

HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT CONSULTATION FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

These FAQs relate to the proposed change to the 2016/17 policy in relation to transport to catchment schools for secondary students.

1. How do I know if I am affected? How do I know which is my nearest school?

Please note that, we have published a range of maps on the consultation page to enable parents to more easily see whether they are likely to be affected by the change.

Due to the scale, the map should only be used as a guide. The closest school can be checked on the website: www.westberks.gov.uk by typing the postcode into the search box.

2. Will I be able to get a place on the school bus?

Yes, the Fare Payer Scheme includes a guarantee of a seat on the school bus to your nearest or catchment school. This means that, even if you do not qualify for free transport and have to pay a fee, your child will be guaranteed a seat – provided that you apply on time and pay the fee.

Some responses to the consultation have indicated that we have not made this point clear, and we will amend the wording in the Fare Payer Scheme so that there is no misunderstanding.

3. How much will a seat on the bus cost?

We have introduced a new flat rate fee for nearest or catchment school, which for 2016/17 is £250 per year. This is an equivalent to £1.32 per school day. It does not matter how far you are away from the school, the fee is the same. This reduces the cost of using the bus compared to the old banding rate, where some distances, especially to rural schools, would have attracted a fee of £430 per year (2014/15 rates).

Some responses have asked whether there is any further discount for siblings, and we will be looking at this point when we consider the consultation responses.

4. Do I have to pay the fee in one lump sum?

You can choose to pay in one lump sum at the beginning or in up to 6 monthly instalments. Either the full payment or the first instalment of an agreed repayment schedule must be made before the pass is issued.

5. I am on a low income. Is there any help for me?

If you are in receipt of free school meals or the maximum working tax credit without any deductions, you should check your entitlement with the Transport Officer on 01635 519777. If you meet the national low income criteria, you would still be entitled to free transport to the 3 nearest schools between 2 and 6 miles from your house. This would usually include your catchment school. If you are not entitled to free transport, you can arrange a payment plan to spread the cost over 6 months.

6. I have to go to work and this change could be inconvenient for me.

Parents are legally responsible for making sure that their children get to and from school at the appropriate times each day. This includes a parent making appropriate arrangements for their child where the parent has working commitments at the relevant times in the school day.

The proposal includes a guarantee of a place on the school bus for the nearest or catchment school, subject to the payment of a fee. You may prefer to continue using the school bus, but this will attract a cost of £250 per year (price correct for 2016/17).

Alternatively, you may choose to make other arrangements for some or all of your children, if you did not wish to use the Fare Paying Scheme. It would be for you to decide what works best for your family

7. I have children at the school already – will they be affected?

Current secondary students who receive transport will continue to be entitled to free transport on their existing route until the end of Year 11. If the proposal goes ahead, it will be phased in from September 2016 for all new transport applications - new students when they start secondary education or existing students if they change their secondary school route.

8. I have children at the school already and other children joining the school in the next couple of years – how would this work?

There is transport protection in place for current students (see Question 7).

The proposal includes a guarantee of a place on the school bus for the nearest or catchment school, subject to the payment of a fee if you do not qualify for free transport. You may prefer to continue using the school bus and this would attract a cost of £250 (2016/17 annual fee). Therefore, for a period of time you could have some children travelling free and others for whom you have to pay a fee.

Alternatively, you may choose to make other arrangements for some or all of your children, if you did not wish to use the Fare Paying Scheme. It would be for you to decide what works best for your family.

9. Why are the admissions rules and transport rules different?

There is statutory transport guidance which the Local Authority must comply with and this only requires free transport to the nearest school (subject to other criteria such as distance). The national guidance does not use the admission catchment at all.

Our use of catchment for transport is a discretionary element of our provision at the moment and the transport guidance is quite clear that discretionary elements can be charged for. Therefore, the Council is not obliged to provide catchment transport at no cost.

However, we recognise that this proposal would have an impact on families, and that is why we are consulting on the proposal. This will allow us to better understand the views of our residents.

10. Does this mean you are thinking about changing school admission catchment areas?

There is no intention to alter admissions catchment areas.

11. Has an environmental study been undertaken considering the impact of the 800 or so additional parental journeys per day that this policy will introduce?

At this stage, we cannot be sure what arrangements parents may choose to put in place. Parents may choose to transport their child themselves or may choose to continue to use the school bus and pay a fee. If the latter proves to be the case, any change to the environmental impact as a result of this proposal would be substantially mitigated as the transport is currently operating. We have not undertaken an environmental study.