

Free home to school transport: FAQs



To which school/s may I be entitled to receive free home to school transport?

Under the Department for Education's Home to School Travel and Transport Guidance (July 2014), local authorities (LA) have a duty to provide transport to children who are attending their nearest suitable school, where that school is over the statutory walking distance.

The nearest suitable school means the nearest qualifying school with places available that provides education appropriate to the age, ability and aptitude of the child.

Individual LAs will publish how they assess which qualifying school is nearest within their home to school transport policy. They may also offer additional discretionary free transport over and above their statutory duty; this will be published within their local policy.

How far away from home must the school be, to be eligible for free transport to school?

Central government sets the statutory walking distances. The school must be over two miles for children up to eight years old and over three miles for children aged eight and over. However, for children aged 8 to 11 from low-income families, the statutory walking distance remains at two miles.

For children aged 11 and over from low-income families and attending one of the nearest three schools, the school must be between two and six miles away. For children aged 11 and over from low-income families and attending their nearest denominational school chosen on faith grounds, this school must be between 2 and 15 miles away. There are slightly different rules and distances for the devolved areas of the UK; this document is for England.

How is the route measured?

The route is measured via the shortest available walking route. This is the shortest route along which a child, accompanied as necessary, may walk safely. It may include footpaths, bridleways and other pathways, as well as recognised roads.

What about if the route isn't safe to walk along from my quarter to school?

If no safe route is available, then free transport will be provided if the school is the nearest available school.

My school is 2.5 miles away by car, but the school transport team have said I am not eligible for free transport for my seven-year-old child - why might this be?

The statutory walking distance calculated by the transport team is not necessarily the same as car mileage. Footpaths, bridleways and other pathways can be used as the shortest, safest walking route.

I don't have an address yet - how will I know which is my nearest school?

This is tricky. It's possible to apply for schools using the Unit address; however, you could then find yourself ineligible for free school transport if your quarter is nearer another school with available places.

It is best to find out as much as you can about all the schools locally before you apply; including considering how you might transport your child to and from school. If you think that your eligibility may be affected, and you have no way to get your child to school by any other means, then it may be best to wait for an actual address first.

Alternatively, you may apply for a place from the Unit address and then, if your actual address is nearer to other schools, you can amend your application to apply for closer schools later.

If a place is not available at closer schools at this time, but you gained a place at the nearest available school from your previously known Unit address, transport should be provided by the LA.

We've been posted to an area where our friends live. I want my child to go to school with my friend's child - can they get the free school bus together?

Transport is assessed individually for each child. If your friend's child attends the nearest school to your home address and receives free transport because this school is over the statutory walking distance, then your child is also likely to be entitled to free transport.

However, this is assuming you gain a place at this school and the same age and distance criteria apply to the statutory walking distance.

If your friend's child is receiving free transport to a school that is not the nearest, but was the nearest school with an available place, then the free transport eligibility only applies to that particular child and wouldn't necessarily apply to your child. Your child will not be entitled to free transport to this school if there is a nearer school with an available place.

What about if I wanted to pay for a seat on the free school bus?

This may be available if the LA operates a vehicle to your child's school and there are spare seats available. This will be a local offer and often one that is temporary for that particular school year. The LA assesses school transport provision every year; they may remove provision at short notice if a pupil who is entitled to free home to school transport requires a seat on the vehicle.

My youngest child is starting Reception in September. Their sibling goes to a further away school as there were no places in the nearest school when we moved here last month. Will the eligibility for free school transport extend to both children?

There is no statutory duty for LAs to provide free transport in this scenario if there is a nearer school with an available place for the younger sibling.

If an LA does provide free transport in this scenario, then this is discretionary and is likely to have been agreed locally and stated within their home to school transport policy.

Whilst this scenario can face any family, Army or otherwise, AFF believes this is something that LAs could look at to improve the settling in and continuity experiences of mobile Army families.

We believe it is very important that siblings attend the same schools and indeed families tell us this regularly. Often their sibling is the one main constant in their lives. If transport is not provided in this scenario, LAs may provide a transport appeal process whereby parents can put forward a case to receive free transport exceptionally, outside of the authority's published home to school transport policy.

My children have been allocated places in different schools. One isn't happy and we would like to move that child to be with their sibling. Will they get the same free school transport?

This is unlikely, as it is your choice to move your child. Please assess how you will get your children to school before you move them. Please go in and speak with the school or contact the AFF Education and Childcare Specialist at ec@aff.org.uk

Will the Army help me get my child to school?

The MOD do not generally provide transport other than for welfare reasons, but can certainly help when you move into the area with information about the nearest schools. Look on the local HIVE website for more information.

I don't drive - is there more help available to me?

Sadly, the rules are the same whether the parents drive or not and there is no specific help for parents who don't drive. If public transport is not available in your area, please get in touch at ec@aff.org.uk

The nearest school is a school in special measures. I would like my children to go to a different school further away. Does this affect free transport provision?

Free school transport eligibility is not affected by a school being in special measures - the same rules apply.

I cannot be in two places at once for dropping children off - can I get help?

Free school transport can't help with this, but appealing for school places in the same school may help, as well as investigating paid transport.

How can I be sure that the paid school transport that I currently use will continue?

There are no guarantees, so it is best not to choose the school if this is the only means of transport open to you.

Where can I find out about what my new LA will offer on my next posting?

The best place to look is the LA website and type 'school transport' into the search box. There you will find further information and contact details for the school transport team.

What type of transport is on offer?

This will depend on the local circumstances, including the distance and number of children that need to be transported. The LA will provide the most appropriate and cost effective method of transport. Taxis, minibuses, coaches, petrol reimbursement and public transport season tickets (bus or train) may be offered.

What if I disagree with the decision?

In most authorities, it is possible to appeal against the decision. Find details of how to do this on the LA's website as well as from the school transport team themselves.