16 years.
- Is in a readable form, making it easier to understand.
- Talks about home to school **travel** more than **transport** to help a shift towards more independent forms of travel, away from school buses and taxis where this is possible.
- Shifts the focus to independent travel and sustainability.

We are seeking your views on an updated Home to School Travel Policy based on the following principles:

- The promotion of independent travel for children and young people with SEND,
- promotion of travel training and the use of personal budgets in preparation for adulthood,
- The promotion of Hackney's child friendly borough
- The efficient use of public resources
- The moving away from use of Hackney Education buses; taxis and minicabs to more independent forms of travel.
- That home to school (or college) travel only happens at the beginning and end of the school day, and from one address.
- That parents may be expected to accompany their child to and from school if they live close to the school.
- That, if your child gets a seat on a bus or minibus, it's reasonable to get them to a pick-up point nearby, rather than be collected from the house.
- If a passenger assistant is on board the vehicle, then that is only because of the needs of the individual young person, rather than one being allocated to nearly every taxi or minibus.

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- That a young person's travel needs should be regularly reviewed, to see if other forms of travel – particularly independent travel training – are appropriate.

We are introducing an independent travel training (ITT) scheme in Hackney in the summer term 2024 to enable young people to get to and from school by using public transport. Independent travel training is practical help for people with some special educational needs and disabilities. It helps them develop the skills and confidence to travel on buses and trains. It will be offered to parents of secondary age school children and to students aged over 16 where we think it might be appropriate.

Personal travel budgets are where the Council offers to pay parents to take their children to and from school. The amount awarded will be on a case by case basis dependent on the parent(s) income. Typically, a personal travel budget is about half the cost of a private hire taxi. We pay 55 pence per mile for 2 return journeys a day between home and school. Over 130 families in Hackney have personal travel budgets.

Who is affected by the proposals?

- Parents of children with SEND who are of nursery school age (under 5 years).
- Students with SEND, aged 16- 18 years.
- Adult learners - students aged 19 or over who have an EHCP.

Hackney provides travel support for children and young people who are not of compulsory school age (5-16 years). This is called 'discretionary' travel support. This includes: children with SEND who are of nursery school age (under 5); students with SEND, aged 16- 18 years, and adult learners - students aged 19 or over who have an EHCP. We don't have to provide transport in these areas.

Many councils up and down the country have consulted on reducing their travel support to the statutory minimum, that is for 5–16-year-olds. Or, if they keep it as it is, introducing charges or contributions towards the costs of travel. We are not proposing to do that.

But we are saying that, wherever possible, our travel offer in discretionary areas will be independent forms of travel support – using buses, tubes and trains or by using vehicles belonging to the family. We will do this by providing travel training, travel budgets, and reimbursements, with organised transport (taxis and minibuses) only where it is necessary.

Your feedback will allow us to look at how we implement the policy. If you are a parent or carer, a student, a resident, a school or college, partner organisation or a contractor, we want your views of the current travel and transport service in Hackney.

How to get involved

You can:

- Complete an [on-line questionnaire](#).
- Make written responses and submit to travelconsultation@hackney.gov.uk or request a paper survey.
- Take part in upcoming meetings and focus groups with partner organisations.