



BEDFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Statutory School Age
Transport Policy
2026/27

Last published June 2026

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 Parents and carers have a legal duty and a responsibility to ensure that their children attend school regularly and to make any necessary arrangements to ensure that they attend. In certain circumstances based on statutory guidance the Council has a duty to provide transport assistance and this document sets out these circumstances. The Statutory School Age Transport Policy for Bedford Borough, set out below, is for children of statutory school age including those with special educational needs and disabilities, attending mainstream and special schools.

1.2 Statutory School Age

- 1.2.1 A child begins to be of statutory school age on the prescribed day which either falls on or follows their fifth birthday. The prescribed days are currently 31st August, 31st December and 31st March, this is the term following their fifth birthday. A child ceases to be of statutory school age on the school leaving date in the academic year in which they turn 16. The school leaving date is currently set as the last Friday in June. An academic year commences on 1st September and ends on 31st August. Raising the participation age does not affect the statutory school age.
- 1.2.2 Transport is not normally awarded to children who are below statutory school age. Transport will only be awarded where there are exceptional circumstances and on a discretionary basis.

1.3 Catchment Areas

- 1.3.1 Catchment areas represent a geographical area and are used by a number of Bedford Borough Schools to determine the allocation of school places. Each school's admissions criteria will explain what priority is given to children that live within the priority area. The Local Authority may be the admissions authority for the school, or the school's governing body may be responsible for the admission arrangements. This will usually depend on the status of the school.
- 1.3.2 Schools set their own catchment areas. Free transport assistance is not provided on the basis of catchment areas.

1.4 Nearest School Policy

- 1.4.1 Free home to school transport is provided to the nearest suitable school from the home address within Bedford Borough.
- 1.4.2 The Council has no duty to provide free transport if parent(s)/carer(s) send their child to a school that we do not consider to be the nearest, suitable school. In this case, the child will be considered as attending a 'parental preference' school and parent(s)/carer(s) remain responsible for any necessary transport arrangements or associated costs.
- 1.4.3 The nearest suitable school may or may not be the catchment area school.
- 1.4.4 Free home to school transport is only provided where the eligibility criteria contained within this policy are met.
- 1.4.5 Free home to school transport may be provided to schools outside Bedford Borough where there is a statutory duty to do so and the eligibility criteria are met.
- 1.4.6 Free home to school transport will be provided to St Thomas More School where it is the first preference school, the nearest school to the home address and the eligibility criteria are met.
- 1.4.7 In exceptional circumstances, free home to school transport may be provided to schools that are not the nearest school to the home address.

1.5 Qualifying School

- 1.5.1 A qualifying school is defined as an educational establishment providing statutory school age education which is free of charge to parent(s)/carer(s) and is registered and monitored by Ofsted and has spaces available.

- 1.5.2 'Suitable school' does not mean the most suitable school for a child. Schools are able to meet a wide range of needs. The nearest secondary school to the home of a child of secondary school age, for example, will almost always be their nearest suitable school.
- 1.5.3 For children transferring school; the nearest qualifying school is defined as a school with an appropriate year group for the age of the child, not the nearest school with a relevant point of entry.
- 1.5.4 Free home to school transport for secondary school age children (years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 inclusive) will only be provided to the nearest qualifying school with an existing or planned year 11.
- 1.5.5 Please note exceptions listed in section 1.12 of this policy.

1.6 Eligibility Criteria - Distance

- 1.6.1 Free home to school transport is only provided to the nearest suitable school with the exception of 1.9. Children who attend their nearest qualifying school will be provided with free home to school transport if they exceed the statutory walking distance criteria of;

- a) more than 2 miles away from their home for children aged under 8.

Children aged 8 years of age who are entitled to receive free home to school transport under the distance criteria will continue to receive free home to school transport until the end of the academic year in which they reach the age of eight where they live between 2 and 3 miles from the school.

- b) more than 3 miles away from their home for children aged between 8 and 16.

- c) Children aged 16 years of age who are entitled to receive free home to school transport under the distance criteria will continue to receive free home to school transport until the end of the academic year in which they reach the age of 16. Young people over the age of 16 may be eligible under the post statutory school age policy.

1.7 Eligibility Criteria – SEND

A child is eligible for free home to school travel to school if 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 needs, disability or mobility problem, even if they were accompanied by their parent(s)/carer(s).

Not every child with an EHCP or who attends a special school will be eligible for free travel to school.

Bedford Borough Council will assess eligibility on the grounds of special educational needs, disability or mobility problems on a case-by-case basis. The assessment will take account of the child's physical ability to walk to school and any health and safety issues related to their special educational needs, disability or mobility problems. It will take account of whether they would be able to walk to school if they were accompanied.

1.8 Eligibility Criteria – Unsafe Walking Route

- 1.8.1 Children who live under the statutory walking distances may be entitled to free home to school transport to their nearest qualifying school where the nature of the route is such that a child cannot be expected to walk, accompanied by an adult as necessary, in reasonable safety.
- 1.8.2 Children living less than half a mile from school are not entitled to receive free home to school transport on road safety grounds.

- 1.8.3 Bedford Borough Council follows the guidance published by Road Safety GB to assess walking routes to schools.
- 1.8.4 The walking route must have;
- a) a continuous adequate footway on roads that carry normal to heavy traffic or
 - b) step-offs on roads that are lightly trafficked, but have adequate sight lines to provide sufficient advance warning or
 - c) on roads with low traffic flow, no step-offs, but sufficiently good sight lines to provide adequate advance warning
- and;
- d) if there is a need to cross roads, there must be crossing facilities e.g. zebra or pelican crossings, pedestrian phases at traffic signals (including necessary refuges), school crossing patrols, traffic calming (sufficient to enable safe road crossing), pedestrian refuges, etc. or;
 - e) sufficient gaps in the traffic flow and sight lines to allow enough opportunity to cross safely.
- 1.8.5 Walking routes are designated as safe or not safe by an independent 3rd party assessment, conducted in accordance with 1.8.4 above.
- 1.8.6 Route reviews will be undertaken when changes in the road network or additional pathways mean a safe route to school may be identified. Major changes to the public highway will also be considered as and when the change occurs.

1.9 Extended Rights

- 1.9.1 Children whose parent(s)/carer(s) are in receipt of Universal Credit with annual earnings of £7,400 or less will be provided with free home to school transport if the child is;
- a) aged 8 but under the age of 11, attending the nearest qualifying school and the school is more than 2 miles by the shortest available walking route.
 - b) aged 11 to 16 attending their one of the 3 nearest qualifying schools where they live between 2 and 6 miles from the school by the shortest available walking route, but not more than six miles (by motorised route) from their home.
 - c) aged 11 to 16 attending their nearest qualifying school in accordance with their parent(s)/carer(s) religion or belief, provided it is more than two miles (by the shortest available walking route), but not more than fifteen miles (by motorised route) from their home.
- 1.9.2 For the above age groups, the child must be of the relevant age on 1st September of the academic year for which they wish to apply.

1.10 Free home to school transport to schools based on a particular religion, belief or philosophical conviction

- 1.10.1 There is no statutory entitlement to denominational transport. The Council will however have regard to any wish of a parent(s)/carer(s) to have their child educated at a school on the basis of a particular religion, belief or philosophical conviction.
- 1.10.2 Having considered the wishes of the parent(s)/carer(s) to have their child so educated the policy is normally not to make such travel arrangements.
- 1.10.3 The Council would expect that the majority of parent(s)/carer(s) would be able to facilitate their child's attendance at school, either by providing the transport themselves, or by making alternative arrangements. The Council will continue to meet its statutory obligations, with regard to denominational transport, outlined in 1.9.1(c) above.

1.11 Medical transport

- 1.11.1 Discretionary travel assistance may be provided where a child has a temporary medical problem or if they have a long term condition that prevents them from walking to school or accessing existing school transport.
- 1.11.2 Discretionary travel assistance may also be provided where parent(s)/carer(s) have a temporary medical problem or if they have a long term condition that prevents them from accompanying their child to school.
- 1.11.3 Each case is considered on its individual merits and relevant supporting independent professional evidence will be required. The evidence must clearly state inappropriate types of transport and be specific about appropriate distances before transport can be awarded.
- 1.11.4 This would be for one return journey per day, at the beginning and end of the standard school day, and solely to the nearest suitable school.

1.12 Exceptions

- 1.12.1 In some areas the majority of the houses are closer to one particular school or there may be local circumstances where a particular school may not be the nearest school for the whole area but where an exception can be made. The following exceptions allow free home to school transport to the schools listed for children living within the following area boundaries where the eligibility criteria are met.

1.12.2 Primary School Exceptions

Area	School
Bletsoe	Riseley CofE Primary
Bolnhurst	Kymbrook Primary
Cardington	Sheerhatch Primary
Colesden	Roxton CofE Academy
Colmworth	Wilden CofE Primary
Keysoe	Kymbrook Primary
Melchbourne	Riseley CofE Primary
Pavenham	Pinchmill Primary
Pertenhall	Riseley CofE Primary
Stevington	Bromham CofE Primary
Yielden	Riseley CofE Primary

1.12.3 Secondary School Exceptions

Area	School
Bolnhurst	Sharnbrook Academy
Bromham	Lincroft Academy
Cople	Mark Rutherford School
Keysoe	Sharnbrook Academy
Little Staughton	Sharnbrook Academy
Pavenham	Sharnbrook Academy
Milton Ernest	Sharnbrook Academy
Thurleigh	Sharnbrook Academy
Turvey	Sharnbrook Academy

Area	School
Willington	Mark Rutherford School

1.13 Children for whom there are particular exceptional social circumstances

- 1.13.1 Children for whom there are exceptional social circumstances may be entitled to free home to school transport where these circumstances would otherwise prevent them from attending school regularly.
- 1.13.2 Each case will be considered on an individual basis. An example of exceptional social circumstances would be a child who is Looked After by the Local Authority and transport is necessary to facilitate regular attendance at school.
- 1.13.3 Free home to school transport under these circumstances is provided on a temporary basis and is reviewed regularly. This is usually only provided for one school term.

1.14 General Policy Principles

- 1.14.1 Where children receive free home to school transport as a result of an error, such free home to school transport will be withdrawn within a reasonable timescale.
- 1.14.2 If as a result of making an in year application, it is not possible to offer a place at the preferred school(s), the Council will nominate a place at another school. The nominated school will be the nearest suitable school with space available. In this case, free home to school transport will be provided where the eligibility criteria are met.
- 1.14.3 However, if the nominated school is the school the child already attends, free home to school transport will only be provided if there has been a significant change in personal circumstances e.g. a change of address where the eligibility criteria continue to be met.
- 1.14.4 If the child remains at the current school which, is not the nominated school, the transport arrangements and costs are the responsibility of the parent(s)/carer(s).
- 1.14.5 Free home to school transport will not be provided to nominated schools if the original application to school admissions was not submitted within the published deadlines.
- 1.14.6 Free home to school transport will not be provided to children attending nominated schools where the child was taken off roll at the previous school due to an extended holiday.
- 1.14.7 Parent(s)/carer(s) are expected to accompany their child to and from school where they consider it necessary. The need for parent(s)/carer(s) to be at work or the fact they have children attending more than one school will not normally be considered as a reason why transport assistance should be provided.
- 1.14.8 'Home' is defined as the place where the child is habitually and normally resident. Suitable travel arrangements will only be made using the child's home address, as defined. The Local Authority is not responsible for providing travel arrangements from any other address. The Local Authority is only responsible for providing travel arrangements for children resident in Bedford Borough. The Local Authority will only provide travel arrangements from one address, which meets the definition described.
- 1.14.9 Bedford Borough will determine the 'home address' of the child considering a number of factors as follows:
- The address used for schools' admissions purposes.
 - The address of the parent who receives child benefit (if applicable).
 - The address as defined in any applicable court order.
 - The address as held by the school attended by the child.

- 1.14.10 The measurement used to calculate the distance from home to school is defined as the shortest route using a network of public rights of way including footpaths, bridleways, and other pathways, as well as recognised roads. The measurement is calculated from the nearest point on the 'walking route network' to the boundary of the child's home to the nearest accessible school gate. The measurements are taken annually, using a computerised mapping system, in accordance with admissions application dates.

Section 2 – Transport Operations Policy

2.1 Code of Good Conduct on School Transport

- 2.1.1 Bedford Borough Council has a Code of Good Conduct when travelling to and from school. All children and young persons are expected to adhere to the policy. Failure to abide by the code of good conduct may result in a temporary ban from transport or in extreme cases, home to school transport may be withdrawn.

2.2 Sustainable School Travel Strategy

- 2.2.1 The Local Authority has a sustainable school travel strategy which is available at www.bedford.gov.uk/schooltransport

2.3 Provision of Transport

- 2.3.1 Where a child is assessed as eligible, the Council will determine the most appropriate means of transport. The transport provided will depend on a range of factors, including (but not limited to) the age of the child, the distance between the child's home and the educational establishment, the nature of the route, the child's individual needs including any Special Educational Needs and Disabilities that they may have, and the availability and suitability of transport provision.
- 2.3.2 The Council will provide transport in one of the following ways:
- an annual bus pass for use on a designated bus route
 - commission transport by taxi or other suitable vehicle
 - financial assistance
- 2.3.3 As a general guide, where reasonable, the journey time for a child of primary school age should be up to 45 minutes each way, and up to 75 minutes each way for a child of secondary school age, including any time taken to walk to a pick-up point.
- 2.3.4 Where approved for travel assistance, this does not imply a door to door service. The Council will consider whether or not the child would be expected to walk unreasonably long distances from their home or school to a 'pick up' point. The distance will depend on a range of circumstances, including the age of the child, their individual needs and the nature of the route they are expected to walk to the pickup point.
- 2.3.5 Parent(s)/Carer(s) remain responsible for their child before they board the vehicle in the morning, when they are travelling and when they leave the vehicle after their return journey.
- 2.3.6 Free home to school transport will apply to one return journey per day at the normal start and finish times of the school day. Free home to school transport will not be provided at a later or earlier time for children to attend before or after school clubs, detention or sporting activities. It is the responsibility of the parent(s)/carer(s) to make alternative arrangements in these circumstances.
- 2.3.7 The Council will not ordinarily be able to support transport arrangements for non-standard or part-time timetables; such arrangements are discretionary and the Council can only consider supporting in exceptional circumstances, where it can be deemed an efficient use of Council resources.
- 2.3.8 Subject to 1.11 children from secondary school age, who are entitled to free home to school transport, may be expected to use public transport including one route change.

- 2.3.9 Where eligible, appropriate support will be provided to enable the child to attend a school within the statutory walking distance. Where appropriate, parent(s)/carer(s) may be offered an escort to walk their child a short distance to the school.
- 2.3.10 Transport is only provided to and from 'home', except where it is agreed that a child will attend a respite placement, during term-time

Section 3 – Appeal and Complaints Procedure

3.1 If you feel aggrieved by a decision taken

- 3.1.1 All parent(s)/carer(s) have the right to appeal if they disagree with the decision regarding transport eligibility. Bedford Borough Council offer a two stage appeal process as detailed below.

3.2 The Appeal Process

- 3.2.1 Parent(s)/Carer(s) have 20 working days from receipt of the local authority's home to school transport decision to make a written request asking for a review of the decision.
- 3.2.2 You may challenge a decision on any or all of the following grounds:
- Eligibility - you believe that we have failed to take into account some significant factor in assessing whether your child is eligible for travel assistance
 - Distance measurement between home and school
 - Safety of the walking route between home and school
 - Transport arrangements offered are not suitable for the child or young person's needs
- 3.2.3 Your appeal should detail all the reasons why you believe the decision should be reviewed and give details of any exceptional circumstances you believe should be considered when the decision is reviewed. You should submit any evidence that supports your appeal (for example letters from your school, medical professional or social worker, or financial evidence such as benefit eligibility). You can appeal for any reason or combination of reasons, but you should carefully consider if you have sufficient additional evidence to support your case.
- 3.2.4 Within 20 working days of receipt of the appeal a senior officer, who was independent of the original decision, will review the original decision made and send the appellant a detailed written notification of the outcome of their review and information about how parent(s)/carer(s) can escalate their case to stage two (if appropriate).
- 3.2.5 The Appellant has 20 working days from receipt of the local authority's stage one written decision notification to make a written request to escalate the matter to stage two, which is a review by an independent appeal panel.
- 3.2.6 Stage two appeals will be decided by a Transport Appeals Panel of three Councillors. All will be impartial and have no member interests/roles in Transport, Education or Social Services. Appellants will be advised of the names of the Councillors who will decide their appeal
- 3.2.7 The panel will consider all appeals on their individual merits. The procedure will normally be as follows:
- a). The Presenting Officer will be invited to explain the Council's case
 - b). The Appellant and the Panel can ask questions about the Council's case.
 - c). The Appellant will be invited to explain their case.
 - d). The Presenting Officer and Panel will ask the Appellant questions about their case.
 - e). The Presenting Officer will sum up their case (they cannot mention any new evidence or points).
 - f). The Appellant will sum up their case (they cannot mention any new evidence or points).
- 3.2.8 The Panel will make their decisions after they have heard all of the appeals they are dealing with on that occasion. Neither the appellant nor the Presenting Officer will be present when they

make their decision. The Clerk will be present to record the decision and provide legal/procedural advice. The Panel will either uphold the appeal or they will dismiss the appeal.

- 3.2.9 The Clerk will notify the Appellant within 5 working days after the decision is made explaining the result and how the Panel reached their decisions.
- 3.2.10 The Appeal Panel's decision is final and binding, they cannot review their decision. However, an appellant may make a complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman if they feel there has been any administrative fault in the way the Panel has reached its decision.