

School Transport Policy 2021-2022

The Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 requires Caerphilly County Borough Council (the Council) to make available information about their policies and the arrangements that are put in place for transporting learners.

In doing so, the Council's Learner Travel Policy, Information and Arrangements contain guidance designed to inform parents, carers and learners on how the policy is practically implemented and ensure that it is applied consistently and equitably across the County Borough.

Any decisions made by Council Officers regarding entitlement will be based on this document and, subject to compliance with the information contained within, will be considered to be final.

Statutory Provision of Free Transport

There is a statutory duty placed upon the Council to:

- Assess the travel needs of learners in its area.
- Provide free home to school transport for learners of compulsory school age attending primary school who live 2 miles or further from their "relevant" school.
- Provide free home to school transport for learners of compulsory school age attending secondary school who live 3 miles or further from their "relevant" school.
- Assess and meet the needs of children "looked after" in its area.
- Promote access to Welsh medium education.
- Promote sustainable modes of travel.

To meet this duty, the Council provides learners with free transport to their "relevant" school if they reside beyond "walking distance" to that school. The term "relevant" school applies to the catchment area or nearest Welsh, English, dual language or voluntary aided (faith) mainstream school or special school/class as appropriate.

The law relating to "walking distance" is defined as two miles for learners of compulsory school age receiving primary education and three miles for learners of compulsory school age receiving secondary education.

Discretionary Provision of Free Transport

Beyond the statutory minimum, the Council has determined that when assessing entitlement on the basis of "walking distance", to use the discretionary powers afforded to it under the provisions of the Measure to make a more generous provision to learners.

- The eligibility criterion for walking distance for learners receiving compulsory primary education at their “relevant” school has been set at 1.5 miles, instead of 2 miles as required by the Measure.
- The eligibility criterion for walking distance for learners receiving compulsory secondary education at their “relevant” school has been set at 2 miles, instead of 3 miles as required by the Measure.
- Free transport is provided to post 16 learners who meet the 2 mile eligibility criterion for two years after the end of compulsory education, rather than until the end of compulsory education (the last Friday in June of the school year in which a learner reaches the age of 16) as required by the Measure. This provision applies to full time attendance at the relevant school or college at which the approved course of study that they wish to pursue is offered.
- Free transport to their “relevant” school is provided to learners (as set out above) in accordance with their preferred religious denomination.

The term “relevant” school applies to the catchment area or nearest Welsh, English, dual language or voluntary aided (faith) mainstream school or special school/class as appropriate.

The discretionary elements of the Council’s policy are subject to review and may be discontinued. Any proposed changes will be subject to consultation with learners and parents/carers and, if taken forward by the Council, will usually apply from the start of a school year and will have regard to the Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance - June 2014 or its replacement.

Transport Provision

The provision of free school transport (as set out above) will be arranged to coincide with the start and end of the normal school day only, not at lunchtimes, and shall be provided during the school term time.

It is not provided for medical appointments, collection from school or college due to illness, detention requirements, and part time or examination timetables.

Where the Council has arranged for a learner to attend an out of county residential school, transport will normally only be provided at the start and end of each half term.

Transport will normally be provided from pick up points at approved bus stops on the nearest public transport route to the learner’s home.

Transport will not be provided to alternative addresses to suit parent's work or other commitments.

It will not always be possible to arrange the routes for our contracted vehicles to pass close to the home of a learner. In such circumstances, it may be necessary for parents or carers to make arrangements for the learner to reach the nearest available pick-up point on the contracted route allocated to them. Every effort will be made to keep as short as possible the distance from a learner's house to the pick-up point and will normally not exceed one mile.

For learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) transport is usually provided to and from the home address, with every effort being made to collect/drop off at the kerbside. It is for parents/carers to take/meet their child(ren) to/from the vehicle.

No arrangements will involve the transport provided operating onto un-adopted roads, private land or farm access tracks.

It is the intention of the Council to provide a system of transportation that will seek to carry learners safely, comfortably and without unreasonable levels of stress.

Parental Preference

Should parents/carers choose to place their child(ren) in a school other than the “relevant” school (Welsh, English, dual language or voluntary aided (faith) mainstream school, or special school/class as appropriate) then those parents/carers are totally liable to organise and pay for the cost of transport to the chosen school.

Transport for Children with Additional Needs

Free transport is provided for all pupils who attend Special Resource Bases and our Special School - Trinity Fields School and Resource Centre, which are not held within their own schools irrespective of distance and family circumstances. Special provision includes classes for children with profound and multiple learning difficulties, physical disabilities and additional learning difficulties, complex learning needs, hearing impairment, speech and language difficulties, social communication and autism, behavioural difficulties and pupil referral units.

Transport to Welsh Medium and Dual Language Schools

There is no statutory requirement to provide transport to Welsh medium and dual language schools. The Council's current policy is that learners attending the nearest Welsh medium or dual language school receive free transport in accordance with the Council's agreed policy on walking distance (as set out above).

Transport to Voluntary Aided and Special Agreement Schools

There is no statutory requirement to provide transport to voluntary aided (faith) schools. The Council's current policy is that learners attending the nearest voluntary aided school of the parent/carers denomination receive free transport in accordance with the Council's agreed discretionary policy on walking distance (as set out above).

Transport to schools in neighbouring Authorities

Pupils residing within Caerphilly County Borough area who attend schools located in neighbouring authorities receive free transport provided that the school attended is the relevant or nearest school, and that they reside beyond walking distance (as set out above).

Transport on Medical Grounds

Free transport to and from school may be provided on medical grounds e.g. chronic illness or temporary incapacity for short but continuous periods, upon receipt of a written recommendation from an appropriate Health/Medical Officer. Each case will be considered on its own merits and where agreed, this provision will be subject to a regular review.

Each application must specify:

- The nature of the illness or incapacity.
- The reason that this impacts on travel to school.
- The extent of the impact e.g. expected duration.

Transport on medical grounds is only given consideration where a child is attending his or her 'relevant' school or where the child has been placed at a school because of his or her medical needs.

Transport may not be in the form of a dedicated vehicle from the house address where a reasonable adjustment to the Council's normal practices can be made in order to accommodate the learner's specific needs e.g. the allocation of a seat on a nearby contracted school bus.

Special Arrangements: Hazardous Routes

The criterion used to determine the eligibility to receive free school transport is based on walking distance, measured by the shortest, available walking route. A route is considered to be available if it is safe for a learner to walk alone or, if appropriate for the age of the learner, accompanied by an appropriate adult. It is recognised that occasions will arise when routes may become hazardous. In these circumstances, the Council reserves the right to provide free school transport over distances below the discretionary limits if this is recommended by appropriate officers in the interests of the safety of the relevant learners.

In determining the comparative safety of a walking route, the Council will conduct an assessment of the risks that escorting parents/carers and learners might encounter along the route between home and school. The assessment of a route will take place at the time of the day and on the days of the week that learners would be expected to use the route. It will take a road safety perspective and follow the Welsh Government Statutory Guidance on Risk Assessing Walked Routes to School.

As a matter of policy, routes that are considered hazardous will be reviewed biennially and discretionary provision may be withdrawn where the identified hazard has been mitigated and the route identified as available to walk in safety. Parents/carers will be given at least one term advance notice of the withdrawal of such discretionary transport.

Over-Subscribed Schools

If a learner cannot be admitted to their “relevant” school (the catchment or nearest Welsh, English, dual language or voluntary aided (faith) mainstream school or special school/class as appropriate) and, as a result, has to attend another school beyond the walking distance from their home then transport will be provided to the next nearest “relevant” school. In such circumstances, consideration will be given to transporting siblings to the same school.

Protected Provision – Catchment Area Variations

Where the Council decides to vary the catchment area for a school (Welsh, English, dual language or voluntary aided (faith) mainstream school or special school/class as appropriate), existing transport arrangements will be protected for the learners living in the areas affected for the duration of their attendance at the school or until they reach the end of that phase. In exceptional circumstances, consideration may be given to transporting siblings to the same school.

Concessionary Transport

From time to time it is possible that the numbers to be carried by the LA will be below the seating capacity of the vehicle being used. In such cases the LA will reserve the right, using the appropriate powers, to make spare seats available to children attending their relevant school who live below the discretionary distance, provided that there is no additional cost to the authority. It must be understood that the provision of this facility does not represent an obligation on behalf of the LA and, being entirely dependent on the capacity of the vehicle used, may result in withdrawal of the facility at short notice.

Concessionary transport cannot be considered until after the second week of September, when accurate numbers of pupil’s travelling during the year are known. Requests must be made in writing to these offices giving details of the pupil and school attended by no later than the third Monday of September. All requests received by that date will be considered

and any available seats will be allocated on the basis of those that reside furthest from the school. Requests thereafter will be considered depending on availability.

Change of Family Home

Pupils in receipt of free transport whose families move to an address outside the traditional local area of the school to which transport has been provided will be assessed in accordance with the eligibility criteria (as specified above).

Families need to be mindful of this fact when they are considering moving home, especially if that move takes place during primary education, in years seven, eight or nine of secondary education, or in years twelve and thirteen of further education.

Pupils who move on a permanent basis after the October half term in year ten, and year eleven will be provided with a free bus or train pass to enable them to complete their current course at the same school, provided they were attending their “relevant” school and that they now reside beyond the walking distance (as specified above).

Dual Residency

Where a pupil has more than one home because the child’s parents are not living together but the child lives partly with each parent, or with a parent and also at a child’s home, then both places of residence should be regarded as their place of ordinary residence.

Only permanent established living arrangements will be considered e.g. a learner who stays two nights of every school week with one person with parental responsibility and three nights of every school week with the other, or alternate weeks with each parent. Such arrangements do not apply where a learner spends weekends with a different parent from where the learner lives during the school week. The nights of the school week are Sunday evening/Monday morning to Thursday evening/Friday morning inclusive.

If the second home address is:

- Above the discretionary distance – They will be entitled to free transport for the days they will be travelling on that route.
- Below the discretionary distance - No transport will be provided.

Where a child has two places of ordinary residence in two different local authorities, then each of those local authorities will be responsible for the child’s travel arrangements when in its area.

Where pupils attend, as a result of parental preference, a school, which is not their relevant school, it must be understood that parents accept full responsibility for transport arrangements. This will include making all the necessary arrangements as well as meeting the cost.

Monitoring

All vehicles will be available for random checks by the DVSA or other appropriate body, when required. Any complaints received by the LA from parents concerning services or vehicles will be immediately investigated. In the event of the complaint being upheld, action will be taken in accordance with the operator's terms of contract. The LA will undertake random checks on contracts, to ensure that the contracts are being complied with, in a manner acceptable to the LA.

Mode of Transport

In all cases, the efficient use of resources will dictate the mode of transport provided (subject to any additional needs requirements). Transport may be provided by means of contracted school transport services or existing public transport services which, together with the size and type of transport (bus, minibus, train, taxi, etc.) will be dictated by cost effectiveness. In exceptional cases, learner or parental reimbursement will be offered where this is the most cost-effective method of providing transport. The provisions of Section 88 of the Transport Act 1985 place a duty on the Council to secure, in the interests of its residents, the best value for money from expenditure on public passenger transport as a whole. The Council will therefore be mindful of its duty to provide socially necessary (public transport) bus or train services when arranging transport provision for learners.

Journey Times

The Council does not specify a time limit for journeys. However, journey times should be reasonable, taking into account the age and individual needs of the learners, and the nature, purpose and circumstances of each journey. Where parents/carers express preferences for their children to attend Welsh/dual language schools or voluntary aided (faith) schools that are some distance away from their homes, journeys may generally be longer. This will also apply to some ALN journeys.

Provision for Learners Aged 16-19

There is no statutory requirement to provide transport for post 16 learners. The Council's current policy is that post 16 learners, who are attending a course of full-time study at their nearest or catchment school or college at which the approved timetabled courses are studied, will be eligible for free transport, in accordance with the Council's agreed policy on walking distance (as set out above). A full-time course is determined as one which requires attendance of 16 or more hours per week.

If the same courses are available in a number of schools / campuses, free transport is only provided to the closest school / campus, unless the course(s) at the nearest school / campus are full. This will be determined by officers.

Learners within the 2 mile distance, who choose to enrol at a school / campus that is further away, and there are places available at the nearest school / campus, are expected to make their own travel arrangements.

No transport will be provided for learners beyond the second academic year after the end of compulsory education. In exceptional circumstances, transport may be provided until the end of the academic year in which a learner attains their 19th birthday. Travel arrangements in respect of any subsequent attendance are the responsibility of the learner.

This transport policy covers school 6th form and college full time further education courses only approved by Qualifications Wales and does not extend to higher education courses funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW).

Coleg Gwent Catchment Area

All students who reside within the catchment area of the schools listed below are within the catchment area for Gwent Tertiary College for post 16 Education. Students are however only eligible for free transport if they are attending the nearest campus offering the course.

- Blackwood Comprehensive School
- Islwyn High School
- Newbridge School
- Risca Community Comprehensive School
- Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni - (Islwyn Area)

Should students who reside within these catchment areas choose to attend an alternative education establishment, assistance will only be provided if the student is attending the nearest education establishment to home offering the course.

The mileage limits will be the same as those applying to school pupils. The arrangements as specified for schools above, apply equally to college students.

Ystrad Mynach College Catchment Area

All students who reside within the catchment area of the schools listed below are also within the catchment area for Ystrad Mynach College for post 16 Education.

- Idris Davies School 3-18
- Heolddu Comprehensive School n Lewis School Pengam

- Lewis Girls Comprehensive School
- Bedwas High School
- St Martins Comprehensive School
- St Cenydd Community School
- Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni (Rhymney Valley Area)

Should students who reside within these catchment areas choose to attend an alternative education establishment other than Ystrad Mynach College or their catchment comprehensive school, assistance will only be provided if the student is attending the nearest education establishment to their residence offering the course.

The mileage limits will be the same as those applying to school pupils. The arrangements as specified for schools above, apply equally to college students.

Travel Grant

Where a course of study is not available locally (i.e. at the relevant 'school or college, as appropriate') a travel grant of £363 is available.

This travel grant is payable in six Instalments of £60.50. The travel grant is paid at the end of each half term/term after confirmation has been received of the continuing attendance.

Petrol Allowance

Students who meet the criteria for the provision of free transport to their chosen education establishment can apply for petrol allowance.

Petrol Allowance is paid at a rate of fifteen pence per mile. Should a student wish to apply for petrol allowance then they should put a supporting letter with their application detailing why they are unable to travel on the prescribed transport. Petrol allowance is only normally payable in circumstances where either the contracted vehicle or public transport is not suitable. Authorised petrol allowance claims are payable at the end of each half term/term.

Work based learning

The Authority does not provide assistance to those students on work-based learning courses. Students should contact the provider who may be able to offer assistance.

Post 16 learners may be eligible for the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), funded by Welsh Government and administered on their behalf by Student Finance Wales. The EMA is intended to support post 16 learners to access post 16 education. Details to determine eligibility for EMA are available from the Student Finance Wales website at www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/fe/ema

Travel Behaviour Code

The Welsh Government has introduced an initiative called “The Travel Behaviour Code” to promote safe travel for all children and young people, by setting out the standards of behaviour required when travelling between home and school. The code applies to all modes of travel to and from education institutions, and learners must comply with the code whilst travelling to and from their place of learning.

The code sets out standards of behaviour expected of a learner when travelling to and from their place of learning and encourages schools and Councils to work proactively with learners, their parents/carers and the community to promote positive behaviour.

Parents should ensure the learner has understood the code and must encourage good behaviour.

It is compulsory to wear a seat belt on dedicated mainstream school transport.

Parents/carers are requested to emphasise the importance of wearing a seat belt to their child(ren).

In the event that a learner does not comply with the Travel Behaviour Code the Council can for a period of time withdraw an individual’s entitlement to free transport. In the event transport is withdrawn from a learner, it is the responsibility of the learner’s parents to arrange transport to and from their place of learning.

Appeals

Any appeals against a refusal to grant free transport should be made in writing to the Integrated Transport Unit, giving full details of the reasons for appeal for consideration.

Consideration will also be given to individual written applications for discretionary transport outside the normal policy criteria. These will be considered on their respective merits and in exceptional circumstances, transport may be provided outside the normal policy criteria. If you have any concerns about school transport, you should contact the Integrated Transport Unit.

For further information about school transport policies and procedures please contact the Integrated Transport Unit at educationtransport@caerphilly.gov.uk or 01443 864810.