WANDSWORTH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS HOME TO SCHOOL TRAVEL ASSISTANCE POLICY

1. Introduction
1.1 Wandsworth Borough Council is committed to meeting the assessed needs of children with Special Education Needs (SEN) who have a statement of SEN / an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or who have an Assessment Placement in one of the borough’s specialist provisions. It recognises that children with a Statement or EHC Plan may require assistance to travel to / from school. This Policy sets out the criteria under which transport support may be offered to enable children to attend school. This policy only applies to Wandsworth Borough residents. Residents of other boroughs attending Wandsworth schools should apply to the Local Authority where they normally live.

1.2 This SEN Travel Assistance Policy replaces any previous policies and builds on consultation which was undertaken to develop more flexible approaches to providing travel assistance and to emphasise the benefits of enabling young people to become more independent. The provision of travel training will enable the development of young people’s skills and confidence to use public transport and allow them to become more independent, while reducing reliance on SEN travel assistance. Nationally, as the policy direction changes towards personalisation, there is also a greater expectation that the use of personal budgets will become commonplace. As this policy is implemented, the Council expects that over time, the balance will shift towards more families organising their own travel arrangements via a Travel Assistance Budget in a way that better meets their individual needs.

1.3 This policy relates to children and young people of compulsory school age, that is, 5-16, unless otherwise stated.

1.4 This document will be reviewed every three years as a minimum but this may be brought forward if there are changes to legislation or DfE guidance.

2. The Statutory Duty
2.1 Section 509(1) of the Education Act 1996 requires a Local Authority to decide whether or not it needs to make arrangements for provision of travel assistance for pupils with a statement of SEN / an EHCP. If a Local Authority decides that this is necessary, then it must decide what form of travel assistance is suitable and organise it free of charge.

2.2 Children with statements of SEN / an ECHP may be provided with travel assistance dependent on the nature and level of their SEN and disability. This applies to children and young people in both mainstream and special schools.

2.3 Attendance at a special school does not automatically entitle a pupil to travel assistance. LAs must consider each pupil’s particular circumstances on their merits even if they fall outside the scope of the LA’s published policy, and take account of any representations made to them.

3. General Approach and Guiding Principles
3.1 As a general rule, the Council considers that the majority of children and young people will be able to travel to and from school by walking, taking free public bus transport or cycling accompanied by an adult dependent on age / stage of development.

3.2 Parents and carers have a legal responsibility to ensure that their child attends school and are expected to take their children to school themselves wherever possible. Many families have complex childcare and employment patterns. It is not within the framework of this policy to provide travel assistance simply because the complexity of these arrangements makes it challenging for parents or carers to take their child to school. However this policy sets out the travel assistance available in cases where a child or young
person cannot be reasonably expected to travel to school safely on account of their special educational needs / disability.

3.3 **Key guiding principles:** this policy has assumed three key principles for special educational needs transport:

- Ability not disability;
- Safety and reasonable comfort; and
- Cost effectiveness

3.3.1 **About ability not disability** – children with special educational needs should be travelling wherever possible with or in a similar manner to their peers. Their travelling from home to school should be supporting their independence and be enabling rather than disabling. Therefore the aim is to provide travel assistance in the *least restrictive way* as determined by the Local Authority;

3.3.2 **In safety and reasonable comfort** – children and young people should be able to travel to school in a safe and reasonably comfortable way whether they are walking, taking public transport or being taken by an adult. Where the Council is providing a particular type of transport solution eg school bus (see section 6.8 below) pupils should travel in appropriate vehicles, which are punctual, with appropriately trained staff and equipment and working effectively with the school, parents/carers, young people and transport providers.

3.3.3 **As cost effective as possible** – means not only making sure school travel assistance is focussed on those who need it most, but that it is provided in the most cost effective way; that expenditure and trends are monitored to make sure spending is within budget as a means of ensuring efficient use of local resources.

4. **Definitions**

4.1 A pupil with special educational needs for the purposes of this policy is a child / young person who is the subject of a statement of SEN / an EHCP or who is placed at a special school / specialist resourced provision in a mainstream school under emergency arrangements (an Assessment Placement).

4.2 The LA recognises that pupils with statements of SEN / an EHCP have a range of challenges to face and may have difficulty in making their own way to local schools. Some may have particular special educational needs that require them to travel to school outside the borough.

5. **Applying for Travel Assistance**

5.1 Parents / carers submit an Application for Home to School Travel Assistance to the Special Needs Assessment Service. A senior officer in Special Needs Assessment Service (SNAS) has the delegated authority to decide whether a child / young person is eligible for travel assistance based on the evidence in the application and the statement / EHCP. If it is agreed that the child / young person is eligible for travel assistance, the Council will work with the family to agree the type of assistance that will be provided. This decision will be based on the identified needs of the individual child or young person. Priority will always be given to solutions that reduce reliance upon Council services, empower parents, and develop independence. The Council will always explore with parents / carers as a starting point the offer of a Travel Assistance Budget (TAB) or for young people attending secondary school, Independent Travel Training in the first instance.

5.2 Travel assistance will not be recorded in the Statement or EHCP except in circumstances where the pupil is working towards a specific outcome for instance being able to travel independently, in which case the outcome and related support will be written into section E (see section 6.3 on Independent Travel Training).
6. What travel assistance may be offered

6.1 As indicated above the Council will always explore with parents / carers the offer of a Travel Assistance Budget (TAB) or for young people attending secondary school, Independent Travel Training in the first instance.

6.2 Travel Assistance Budget (TAB): The Council will make a payment to parents / carers to enable them to create and manage personalised travel arrangements that best and most flexibly suit the needs of their child and family. This budget can be spent in any way seen fit to enable the child to get to school, keeping flexibility and control with the family. The parent / carer must be in a position to arrange services to meet the travel assistance needs of the eligible child or young person, and must spend these payments on services which facilitate the child or young person’s attendance at school. TAB payments confer responsibilities on the recipient. If a parent / carer receive a TAB, it is their duty to use that payment to arrange for their child to get to and from school every school day. It is parents’ responsibility to ensure that travel provided is safe and accessible and that school attendance is maintained. The Council will consider any package or option proposed by a parent or group of parents that enables parents to take full or partial responsibility for travel arrangements for an eligible child / children. The budget will be individually tailored to each family’s circumstance and must be a cheaper option than the alternative assistance arrangements. A TAB proposal can be refused if these conditions are not met. More information is available in the leaflet on the Local Offer website.

6.3 Independent Travel Training: Travel training is available for secondary aged young people who have been assessed as being ready and able to begin learning to travel to and from school independently. Independent travel training, focused on the needs and capabilities of a young person, can increase independence by developing personal, social and life skills. By working closely with parents / carers, the child or young person and the school, travel training will contribute to greater independence for the child or young person and thus will always be given priority as an option when considering suitable solutions. Travel training may be on a 1 to 1 basis or a 2 to 1 (where a travel trainer works with two children). Some aspects of training might be undertaken with a small group, but there will always be an individual focus in enabling the young people to develop independence on their own route between home and school.

6.4 Schools will work with parents to help identify if their child is suitable for a travel training assessment. Criteria for successful completion of the training are based on an agreed rigorous training programme and assessment process undertaken by a qualified Travel Trainer. If the child is not deemed to be ready for travel training, the existing travel assistance will continue and this will be kept under review.

6.5 For those aged 16+ travel training is also available to young people as part of the Skills for Life course and Transport for London offer a Transport Mentoring scheme. More information is available in the leaflet on the Local Offer website.

6.6 Other forms of travel assistance: In exceptional circumstances the Council may consider providing more direct forms of travel assistance.

6.7 Factors taken into consideration in determining exceptional circumstances: The Council will take into consideration the following factors when considering a request for travel assistance through a bus / taxi or other direct provision:

6.7.1 parental disability which would make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for the parent to take the child to school;

6.7.2 the severity of the child’s special educational needs / disability – especially where there are complex physical disability / medical needs which might make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for the child to walk or use public transport to get to school;

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6.7.3 where the child presents a danger to him / herself or others;
6.7.4 where a parent’s employment would be jeopardised because of having to transport children to different schools and it would be impossible or unreasonably difficult for the family to make alternative arrangements; and
6.7.5 distance / travel time to a provision, where the Council has been unable to offer more local provision.

6.8 In these circumstances the Council may consider one of the following forms of travel assistance to support a child / young person’s needs

6.8.1 Seat on a Private Bus, Taxi or Licensed Private Hire Car: Where assessed as being required, the Council may transport children on a private bus. These buses will be specially adapted to meet the needs of those travelling on them. The Council may transport pupils in separate taxis or private hire vehicles based on the assessed needs of the child or young person. Parents must expect their child to travel with other children wherever appropriate to do so either in a shared taxi or MPV. Each child should have a safe and reasonably comfortable journey.

6.8.2 Where transport vehicles are provided, these will be either Council vehicles and drivers or those provided by a suitably qualified, registered commercial provider working to contractual standards set by the Council. Vehicles will conform with current legislation and additionally with the Council’s contract specification where this is higher or more detailed than legislation. All staff involved in the provision of transport for pupils with statements or EHCPs will be subject to the appropriate safety checks. Whilst bus drivers are not included in the Home Office guidance for automatic police checking, the Council will ensure such checks are carried out for bus / taxi drivers and escorts.

6.8.3 Parents’ responsibilities: where children are transported by bus / taxi parents must ensure that pupils are ready for collection at the appointed time. Waiting time for buses will be limited to 3 minutes. Thereafter parents will have responsibility for ensuring that the pupil attends school. In the event that a parent or carer is not at home to receive a pupil from the bus, the bus will take all other passengers home and then return to the original address. If the parent is still not at home the pupil will be taken to the Oakdene, Residential Short Break Unit in Tooting, for collection by the parent.

6.8.4 Routing: The nature of transport routing as well as possible congestion in the Borough means that travelling times on directly provided specialist transport can vary greatly. A child should reach school without undue stress, strain or difficulty such as would prevent him or her from benefiting from the education the school has on offer. The Council expects that for the majority of children their journey should not last longer than one hour although in exceptional cases one and a half hours may be acceptable. Journey time may be affected from time-to-time by traffic, road works and other environmental and operational conditions. These times may not apply to children travelling to out of borough schools, where distances and frequency of journeys vary. The timing for pick up and drop off will be specified by Wandsworth Council. Routes will be reviewed regularly to take into account changes in needs and environmental pressures, for example changes in road layouts. Routes will be updated every summer in preparation for the new school year.

6.8.5 Escorts: Escorts will not automatically be provided in every vehicle, it will only be where it is deemed necessary for the care of children or young people and/or the safe operation of vehicles. This will be determined at the point the request for travel assistance is made and reviewed annually. Escorts are provided for all buses and coaches used to transport children with statements of SEN or EHCPs. Provision of an escort at any one time does not guarantee that this will be an ongoing arrangement and the requirement for an escort will be reviewed in the child’s Annual Review, or in the event of a change in circumstance. (More detailed information regarding bus / taxi transport is contained in the relevant leaflet).
6.8.6 Walking Escort: Where appropriate the Council may consider providing an escort to accompany the child to walk to school or via public transport solutions. Such a scheme may be the forerunner to introducing pupils to travel training and seeks to improve confidence and independence by providing a more ‘normal’ travel experience for pupils. Escorts may accompany more than one child or even introduce a ‘walking bus’ route (subject to satisfactory completion of a risk assessment).

6.9 All eligibility and travel assistance arrangements will be reviewed annually, as part of the statutory annual review process to ensure that the basis for entitlement continues and the method of travel assistance remains appropriate. As pupils get older encouragement will be given, where appropriate, to the development of life skills including independent travel. This will not be possible for every pupil but for pupils with specific learning difficulties, moderate learning difficulties and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties this should be a realistic aim. The issue of independent travel should be considered at each pupil’s preparing for adulthood review (Year 9 review) and if appropriate to the young person’s ability and needs, alternatives to direct transport assistance will be offered.

7. Pre School Age (Nursery)
7.1 There is no statutory entitlement to travel assistance for children under 5. Generally parents will be expected to take their own children to pre-school provision. The Council has a discretionary power to provide transport assistance to children aged between 2 and 5 who have been placed in a particular educational setting, in order to meet the child’s identified outcomes but children of pre-school age will not be provided with travel assistance other than in exceptional circumstances (see paragraph 6.7).

8. Post 16 Transport
8.1 The Council has no specific duty to provide travel assistance or make transport arrangements for young people of sixth form age, even if they have a statement / an EHCP. However according to Section 509AA of the Education Act 1996, “Local Authorities have a duty to prepare and publish an annual transport policy statement specifying the arrangements for the provision of transport or otherwise that the authority considers it necessary to make to facilitate the attendance of all persons of sixth form age receiving education or training” hence residents of London boroughs aged 16-18 and in full-time education or on a work-based learning scheme can apply for the Oyster Photocard. 18+ students can apply for an 18+ Oyster Card which enables them to qualify for 30% reduction on some fares and tickets. The Council expects and encourages most learners of this age to use public transport and travel independently because of the beneficial effects this will have on the young person’s development. The link to the policy is below: [http://wandsworth.gov.uk/transportpolicy/post16](http://wandsworth.gov.uk/transportpolicy/post16).

8.2 Support available for 16-19 year olds includes the Bursary Fund that helps 16 to 19 year olds continue in education, where they might otherwise struggle for financial reasons. It is a discretionary fund for schools, colleges, academies and training providers to distribute to support any learner aged 16-19 who faces genuine financial barriers to participation such as costs of transport, meals, books or equipment.

8.3 The Fund is managed and administered by education institutions themselves through their own local policies within the wider guidelines. Contact should be made directly to the schools/colleges for more information about their policy. If a learner feels aggrieved about how their request for a bursary was handled, they should follow the school’s/college’s/provider’s standard complaints procedure.

8.4 The Council recognises that in some circumstances additional assistance with travel may be required and it has a discretionary power to provide travel assistance to those over compulsory school age to encourage participation and prevent transport being a barrier to young learners. SEN travel assistance is subject to assessment. Pupils aged 16+ will be expected to utilise a Travel Assistance Budget or undertake Independent Travel Training, with direct provision such as minicabs or specialist bus transport only provided in very exceptional circumstances.
9. **Parental Preference**

9.1 Where a placement is at a particular school further from the child’s home as a result of parental preference, rather than at a suitable alternative proposed by the LA, then the parents will be responsible for travel arrangements to and from the school. This is in line with the Code of Practice which states: “... The parents’ preferred school may be further away from the child’s home than another school which is appropriate to the child’s needs. In such a case it would be open to the LA to name the nearest school, because it would be incompatible with the efficient use of resources. It would also be open to the LA to name the school preferred by the child’s parents, so long as parents met the transport costs.”

9.2 Any exceptions to this policy would need to be considered on its merits.

10. **Residential and Out of Borough**

10.1 The free and concessionary transport provision provided through Transport for London is available throughout the Greater London Area and those pupils attending an education institution within Greater London will be expected to utilise the public transport network whenever possible. If the Council has agreed to name an out of borough placement (including out of Greater London) pupils will be subject to the same eligibility criteria referred to within section 6 and the same offer of travel assistance referred to within section 6.

10.2 Pupils attending residential schools as weekly boarders will be provided with travel assistance at the beginning and end of each week, see Section 6.

10.3 Pupils attending termly residential schools will be provided with travel assistance at the beginning and end of each half term and for official weekend closures, see Section 6. This may also be in the form of a rail warrant rather than direct transport provision.

10.4 The Council has discretion to consider exceptions from the policy.

11. **Pupils with Temporary Mobility Problems**

11.1 The Council will provide taxi transport in exceptional circumstances where a child is unable to walk or use public transport to travel to school for short term medical reasons and no alternative arrangements can reasonably be made by the parent. A decision on this type of request will be made on the basis of independent medical advice and is made by the Pupil Services section unless the pupil has a statement / EHCP.

12. **Appeals**

12.1 A provisional decision will be communicated with parents / carers by letter / email. If a parent disagrees with the decision this will be reviewed by the Head or Deputy Head of SNAS.

12.2 If an application for travel assistance is not approved by the Council, or the parent/carer disagrees with the type of assistance being offered, parents/carers have the right to appeal. The appeal should be made on the appropriate appeals form within 14 days of the decision letter being received by the parent/carer. The appeal form can be downloaded from the Local Offer website.

12.3 Appeals are administered in two stages:

12.4 **Stage 1:** Review of decision – within 5 working days of the appeal form being received, the parent/carer will be sent a confirmation letter that their appeal has been received and is under review. Further evidence may be requested to support the appeal and there may be consultation with relevant professionals. Parents / carers will be invited to attend the EHC / Complex Needs Panel which will consider the appeal. Parents/carers should receive a decision letter within 10 working days of the panel meeting.
12.5 **Stage 2:** Review of process and evidence – if the parent/carer remains dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1, they should notify the Council in writing within 14 days of receiving their Stage 1 appeal decision. The appeal will then be considered by an Assistant Director in the Children’s Services Department. This will involve consideration of evidence gathered and the reasons for decision being made. Parents/carers should expect to receive their decision letter within 10 working days of their appeal being received.

12.6 During the appeals process no new travel assistance will be provided or in case of existing arrangements, no changes will be implemented.