

Essex County Council
Education Transport and Awards
PO Box 4261
Chelmsford
Essex CM1 1GS

To the Parent/Carer

Date: 12 January 2011

Dear Parent/Carer

HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT

This letter is intended to provide further guidance to schools, parents/carers and parent/carer groups following the publication of the Home to School Transport Commissioning Strategy Cabinet report, in order to provide greater detail on the decisions made and our future commissioning approach.

The transport assessment process for children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) will be centralised, to ensure greater consistency and fairness in the decision making process. This will ensure that statutory policies are adhered to across the board, supported by the ability to accurately measure the distance from home to school, by using Essex County Council's in-house measuring system and not by the use of a multitude of less accurate web-based measuring tools. This will ensure that SEN pupils are measured in the same consistent way as mainstream pupils. It will also ensure that assessments are carried out under the extended rights to transport for low income families which are not currently being universally applied. Additionally, it will ensure consistent application of discretionary SEN transport and provision of escorts (passenger assistants) on a needs led basis. The transport policy is being re-written to provide greater clarity around these areas. This includes an annual review of needs.

Essex County Council is committed to supporting all children in achieving greater independence, while ensuring that where there is a need for an escort, that need is correctly identified through a robust assessment process and formal annual reviews. Each case will be judged on need and where escorts are required, they will be provided. The centralised assessment process will also enable the effective management of referrals to the award winning Travel Training scheme, and the training outcomes, thus forming part of the transport needs assessment. Full details regarding this scheme are available at www.travel-training.co.uk including downloadable material. Alternatively, hard copies of the Travel Training information leaflets are available by calling the Travel Training Support Officer on 0845 603 2200.

From April 2011, new applications for SEN transport will be fully assessed to identify whether or not an escort is required to meet the needs of children and young people attending school. Further assessments will be carried out annually under a formal transport review process to establish ongoing need. If an escort is still required, it will continue to be provided.

Children that are currently provided with escorts will be re-assessed to confirm that they are required. Where the re-assessment identifies that an escort is not required, we will work with the family and any other relevant others towards removing that provision in a timely way. We will not remove escorts for individual pupils or groups of SEN pupils, without prior consultation.

We will be removing the automatic provision of escorts for mainstream primary and secondary pupils as this is not a statutory requirement, but will consider, by exception any request on its specific merits.

The provision of escorts is discretionary and there is therefore no statutory duty for Essex County Council to conduct a formal consultation. However, I fully recognise that parents and schools will have concerns and may wish to submit their comments on this issue for consideration. Once again, I would like to assure all concerned that a child's specific individual needs are paramount and will always dictate whether an escort is provided on their school transport.

Provision of fuel allowances will be agreed in some cases, should parents/carers wish to accept that option. This is because in some cases of specific physical need, the family vehicle has already been modified to the child's individual needs and this may be more appropriate than other available options, or it may be preferential to parents/carers to take their child to and from school themselves. This alternative method of funding will be provided in negotiation with parents/carers and will not be imposed. For parents/carers who do not have access to a car, this option will not be considered.

As part of the assessment process for discretionary transport, the Council will take into account the provision of Higher Rate Mobility Allowance. This does not mean that additional funding will not be made available in all cases.

A list of frequently asked questions and answers will be published on the Essex County Council website during January 2011.

We plan to publish an updated home to school transport policy. This will also be published on the Essex County Council website, during January 2011. This will contain all the information required by parents.

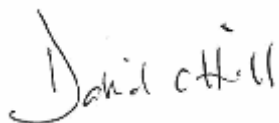
Please send any replies or comments in the first instance to:

Education Transport and Awards, Essex County Council, Floor E2, County Hall, Market Road, Chelmsford, CM1 1GS

Telephone: 0845 603 2200

Email: educationawards@essex.gov.uk

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Daniel O'Hill". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D'.

Dave Hill

Executive Director - Schools, Children and Families