

Travel Assistance Guide for Parents, Carers and Young People

A guide to applying for Home to School or Post 16 Travel Assistance for children and young people including those with Special Educational Needs or Disability (SEND).

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Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to set out the key eligibility criteria, the application process and the appeals process for those who wish to apply for home to school or post 16 travel assistance in Hackney. This guide and application process is relevant for all children and young people in Hackney, including those with special educational needs or disability.

Hackney Learning Trust (HLT) travel assistance focuses on maximising, wherever possible and realistically, the independence of the borough's children and young people, including those with special educational needs or disabilities. It is also in place to ensure that all children and young people are given the best possible chance of achieving their potential by having the highest possible attendance record, and to promote the borough's School Travel Plan Strategies and Independent Travel.

For further information on HLT policies relating to travel assistance, we recommend you refer to the Hackney Learning Trust Pupil Benefits Policies available for download at <https://www.learningtrust.co.uk/content/help-home-school-travel>.

The guide has been developed ensuring due regard is given to the Education Act 1996, Children and Families Act 2014, Equality Act 2010 and relevant regulations, the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice 2014 and the Department for Education 'Home to School Travel & Transport Guidance' July 2014. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications> for more information.

Whose responsibility is it to get my child to school?

It is the responsibility of parents and guardians to ensure that children attend school under section 444 of the Education Act 1996, and this includes making the necessary travel arrangements to and from school.

However, under section 509 of the Act, local authorities have a power to offer assistance with travel based on individual circumstances. Where the local authority does offer assistance with travel, this is only provided for journeys to and from home and the child's school for attendance in normal school hours.

Who is eligible for travel assistance?

Home to School Eligibility Criteria for Children and Young People aged 5 – 16 years

Special Educational Needs, Disability or Mobility Difficulties

The following criteria will be used to determine whether provision of travel assistance is appropriate:

- The age of the child or young person.
- If the school the child or young person is attending is the nearest suitable school.
- If the walking distance from home to school is within two miles of your home for children aged five to seven or three miles of your home for children aged eight or over.
- The Special Educational Needs of the pupil.
- The type of school provision being made for the pupil.
- Whether the pupil has physical, medical, or communication difficulties that would prevent them from safely using public transport.
- Whether suitable public transport is available (e.g. for wheelchairs, specialist seating etc.).

- Whether the pupil may be vulnerable and at risk of danger, or would be a danger to others, if they use public or other transport.
- Whether transport is required on medical grounds.
- Whether the pupil's needs prevent the parents from providing transport.
- If the Educational Welfare Officer or Head Teacher can provide evidence that transport is necessary to ensure regular attendance.
- The efficient use of the Authority's resources.
- Any other individual circumstance.

The above list is for guidance only, and satisfaction of one or more of the criteria does not automatically agree entitlement to travel assistance. Each case will be reviewed on its individual merits.

In certain circumstances, children and young people with Statements of Special Educational Needs, an Education, Health and Care Plan, or mobility or disability difficulties may be provided with travel assistance if they live within the distance described above, but it is not an automatic right.

Eligibility for travel assistance is based on the needs of the child. HLT may take family circumstances into account when considering the type of assistance to be provided, however, the efficient utilisation of HLT resources will always take precedence.

Low Income Families

Low Income Families are defined as families who are entitled to Free School Meals, or are in receipt of the maximum level of Working Tax Credit. Income assessed parents will need to re-apply each year to determine continued support.

Pupils aged 8 to 10 years old from low income families

HLT will provide help with travel for children who meet the low income criteria above, and who also meet the following;

HLT will provide help with travel for children, where the place is more than two miles from their home and they can only travel to school by tube or train. If, when your child starts school, you have previously applied to and been refused school places at all other appropriate schools within two miles of your home.

Pupils aged 11 to 16 years old from low income families

HLT will provide help with travel for children, where there are not more than three or more suitable nearer places to your home and where the place is more than 2 miles but not more than 6 miles from your home.

HLT will provide help with travel for children, if you have expressed a preference for the school based on your religion or belief, where the school is more than 2 miles but not more than 15 miles from your home and there is no suitable alternative school nearer to your home.

Disabled Parents – low income and non-low income families

Parents are expected to accompany children to school (or to make arrangements for them to be accompanied by an authorised adult) if this is necessary for the child's safety.

HLT will in some instances consider help where the parent's severe disability prevents them from accompanying their child to school although the school is within the normal walking distance. In these cases the nearest school criteria and threshold distances for both income and non-income assessed families applies. Such applications will need to be professionally supported and we will pay the cheapest form of suitable transport from home to school. Eligibility is reviewed each term for continued support.

Post 16 Eligibility Criteria for Young People aged 16 years or more

Young people with Special Educational Needs, Disability or Mobility Difficulties

The eligibility criteria for young people 16 – 25 years is the same criteria as for young people who are of Secondary school age. A young person aged between 16-25 year old, in continuing education and with an Education Health and Care Plan or Special Educational Needs, disability or mobility difficulties, they may be eligible for travel assistance based on these criteria.

Young person without Special Educational Needs, Disability or Mobility Difficulties

Students/trainees should refer to the Post 16 travel assistance guidance at <https://www.learningtrust.co.uk/content/apply-travel-assistance> for details of eligibility. The Pupil Benefits Policies also provides guidance (<https://www.learningtrust.co.uk/content/help-home-school-travel>).

You may qualify for help with travel if the education or training establishment you attend is in Hackney and more than 3 miles from your home or situated in another borough, and your chosen course of study is not available within Hackney.

Parents must be eligible for Free School Meals or in receipt of the maximum level of Working Tax Credit.

How do I apply for Travel Assistance from HLT?

Application process

A copy of the application forms for Home to School and Post 16 Travel Assistance can be obtained in any of the following ways:-

- Downloaded from the Hackney Local Offer website www.hackneylocaloffer.co.uk
- Collected in person from the second floor reception of the Hackney Learning Trust, 1 Reading Lane, London, E8 1GQ.
- If you are unable to download a form or collect one from HLT, please contact our SEND Administration Team on SEND.admin@learningtrust.co.uk or 020 8820 7000 (option 4).

Return your completed application via email to SEND.admin@learningtrust.co.uk or via post to SEND Administration, Hackney Learning Trust, 1 Reading Lane, London E8 1GQ.

Emergency Contact Information

Two different emergency contact names and contact details within the London Borough of Hackney (or in neighbouring Boroughs and a reasonable travel distance from Hackney) are required to ensure that in the event of a parent/carer not being at the drop off address in the afternoon at the specified time, there is an alternative safe drop off address for the child or young person.

Version 1.1 180726

Parents are responsible for ensuring emergency contact details are kept up to date and failure to do so may result in the withdrawal of transport.

What happens once I have submitted my application?

Assessment process for pupils with special educational needs, disability or mobility needs

To assist with the application process, it is advisable that as much evidence as possible is provided to demonstrate that the child or young person meets the eligibility criteria.

Once a completed application form has been received, it will be assessed by an authorised officer to determine whether the pupil meets the eligibility criteria for help with travel and, if so, the type of travel assistance to be provided. The outcome of the application will be provided to the parent/carer or young person in writing.

Pupils who are eligible for help with travel, but not on the grounds of their SEN, disability or mobility needs, and who do not have a freedom pass will normally receive a travel card from Pupil Benefits if it is deemed unreasonable for them to travel by bus.

If a child or young person has their application for travel assistance accepted because of their SEN, disability or mobility needs, an assessment of evidence will be carried out. This may include assessment of evidence provided in the application, by relevant professionals who work with the child or young person, or requesting further evidence from the parent/carer. This will enable HLT to determine the most appropriate travel assistance to ensure the child or young person arrives safely to and from their school or educational setting on a daily basis.

The person carrying out the assessment may speak to both the family and the school SENCo to gain an insight as to whether the child or young person would be capable of any of the following:-

- Becoming an independent traveller through participation in travel training.
- Walking to their educational setting with or without the assistance of a Local Authority provided walking escort.
- Travelling by public transport with or without the assistance of a Local Authority provided escort.
- Travelling by a Local Authority provided school bus which has an escort on board.
- Travelling by private taxi with an individual escort which will, in exceptional cases, be provided where it is not deemed to be safe or appropriate for the child/young person concerned and/or other children/young person to travel in any other way than on a one to one basis.

As the young person becomes older, where possible, a move to a more independent method of travel is an important life skill to develop. The Local Authority Travel Training Team will work with those young people for whom independent travel is a realistic outcome to ensure that they are fully equipped with the skills and confidence needed to enable them to become an independent traveller.

HLT acknowledge that there are a proportion of pupils with specific needs who will require some form of assisted transport throughout their education and training.

Assessment process for low income assessed applications and parents with disability or mobility difficulties

Once a completed application form has been received, it will be assessed by an authorised officer to determine whether the pupil meets the eligibility criteria for help with travel. You may be asked to

provide additional information if required. The outcome of the application will be provided to the parent/carer or young person in writing.

What type of Travel Assistance will be offered?

Following evaluation of the evidence provided, the child/young person will be offered one of the following forms of travel assistance:

- A travel card or travel expenses from Pupil Benefits (for children and young people without SEND)
- A Travel Trainer, through the Travel Training Programme, to support the child/young person to become independent travellers
- A Local Authority provided Travel Assistant to travel with the child/young person, to their education setting, by walking or public transport
- A place on a Local Authority provided school bus which has a Travel Assistant on board
- A private taxi with a Travel Assistant. Only in exceptional cases where it is deemed one to one travel support is the most appropriate assistance.
- A Personal Travel Budget to assist with travel costs and provision

Travel Assistance will only be provided for journeys to and from school for school start and finish times. This does not include before or after school clubs or travel within the school day.

Travel Assistance provided by Pupil Benefits

For children and young people up to the age of 16, the cheapest form of suitable transport will be paid, where applicants meet the eligibility criteria.

For Post 16 pupils (16 years or more), travel expenses between home and school or other educational institution will be paid up to a maximum of £390.00 per year for public transport, where applicants meet the eligibility criteria.

Travel Training Programme

When a child or young person with special educational needs, disability or mobility needs is approved for travel assistance, the first type of assistance offered will generally be independent travel training.

The travel training scheme works by pairing the child or young person to be travel trained with a highly trained Travel Trainer. Before developing an individual travel training programme the Travel Trainer will meet with the young person individually, with the child/young person and their parents/carers at the same time, and with the school/college that the child/young person attends to personalise the travel training programme. The travel training programme will set a number of tasks and milestones that the child or young person will need to be able to demonstrate they are capable of undertaking to prove that they are able to independently and safely travel from their home to school/college and back again.

The length of time an individual travel training programme takes varies based on the needs of the child or young person. Although a child or young person may undertake an independent travel training programme that does not necessarily mean at the end they will be cleared to travel

independently. The child or young person may require further support and suitable assistance will be arranged (for example, being paired with a travel escort).

Bus or Taxi Transport

Buses transport several children and young people. Bus routes and pick up locations are determined based on the most efficient route. Journey pick up locations and times for the child or young person will be set based on the most efficient route.

Travel Assistants

Parents may be asked to escort their child, where able, as it is primarily the duty of the parent to transport their child to and from school. Travel Assistants are generally only provided where safety is a primary concern.

All Travel Assistants (including those provided by a contractor) will carry an identity card and be subject to DBS checks. Travel Assistants will be given written guidance on their duties and will receive appropriate training, including information of the needs of each pupil.

HLT will not normally request the gender of drivers supplied by taxi contractors or on bus rounds, unless in exceptional circumstances.

Residential schools

Where the Local Authority agrees that a child or young person should attend a residential school on a termly basis, and where the pupil is eligible for support with travel, this will only be agreed for journeys at the start and end of each term and half term. In general, this provides for up to 2 return journeys per term (6 return journeys per year).

Where a child or young person attends a residential school on a weekly basis, and where he or she is eligible for support with travel, this will be provided at the start and end of the school week.

Travel may also be agreed for parent/carers to travel to the residential school to attend their annual review meeting.

A child or young person attending residential schools will be expected to use group transport arranged by the school or public transport if available and appropriate. If it is felt that the child or young person needs to be escorted on public transport, Hackney Learning Trust may agree to reimburse parents/carers to accompany to and from school. In all cases where reimbursements for travel on public transport are agreed for the child or young person and parent/carers, valid receipts for the journeys must be provided. Payment will be made by cheque or bank transfer only.

Where a child or young person travels on a daily bus or taxi service, this will be provided at the start and the end of the school day.

Personal Transport Budgets

As part of HLT's commitment to improve the choice and flexibility available to children, young people and their families who are entitled to receive travel assistance, in some cases it may be possible to offer a Personal Transport budget. This is a sum of money which is calculated and paid on a termly basis to enable the child/young person and their family to make travel arrangements which suit their needs best.

The basic calculation for a personal transport budget is outlined below. The total termly amount is then transferred before the term starts via BACS to a bank or building society account the

parent/carer provides details of when signing the service level agreement for the Personal Transport Budget.

$$\text{Personal Budget} = \underbrace{(\text{flat rate} + \text{a per mile rate for a return journey to/from home and school} + \text{rate for a Travel Assistant* (only if required)})}_{\text{Daily Rate}} \times \text{number of schools days in the term}$$

**A Travel Assistant will generally only be provided where safety is a concern and a parent/carer is unable to escort their child.*

In the event that a parent/carer, provided with a personal transport budget, is unwell and cannot get the child or young person to school, they are responsible for and must make alternative arrangements for the child or young person to be taken to school.

Costs attributable to parents/carers

Should a parent/carer choose to send their child or young person to an educational setting that is further away than a setting HLT deems suitable to meet the needs of the child or young person, HLT may cover the cost between home and the nearest suitable educational setting and the parent/carer will be liable to pay the cost difference between the nearest suitable setting and the chosen setting.

What if I do not agree with the decision regarding my application?

Appeals Process

In line with National guidance, there is a two stage appeal process in place to allow parents/carers or young people to appeal a decision not to award travel assistance on the following grounds:

- The transport arrangements offered
- Their child's eligibility
- The distance measurement
- The safety of the route

Should a parent/carer or young person choose to make an appeal for any of the above listed reasons, the process will be as follows:

Stage One

A parent/carer or young person has 20 working days from receiving written confirmation of decision to make a written request asking for a review of the decision for either home to school or post 16 travel assistance.

The written request should detail why the parent/carer or young person believes the decision should be reviewed and give details of any personal and/or family circumstances the parent/carer or young person believes should be considered when the decision is reviewed.

Written requests for appeals should be sent via email to SEND.admin@learningtrust.co.uk or via post to SEND Administration, Hackney Learning Trust, 1 Reading Lane, London E8 1GQ.

Within 20 working days of receiving the written request for a review of the decision about either the method of transport or not to award transport at all, a senior officer will review the original decision and send the parent a detailed written outcome setting out:

- The nature of the decision reached
- How the review was conducted (including the standard followed e.g. Road Safety GB)
- Information about other departments and/or agencies that were consulted as part of the process
- What factors were considered
- The rationale for the decision reached
- Information about escalation to stage two (if appropriate)

Stage Two

The parent/carer or young person concerned then has 20 working days from receipt of the Hackney Learning Trust's stage one decision to make a written request to escalate the matter to stage two.

Within 40 working days, an independent appeal panel consisting of professionals, with a good working knowledge of special educational needs and disabilities, considers written and verbal representations from the parent/carer or young person and HLT officers and gives a detailed written outcome setting out:

- The nature of the decision reached
- How the review was conducted
- Information about other departments and/or agencies that were consulted as part of the process
- What factors were considered
- The rationale for the decision reached

The panel members are independent of the process up to the point of the second stage appeal being lodged, and have the appropriate experience of the transport issues faced by children and young people with special educational needs and or disabilities to ensure a balance is achieved between meeting the needs of parents and the local authority, and that road safety requirements are complied with.

What if I am not happy with the service provided?

HLT Complaints and Feedback Process

HLT aims to resolve any individual concerns or complaints about the day-to-day operation of the service within 20 school days. Where there are concerns regarding any aspects of travel assistance services, you are advised initially to write to the Head of the Hackney SEND Travel Assistance Service at, 8 Rigg Approach, London, E10 7QN or transport@learningtrust.co.uk.

Where there are concerns regarding travel assistance from the Pupil Benefits service, you are advised initially to write to the Head of Admissions and Pupil Benefits at, Pupil Benefits Team, Hackney Learning Trust, 1 Reading Lane, London E8 1GQ or pupilbenefits@learningtrust.co.uk.

Where parents, carers, schools or other professionals have safeguarding concerns in relation to SEND travel assistance and transport services, they should contact the Hackney SEND Travel Assistance

Service immediately and provide details of the concerns so that we may investigate and ensure procedures for safeguarding are adequately applied.

HLT's Safeguarding Policy outlines the procedures to be followed by all HLT staff. Furthermore, staff are also advised of, and expected to follow, the rules and regulations surrounding confidentiality and data protection.

Local Government Ombudsman

If you contacted us through our complaints procedure and you're not satisfied with our response to your complaint, you can ask the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) to investigate your complaint.

Local Government Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
Coventry, CV4 0EH
Tel: 0300 061 0614 (8.30am-5pm, Mon-Fri)
<http://www.lgo.org.uk/>

Contacting Hackney Learning Trust

Queries regarding applications or appeals:

SEND Administration Team, Hackney Learning Trust, 1 Reading Lane, London E8 1GQ.
Tel: 020 8820 7000 (Option 4)
Email: SEND.admin@learningtrust.co.uk

Notifying HLT of change in circumstances:

SEND Administration Team, Hackney Learning Trust, 1 Reading Lane, London E8 1GQ.
Tel: 020 8820 7000 (Option 4)
Email: SEND.admin@learningtrust.co.uk

Queries regarding transport of children and young people with SEN or mobility or disability difficulties:

SEND Travel Assistance Service, 8 Rigg Approach, London, E10 7QN.
Tel: 020 8558 4283
Email: transport@learningtrust.co.uk

Queries regarding travel assistance for income assessed or parents/carers with mobility or disability issues:

Pupil Benefits Team, Hackney Learning Trust, 1 Reading Lane, London E8 1GQ.
Tel: 020 8820 7248
Email: pupilbenefits@learningtrust.co.uk