



# **HOME TO SCHOOL TRAVEL ASSISTANCE ELIGIBILITY**

## **POLICY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

### **ATTENDING SCHOOL**

**SEPTEMBER 2025 - August 2026**

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## Introduction

This policy describes how Dorset Council will support parents and carers get their children to school and, where support is required, the type of support that will be considered.

Dorset Council will work with parents and carers to ensure children achieve their potential. Therefore, this policy aligns to the Council's aim of promoting independence to prepare children for adulthood and aims to give parents and carers a range of flexible options for them to make the best decisions for their children.

Furthermore, this policy has been designed to help the Council achieve its vision for children and young people in Dorset with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), as set out in the Dorset SEND strategy 2024 to 2027 - [Dorset SEND strategy 2024 to 2027 - Dorset Council](#)

In particular, the Council will “work together to give children and young people with SEND in Dorset the best chance to succeed, enjoy family life and go to school as close to home as possible” and that “together, we support children and young people with SEND ... prepare well for adulthood”.

Dorset Council has made a commitment to “deliver a seamless pathway to adulthood and independence”; all decisions made by the council will support this commitment. It is each parent's responsibility to ensure their child receives a good education and, as part of that, their child arrives at school ready to learn. If a parent or carer needs help in getting their child to school, subject to meeting certain eligibility criteria, the Council will provide support that meets the needs of the child whilst promoting independence.

## PART 1 - Eligibility for Travel Assistance

1. The Education & Inspections Act 2006 (Section 508B) requires local authorities to ensure that suitable travel arrangements for “eligible children” in their area are made to facilitate their attendance at “qualifying schools”.

### Eligible Children & Young People

2. Parents are responsible for ensuring their child attends school. This means they must take all the action necessary to enable their child to attend school. For most parents,

this includes making arrangements for their child to travel to and from school. Local authorities must make arrangements, free-of-charge, for eligible children to travel to qualifying schools.

3. The terms “eligible children” and “qualifying schools” relate to the age of the child, the school which the child attends (including cross border schools) and the distance between the child’s home address and the school measured by the shortest available walking route (which may include rights of way). [ADD REF/LINK TO SAFER WALKING GUIDANCE](#). Walking routes are from where the property meets the adopted road to the nearest available entrance to school grounds as measured using the Dorset Council GIS system. This GIS system measures the distance from home to school according to the shortest available walking routes. The term “parent” relates to any person responsible for the child. Transport eligibility (free provision) is provided to the end of the respective educational year in the following cases:

- A child lives more than the statutory walking distance from a qualifying school (see Para – 12).
- Could not reasonably be expected to walk to that school because of their special educational needs, disability or mobility, even if they were accompanied by their parent/carer/ responsible other (see Para – 22).
- Would not be able to walk to that school in reasonable safety, even if they were accompanied by their parent/carer/responsible other. (see Para – 72).

### **Qualifying Schools**

4. These are:

- community schools, foundation schools, voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools;
- academies (including those which are free schools, university technical colleges, studio schools and special schools);
- alternative provision academies;
- community or foundation special schools;
- non-maintained special schools;
- pupil referral units;
- maintained nursery schools (where attended by a child of compulsory school age); and
- city technology colleges and city colleges for the technology of the arts.

5. The criteria for a qualifying school to be considered for travel assistance are:

- Nearest School – this is your nearest school to the home postal address and it is determined based on straight line distance between home and school using the Dorset GIS system, using the Eastings and Northings for each location.
- Catchment School – the catchment school is determined by your postal address. You will be eligible to transport to your catchment school if it is over the statutory walking distance, even if there is a nearer eligible school. [Get local information for your address - Dorset Council](#)
- Joint Primary Catchment<sup>1</sup> – some postal addresses are catchment to more than one primary school. In this case the eligible school will be the nearest catchment school (based on straight line distance). You will still be entitled to transport to the nearest school if it is not a catchment school if it is over the statutory walking distance.

6. Travel assistance is currently provided to the nearest or catchment area school where the child meets the qualifying criteria. Whilst these agreed areas remain unaltered, schools will continue to have eligible transport provided by Dorset Council.

7. If any school chooses to alter their catchment area or admissions policy, they will need to consult on their arrangements with Dorset Council, as a Local Authority is only legally required to provide transport to the nearest appropriate school. If schools change their arrangements and this has an impact on the entitlement to transport the school will have to make this clear to parents and other consultees it will be their responsibility to inform parents. (See Para – 75).

### **Area Specific Rules for qualifying schools**

8. In the case of the Dorset Studio School on the Kingston Maurward Campus, as they moved to a Year 7 point of entry from September 2019, a young person will be eligible to transport if the Studio School is the nearest school providing KS4 provision (year 10 and 11) subject to the statutory walking distances.

9. In the case of The Thomas Hardy School, a young person will be eligible if the school is the nearest or catchment school and subject to the statutory walking distances.

10. In the case of the Swanage School, the Local Authority will recognise a transport priority area that is consistent with the size of the combined local primary schools' yearly cohort capacity and within the Pupil Admissions Number (PAN) of the Swanage School. The transport priority (catchment area) for determining eligibility for transport will be the combined catchment areas of the Swanage Primary School, St. Mark's CE VA Primary School (Swanage) and St. Georges Langton Matravers Primary School. Children and young people who are outside of this transport priority area may still be eligible for

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<sup>1</sup> Towns of Gillingham, Blandford, Verwood and Weymouth

transport support subject to the statutory walking distances and the Swanage School being the nearest school.

11. In the case of the Purbeck School, a young person will be eligible if the school is the nearest or catchment school and subject to the statutory walking distances.

12. Some postal addresses in Verwood are deemed catchment for both Ferndown Upper and Queen Elizabeth School and attendance at either will be eligible for transport from those addresses subject to the statutory walking distances.

### **Statutory Walking Distances**

13. The statutory walking distances are used to determine whether a child is eligible for free travel to school. They are the distance beyond which a child who is attending their nearest suitable school is eligible for free travel arranged by their local authority. Where a child lives within the statutory walking distance (and is not eligible for free travel on any of the other grounds set out in this policy) the parent is responsible for arranging their child's travel to school. There is no expectation that the child will walk. It is for the parent to determine what arrangements would be suitable for their child.

- A child attending Reception Year to Year 4 is eligible for free travel to a qualifying school if it is more than 2 miles from their home.
- A child attending in Year 5 to Year 11 is eligible for free travel to a qualifying school if it is more than 3 miles from their home.

14. Assessment as to whether the distance between a child's home and their school is further than the statutory walking distance, the route measured, using Dorset's GIS mapping system, must be the shortest route along which a child, accompanied as necessary, may walk in reasonable safety. This is not necessarily the shortest distance by road. The route may also include footpaths, bridleways, other pathways and alternative entrances to the school.

### **Additional Criteria (Extended Rights)**

15. Additional criteria apply to children from low income families. If families are in receipt of Maximum Working Tax Credit<sup>2</sup>, or the child is eligible to Free School Meals, travel assistance eligibility will be confirmed;

- in the case of children in Year 5 and 6 (aged 9 – 11) – to their catchment area or nearest school where the distance between home and the school is more than two miles (shortest available walking route),

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<sup>2</sup> Parents who claim maximum Maximum Working Tax Credit (MWTC) will have an earned income of no more than £7,400. The child will be eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) – if they are not already – when the family are transferred to Universal Credit.

- in the case of children in Year 7 to Year 11 (aged 11 -16) - to one of their three nearest qualifying schools (which includes schools in neighbouring authorities) with places available at the time of the original application by the parent, where the distance between home and the school is more than two miles (shortest available walking route) and less than six miles (shortest available driven route).
- In the case of children in Year 7 to Year 11 attending a school that is more than 2 miles but not more than 15 miles from their home that their parents have chosen on the grounds of their religion or belief if, having regard to that religion or belief, there is no suitable school nearer to their home. The following information would be required at the time of the application:
  - The provision of baptismal certificate
  - A statement of atheism
  - A statement of adherence to a particular faith
  - A letter of support from a priest or equivalent religious leader stating that the child belongs to a particular congregation.

16. Children who are for any reason being educated outside their normal year group will have their transport eligibility assessed according to the year group which they are in.

#### **Children with Education, Health and Care Plans.**

17. The school named in an EHCP should be the nearest suitable school to meet the child's needs.

18. The child will be eligible for school travel assistance if the nearest suitable school as named on the plan is over the statutory walking distance or there is eligibility under the additional criteria/extended rights section – see Para 14 above.

19. Where the family's preferred school is not the nearest suitable school, the Local Authority will take into account travel and the efficient use of resources before naming in an EHCP .

20. The Local Authority has a duty to consider whether there is a significant cost difference in providing travel assistance to an alternate school than the nearest (or catchment).

21. If the local authority determines that providing travel to the parent's preferred school would be incompatible with the efficient use of resources, the local authority will name both the parents preferred school as well as the school that the Local Authority deems suitable and make it clear that the suitable school would be the school that would have entitlement to transport.

### Special Education, Disability and Mobility Needs

22. A child may be eligible for free travel to school if:

- they attend their nearest suitable school, and
- it is within the statutory **walking** distance of their **home**, and

they could not reasonably be expected to **walk** there because of their **special educational , disability or mobility needs** , even if they were accompanied by their **parent**.

This will be assessed on a case by case basis.

23. A child does not need to have an Education Health and Care Plan or attend a special school to be eligible on these grounds.

24. Supporting information illustrating why the child may not be able to walk to school will be required from the following to support an application:

- the parent
- any professional involved in the child's care for example an educational psychologist or hospital consultant
- the child's school
- information contained in an EHCP if they have one

25. When a child has a need or disability that would prevent them from making the usual type of accompanied journey made by other children of his/her age additional travel assistance may be provided. The conditions that may give rise to such assistance may include:

- Long term severely restricted mobility – for example, circumstances requiring the daily use of significant physical aids such as a wheelchair.
- Long term medical condition resulting in severely restricted mobility due to pain and/or extreme tiredness - for example, juvenile arthritis.
- Long term medical condition resulting in restrictive mobility leading to serious health and safety risks - for example, certain types of epilepsy or life threatening heart defects.



- A sensory impairment resulting in severely restricted mobility - for example, where a child is effectively without the use of sight.
- A child has a disability leading to significant social, and / or emotional immaturity in comparison with other children of his / her age. This may mean a child's behaviour leaves them extremely vulnerable in social settings – for example, a child with Autistic Spectrum Condition who has very little awareness of personal danger
- A child with severe learning difficulties who has an inability to manage the complexity of the process with safety or demonstrates constant challenging behaviour suggesting that this child cannot make an accompanied journey.

26. Transport provision (for eligible children) in very limited circumstances may operate to suit a reduced timetable and professional advice and evidence would be needed to support this.

27. There is no guarantee that siblings of a child with transport provided on these grounds (Para 22) will be eligible to transport. Applications for siblings to travel with the eligible child should be made in the usual way. If the sibling is not eligible but receives a surplus seat place on the same vehicle, please note that this transport will not automatically continue after the transport requirements for the child with the additional needs leaves or run if this child is ill or excluded from school. If the seat on an available vehicle is required by another eligible child, the surplus seat may be withdrawn at short notice.

### **Passenger Assistants**

28. Passenger Assistants are not normally provided on transport unless there are exceptional circumstances for doing so. If a child has a significant, disability, medical or special educational need, and cannot travel on their own, a transport request may be submitted. The Local Authority will consider information from the school and the appropriate health professionals and recommend whether a passenger assistant should be provided. This will be reviewed at least annually by the SEND Travel Review Officer.

29. If your child has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), please contact your SEND provision lead who will be able to discuss how you can get your child to school and whether any assistance can be given. If your child does not have an EHCP, please apply on an application via [Apply for a school place - Dorset Council](#)

## **PART 2 - Other Considerations/Clarifications**

### **Parental Preference:**

30. If a child is attending a school on “parental preference” grounds i.e. the school applied for is not the catchment/nearest school (or one of the three nearest eligible schools in the case of extended rights), there is no duty for a Local Authority (LA) to provide transport and the families are responsible for their own arrangements.

31. If a child or young person on an Education Health & Care Plan attends a mainstream school other than their catchment or nearest due to parental preference having that school named on their EHCP, the family will not be eligible for free transport.

#### **Year Group Full Transport:**

32. If families apply ‘on time’ (based on the nationally recognised deadlines for applications) for the Normal Year of Entry to a School for their catchment school (or in the case where there is no catchment school the nearest school) and are refused due to oversubscription (referred to as ‘year group full’) transport eligibility may be provided to the nearest suitable school with places available considering efficient use of resources subject to the statutory walking distances. A school would only be considered unsuitable if there was a physical reason that the child could not attend. Reasons for this include a boy attending a girl’s school, secondary aged child attending a primary school or a private school to which we do not provide transport.

33. Where an application in the normal year of entry is late, though the application could have been made on time, and an alternative school has to be provided on year group full grounds, then transport provision will remain the responsibility of the parent.

34. A child who has attended an alternative school nominated by Dorset Council (due to year group full or other such reason) will only be eligible to continued transport support at age of transfer to that pyramid’s receiver school if the child’s catchment area school does not operate the same age of transfer or they would not have been able to offer a place.

35. Dorset Council has a duty to offer an alternative school place if unable to offer a preferred/catchment or nearest school. Transport will not be provided to the alternative Dorset school if there is a closer school in a neighbouring authority which is under the qualifying distance. In this case parents will be informed of the space/s available in closer neighbouring school(s).

36. If one child in a family is eligible for transport to a specific school, other than the catchment/nearest, and remains on roll, transport support will normally be provided for all other children from the same family unit to attend that same school (until the standard age of transfer or a change in circumstance).

#### **Moving House:**

37. Parents are advised to check availability of school places before moving house, as there are no guarantees places will be available at the new catchment or nearest school.

Unless nearer schools do not have places available in the relevant year group, any request for a child to remain at the existing school upon a house move will be considered as parental preference and, therefore, families will be responsible for making their own transport arrangements.

38. Dorset Council will not provide travel assistance for children who have been displaced from their home because of family related issues (e.g. family disagreements).

#### **Temporary Housing:**

39. Occasionally, families have to move involuntarily from their established home address to alternative accommodation on a temporary basis. Transport support to a child's existing school may be considered for a maximum period of two school terms when a family has had to be temporarily re-housed.

40. Agreement to transport support will depend upon the location of the temporary housing, the age/distance criteria, the basis of the original application (i.e. was the place secured on in-area or parental preference grounds), the cost of transport and satisfactory reasons for the loss of the registered accommodation. Transport support from the temporary address will cease at the end of the two school terms period (unless the cost of providing transport support to an alternative school is greater) or upon a return to the original property or permanent re-housing, whichever comes first.

#### **Changing School for other reasons:**

41. Applications for travel assistance following a parents' decision to change schools (whether or not the decision is supported/encouraged by the existing or receiving school) will not be approved unless the school they transfer to is the catchment/nearest school and/or all avenues of support at the current school have been pursued and the move is supported by the Locality Service Manager – Learning & Belonging Team.

#### **Year 11:**

42. If a family moves house when a child is in Year 11, travel assistance may be provided if it is sought to enable the child to remain at the existing school, if the following circumstances apply;

- A house move is outside of the family's control and confirmed by Dorset Council housing or the Locality Team.
- The provision of transport is reasonable in terms of

#### **Young Carers:**

43. Children who are registered carers and who receive transport support may be considered for alternative methods of transport if the normal arrangements require the child

to be away from home for an unreasonable length of time. (Support from Young Carers Association and health care professionals would be required).

#### **Exceptional Circumstances:**

44. There may be exceptions to the general criteria set out above and these are considered on a case-by-case basis.
45. Where a place could be offered in the catchment or a nearer school and there would be no cost, the alternative transport should only be considered on a temporary basis. The need for this provision will be reviewed by the Locality Team.
46. The Locality & Inclusion Team and/or the School Admissions Team will liaise directly with Dorset Travel to commission transport under exceptional circumstances.
47. Travel assistance may be considered where a temporary, part time timetable is agreed due to medical needs or reintegration programme. Evidence and the views of professionals would be required to support such cases.
48. Travel assistance provided on exceptional grounds will normally cease if a family move to an area served by a school with places available in the relevant year group.
49. Any request for Exceptional Circumstances will be signed off by the Service Manager – Learning and Belonging,

#### **Alternative Provision and Managed Moves:**

50. Where a child, through the In Year Fair Access process is referred to a new school including a Managed Move, then consideration will be given to providing transport. As part of the allocation of a place, consideration will be given as to whether this is the next nearest appropriate school, or the only other appropriate school for the child to attend.
51. If a Managed Move is agreed as a result of parent making an application, then transport eligibility will be determined based on the usual eligibility criteria of statutory walking distance.
52. Where a child is referred to Alternative Provision, including Learning Centres, then transport will be provided to that setting for the duration of their attendance, or until such time as it is deemed appropriate that they remain and the setting is over the minimum statutory distance for their age.

### **Transport for Children attending Pre-School Settings:**

53. Transport is not provided for children attending pre-school settings, nurseries, playgroups etc. It is the responsibility of families to make their own transport arrangements. However, if places are available on school transport vehicles, families can apply for a place through the surplus seat travel scheme.

### **Post 16 Transport Provision**

54. The Education and Skills Act 2008, states that young people are required to stay in education, training or enter employment (up to 20 hours while in a part-time training or education programme) until they are 18.

55. When making decisions about which course, school or college to attend parents/students must consider:

- the different modes of transport available
- the timings for arrival and departure
- how much it will cost.

56. There is no automatic eligibility to free home to school or college transport once a student is over 16 even if free transport has been provided in the past.

57. Dorset Council is committed to supporting Young People in accessing Post 16 education and training and we advise that Home to School Transport Policy is read in conjunction with the Post 16 Transport Support Policy 2025 – 2026.

58. Those attending Post 16 education placements can apply for a place under the Surplus Seat Travel Scheme below.

### **Out of School Activities/Work Experience:**

59. Dorset Council will provide transport support to/from the allocated school only at the beginning and end of the normal school day. Families are responsible for meeting the transport needs of children involved in work experience programmes and attending before school activities such as breakfast clubs and after school activities, i.e. sports clubs etc. Only where a child is travelling individually may it be possible to alter the transport times and these would need to be made in advance with the agreement of all parties and at no additional cost. If other students subsequently join the transport, transport times may revert to provide transport for the usual school opening and closing times.

### **Extended schools:**

60. Dorset Council is not responsible for meeting the transport needs of children attending before school activities such as breakfast clubs and after school activities, i.e. sports clubs etc. Only where a child is travelling individually may it be possible to alter the transport times and these would need to be made in advance with the agreement of all parties and at no additional cost. The school may be able to arrange with the LA to amend transport times/ routes to improve access to before/ after school activities. If other students subsequently join the transport, transport times may revert to provide transport for the usual school opening and closing times.

### **Childcare Arrangements:**

61. Dorset Council would provide transport support to/from the allocated school only at the beginning and end of the normal school day to a nominated stop relevant to the home address. If surplus spaces are available, and a childcare provider is on an established route, children may use school transport to transfer to/from the provider at the beginning/end of the school day by arrangement subject to Part 3 of this policy.

### **Home Address:**

62. A school place can only be based on one address - the home address (identified by the recipient of Child Benefit or GP registration address). However, where a child has split residency, transport support will be provided from the nominated home address, subject to meeting the criteria for transport support to be provided as identified above. Where this is unclear, disputed, or care is split equally and there is no agreement between the parents, the application considered will be that made by the parent at the address identified in the first instance by Child Benefit and if this is not applicable, then by GP registration.

### **Decisions Made in Error**

63. Where an application for transport support is approved in error, Dorset Council will withdraw the provision as follows;

- Where the child is in Year 11 transport will be allowed through to the completion of the academic year,
- Where the transport support has not yet commenced immediately on discovery of the error,
- In all other cases, at the end of the half-term in which the error has been found.

64. Where transport is withdrawn, the family may apply for a surplus seat.

## **Cost**

65. This policy regularly refers to efficient use of resources. Where a child is eligible for travel assistance then the Authority will meet those requirements. However, having regard to all other factors, the Authority will offer the most cost-effective solution on a case-by-case basis and will not authorise alternative transport provision should the family of an eligible child reject the type of transport support being offered. Dorset Travel or their contracted operator is responsible for the assessment and provision of transport support considering best use of resources. Dorset Council will not contribute to the costs of the approved transport provision to a proposed alternative.

66. Where a contract vehicle bus pass is provided but lost there will be a charge levied for the administration of replacement of the pass, of £15 for the first loss of the pass followed by payments of £25 for any loss at any time thereafter, subject to regular review. If the pass is provided directly by the bus company charges may differ.

67. Where transport is agreed either through School Admissions, SEND, Transport Appeal or based on a Safety Audit, the Local Authority will be liable for the cost from 2 weeks from when the authorisation is confirmed with the parent, the date of the appeal hearing or road safety audit, whichever occurs earliest. Any costs previously incurred by the parent will not be subject to a refund.

## **Safety of the Route between Home and School**

68. Applicants may submit a request for an audit on the safety of a route between home and school. The criteria ruling all road safety assessments are taken from national guidance. If a route is deemed unsafe for a child to walk accompanied by an adult, that route will be disregarded. A separate policy and procedure is available on [Request a safety assessment of your child's walking route to school - Dorset Council](#)

## **School Reorganisations/Catchment Area Changes**

69. Area or individual school reorganisations may involve displacing children from one school or site to another. In such circumstances, transport eligibility for children whose education has been disrupted will be continued or introduced for a period of three years after the date of implementation. In addition, the minimum distance at which transport eligibility will be confirmed will be determined on a case-by-case basis by the Director of Children's Services after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services.

70. On occasion Dorset Council may decide to change a school's catchment area. As a result, families may find that the area in which they live is served by a different school. In such cases children who attend the 'previous' catchment area school and receive transport support will continue to receive that support to that school for a period of up to six years following the date of implementation.

71. Where an Own Admissions Authority makes changes to the catchment area – Dorset Council will review accordingly and decide if the new catchment area will be used for school transport eligibility (see Para – 6).

### **Children in Care**

72. Admission authorities are required to give Children in Care (CiC) the highest priority and agree which school best meets the child's needs and act in the best interests of the child. In accordance with the normal admission allocations process, transport eligibility arrangements for CiC will be the same as for all other children.

73. Transport support for in year applications may be considered in accordance with the following principles;

- Successful applications for catchment/nearest/parental preference schools will reflect the arrangements that apply to all other children,
- Where a school admits on the recommendation of the Child in Care (Looked After Children) Education Manager (subject to the age/distance criteria) irrespective of the location of and space availability at other schools.
- The family or young person is still subject to the stipulations in section 1.1.2.

### **In Year Fair Access**

74. Transport support for applications considered under Dorset Council's (In Year) Fair Access protocol will be considered in accordance with the following principles;

- Successful applications for catchment/nearest/parental preference schools will reflect the arrangements that apply to all other children,
- Where a place is allocated by the panel for an alternative qualifying school (to the applicants preferred/catchment/nearest) school, transport support may be provided (subject to the age/distance criteria) irrespective of the location of and space availability at other schools.

### **Traveller Children & Young People**

75. Traveller children are generally subject to the existing guidelines on transport support. If a child is attending his/her local school and lives outside the statutory distance limits transport support is provided. If a family move onto another site outside the existing school's area transport support would normally cease as the Authority would expect the child to attend the (new) local school, or in the event of over-subscription the next nearest school with places available (if the next nearest is the existing school then transport support would continue).



76. In recognition of the need for greater stability and consistency in the provision of education for traveller children, the following will also be taken into consideration.

77. In the event of eviction from a site transport support will be /continue to be provided for two terms or upon voluntary change of schools, whichever comes first. This will be looked at on a case-by-case basis and subject to the efficient use of resources. Upon reaching the end of the two terms deadline the position will be reviewed to establish on a case specific basis whether transport support will continue. In the case of a child attending a school during a testing year it is expected that transport support would continue to the end of the school year if the two terms deadline expires during that year.

78. On advice from Democratic Services, transport will be provided from illegal or tolerated sites as this is within the statutory duty of the Local Authority to support any child's education.

## **PART 3 - Transport Arrangements**

### **Methods of Transport**

79. Upon determination of transport eligibility Dorset Travel and the SEND Travel Team will normally decide the most appropriate means of supporting children to travel to and from school. Methods of travel support will be discussed in a clear order, linked to the Council's aim of maintaining flexibility and promoting independence, while ensuring cost efficiency. The types of travel support to be considered are as follows:

- Use of public bus and train networks. Independent travel gives children and young people the essential skills required to travel independently either on foot or by public)
- Fuel contribution, if it is shown to be a cost-effective solution (Families should be prepared to use their own vehicle where there are no suitable or appropriate alternative arrangements in place). The rate paid to families, is for the shortest available driven route only (45p per mile x return journey/s)
- Personal Travel Budgets which can be used by parents in any reasonable way to get their child to school. More information about personal travel budgets will be available on Dorset Council Website.
- Contract Bus/Minibus/Council Fleet
- Taxi

80. Whilst Dorset Travel endeavour to ensure continuity for the children they cannot guarantee that the same driver will be provided for the vehicle for the duration of a particular child's need for transport.

81. Passenger Assistants are not normally provided. (Please see Para 30-31)

82. Where a passenger assistant is provided for an individual child on shared transport, that PA will only be responsible for that child. The safe boarding and exiting of the vehicle for other children will be the responsibility of the parent at the pickup/drop-off point.

### **Journey Times**

83. The maximum journey times are from 'gate to gate' for travelling to and from school following Government Guidelines are as follows;

- The maximum each way length of journey for a child of primary school age is 45 minutes
- The maximum each way length of journey for a child of secondary school age is 75 minutes

84. 'Gate to gate' represents where the property meets public paths and roads. For those families living on islands in Poole Harbour, this will be an appropriate point on the mainland.

85. Most schools have staff on duty to receive/hand over children 10-15 minutes before and after the school day and it is expected that school transport will arrive/depart within that time frame. Where this is not possible special arrangements will need to be made. It is recommended that children arrive at their stop 10 minutes before the departure time. If children are being picked up from their home address, they should be ready 10 minutes before the transport is due to arrive.

### **Pickup and Drop off Points**

86. Every effort is made for children to be collected and dropped at a point close to their home. However, some pupils may have to walk a reasonable distance to and from their home/school to meet the vehicle. Where this is not possible Dorset Council may arrange transport to and from the pick-up/drop off points if;

- A primary aged (4 – 11) child lives more than 0.75 miles from the nearest point,
- A secondary aged (11 – 16) child lives more than 1 mile from the nearest point.

87. Parents and children are responsible for being at the pick-up point in good time to access the service.

88. Parents are responsible for their children's safety in getting to and from the notified pick up/drop off points (including awaiting or leaving transport) or to and from the vehicle, if they are picked up at home. Younger children should be accompanied, and parents must ensure that they carry their bus passes (if applicable).

### **Accompanied Children**

89. Bus Passes may be made available for adults who wish to accompany their children to and from school on local public bus services. This applies only to primary aged children, i.e. up to the end of Year 6. Bus Passes are not made available for adults who want to accompany secondary age children to school. Transport support is not available for adults if their children (of any age) use LA contract vehicles (Bus/Taxi). Bus passes for parents accompanying Primary School Children (up to end of Year 6) may be restricted to Home to School return journeys on school days only, term time only.

### **Personal Luggage**

90. Dependent on the capacity of the vehicle it may not be possible to carry large amounts of personal luggage for individuals. The driver reserves the right to refuse to carry excessive luggage or personal belongings.

## **PART 4 - Surplus Seat Travel Scheme (SSTS)**

### **Availability**

91. Spare seats that are available on any of the Council's (LA) contract routes (including local public services and One School One Operator Routes) can be used by children who are not eligible to free transport. Details of routes are available at [Pay for school transport if you're not eligible - Dorset Council](#).

92. Where a single operator has been identified for a specific school, families or young people will need to contact that service provider to secure a bus pass on services to that school. Further details of the operators on these One School One Operator (OSOO) Routes are available on [Routes and timetables - Dorset Council](#). The cost of these passes is set by the commercial operator.

### **Surplus Seat Travel Scheme (SSTS) Charges**

93. The price for a surplus seat for 2025-2026 will be **£945**.

94. These costs only apply to passes on buses and taxis provided directly by Dorset Council. Schedule of costs on the One School One Operator routes are available through the relevant operator.

95. An annual charge is levied which will apply to all SSTS users irrespective of whether they have siblings already using a surplus seat. This is reviewed annually. Payment can be made in instalments.

96. Where seats are provided by Dorset Council directly, the seats may be withdrawn at short notice under the following circumstances:

- Seats are required for children who are eligible to free transport (proportional refund will be given)
- If re-tendering or re-planning reduces the number of surplus seats.
- If payment is not received or parents fail to meet their direct debit payments the pass will be withdrawn, and any future passes will only be issued if payment is received in full in advance.
- If the behaviour of the ticket holder affects the safety of the vehicle and/or its passengers.
- If the transport policy is changed.
- If the route ceases to be required for the conveyance of eligible passengers.
- Where passes are not being used (or are being abused) Dorset Travel reserves the right to withdraw the pass and offer the seat to another SSTS passenger.

97. In addition, parents need to be aware of the following:

- a. The bus or taxi may only stop at listed pickups, details of which can be obtained from the Dorset Travel team. Requests for a new stop must be made in writing to Dorset Travel. No diversion of route can be made for a SSTS passenger.
- b. Applications will need to be made each year.
- c. Existing holders of surplus seats will be contacted to check whether their circumstances have changed and whether a seat is still required for the following academic year.
- d. If no eligible pupils require the transport (e.g. staff training days or other school closures), the bus will not run.
- e. Students should not attempt to travel unless authorised to do so.
- f. The price for a surplus seat under this scheme is £900 per year irrespective of use, as partial use (e.g. one-way journeys or irregular attendance during study leave) makes the seat unavailable for others.
- g.

**Priority for the allocation of surplus seats on Dorset Council routes (Not applicable to OSOO routes):**

98. Applications to purchase a surplus seat must be made online prior to the academic year for which the seat is required. Though Dorset Council will endeavour to confirm the

allocation of surplus seats as soon as possible, a surplus seat allocation may not be finalised until after the October half term once all eligible children have been placed on routes. The information supplied will be assessed after which, any surplus seats will be allocated in the following priority:

- (i) Children and Young People who are in any of the following categories which significantly impacts on their ability to travel to school independently, but do not qualify for 'transport eligibility':
  - A Child in Care or previously in care,
  - Children with an Education, Health and Care Plan;
  - Registered Disability;
  - medical condition (supporting evidence from the school and appropriate Medical Officer will always be necessary);
  - Young Carer;
  - Vulnerable or living with a parent registered as disabled
- (ii) Children and Young People who are attending their catchment school or for whom the school is the nearest appropriate school (including 'year group full' placements), but do not qualify for 'transport eligibility'.
- (iii) Children and Young People whose parents applied for the school on 'parental preference' and are in receipt of Maximum Working Tax Credit, or the child is eligible to Free School Meals and so do not qualify for 'transport eligibility'.
- (iv) Children and Young People whose parents applied for the school on 'parental preference' and are not eligible for travel assistance.

99. If there are insufficient places within any of the above criteria, those who travel the furthest distance will be given priority based on the shortest available walking route.

100. Applications received during the academic year will be offered a seat if available or placed on the waiting list.

## **PART 5 - Examples of When Transport Support Would Not Be Provided**

101. Notwithstanding exceptional circumstances, the following list contains details of cases not referred to above when mainstream and SEND transport support (defined as transport which is provided, or commissioned by the council, such as taxis and minibuses) would not normally be provided and where families would be expected to make their own arrangements;

- To accommodate breakfast/after school clubs
- Trips and journeys during the school day and /or which are in the curriculum
- To or from a venue that is not your normal home address, for example the address of a childcare provider or a short break placement. (unless there is a legal order in place, or a statutory care plan agreed by the local authority)
- If your child is unwell and has to be collected from school during a school day

- If your child is excluded during a school day
- Medical appointments or other approved activities which affect the start or end of and during the school day,
- When a child has missed the contracted transport,
- Transitional/integration placements in schools/colleges i.e. step up days.
- Attendance at work experience programmes,
- To/from childcare addresses where they are not on an established route,
- To fall in line with childcare arrangements where they are off recognised transport routes,
- Children withdrawn from school by their family and placed in an alternative education setting,
- Other family members travelling in the same direction,
- To support working arrangements for parents and/or children.

### **Transition Days**

102. Dorset Council will not formally provide transport for transition and step up days during the summer when those leaving one phase of education have an opportunity to have a day's orientation in their new school. Parents will be expected to ensure that their child can attend these step-up days and should check with the new school what arrangements may be in place to support transport for that day.

## **PART 6 - Advice on Health, Safety and Behaviour on Vehicles**

### **Advice for Parents**

#### **Safety Belts**

103. If seatbelts are fitted, then they **MUST** be worn. Persistent lack of use in a vehicle that has belts fitted could result in transport being withdrawn.

#### **Behaviour**

104. Schools have a key role in ensuring that pupils behave in an acceptable manner whilst travelling to and from school on transport arranged and organised by the LA. Unacceptable behaviour by pupils whilst travelling should be dealt with initially by the school as part of their discipline policy.

105. Families and schools are expected to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure appropriate behaviour on LA provided transport and to take necessary action when incidents of unacceptable behaviour are reported and that endangers others will not be tolerated. Any damage to the vehicle or property of other passengers will be investigated and parents may be held responsible for the cost.

106. Schools have a legal right to impose reasonable sanctions if a pupil misbehaves and incidents of serious or persistent indiscipline can lead to transport support being suspended. Parents will be informed in writing of any such incidents by the school outlining any action to be taken. In such cases it will be the responsibility of parents to ensure that their child attends school.

### **Medication**

107. Dorset Council will not normally be responsible for administering medication to children whilst using Dorset Council arranged transport to and from school. However, should a specific medical need arise, guidance would be sought from the Senior Advisor for Physical and Medical Needs.

**Advice for Children & Young People – [What we expect from students travelling on school transport - Dorset Council](#)**

## **PART 7 - Complaints and Appeals Procedures**

### **Complaints**

108. The School Admissions Team will provide information relating to queries and complaints about transport eligibility.

109. Dorset Travel will provide information relating to queries and complaints about the method of transport, vehicles, contractors, drivers, bus passes, costs/charges, behaviour and safety. Both are contactable through Dorset Customer Services - [Call us - Dorset Council](#) Operators will provide information about routine operational matters if the school is within the One School One Operator Model.

110. The SEND Team will provide information relating to queries and complaints about transport eligibility for children who have Education Health & Care Plans.

### **Transport Appeals**

111. Due to exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary to consider a case on its individual circumstance. Applicants who are refused transport assistance have the right of appeal against the decision only under the following grounds:

- i. They are seeking for their child to be considered as an 'eligible' child or dispensation due to special circumstances
- ii. They would have received either an eligible or surplus seat if the application had been processed correctly
- iii. They are appealing on route safety grounds

112. Stage 1 of the appeal process: Applicants can submit a Transport Appeal form with full supporting evidence - [Appeal a school transport decision - Dorset Council](#). This must be submitted within 20 working days of the receipt of the letter from the Local Authority advising the family that they are not eligible to school transport assistance. This advice to parents may also be contained in the transfers letters issued under the co-ordinated scheme. The evidence will be reviewed by Senior Managers within the Council to confirm:

- i. There are no grounds for exceptional circumstances
- ii. The application for transport has been processed in accordance with the Home to School Transport Policy
- iii. There are no road safety issues that suggests an incorrect decision has been made.

113. The family or young person will be notified in writing within 20 working days of the result of the appeal review. If the family is still not satisfied with the outcome of this review, they have 20 days within which to request that their appeal moves to Stage 2 of the appeal process – where the evidence is reviewed by the Children’s and Adult Services Appeal Panel. A copy of the Transport Appeal forms together with Dorset Council’s statement justifying the reasons for the decision, the original application and other supporting documents will be submitted to the Committee.

114. If an appeal goes ahead, the applicant can attend to present the case and may be accompanied at the hearing. The Committee’s decisions are binding on all parties (but do not necessarily set precedence).

115. The Local Authority should make the parent aware that they may complain to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) if they believe the Local Authority has made a mistake in the way it has handled their case. If a parent considers the decision of the independent appeals panel to be flawed on public law grounds, they may apply for a judicial review.

116. Transport appeals will only be heard for Dorset resident pupils. If you live in a neighbouring authority you will need to appeal to your home authority.

117. Only one transport appeal for the same journey is permitted in each academic year.