

MERTON COUNCIL

Children, Schools and Families Department

General (statutory) policy for home to school travel assistance (Reception to Year 11)

Academic Year 2022-23

www.merton.gov.uk

Introduction

1. This policy explains the assistance that may be available to support a Merton resident child's access to school. The policy was last reviewed May 2022.
2. This policy does not apply to:
 - children with Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCPs) or Learning Difficulty Assessments.
 - children with a temporary mobility issue
 - children who have a long term disability or mobility issue that may require specialist transport

Assistance for children meeting any of the criteria listed above would be considered under Merton's SEN and Disabilities Travel policy which can be viewed on the following webpage -

<https://directories.merton.gov.uk/kb5/merton/directory/service.page?id=byEVTQAawc4>

This policy also does not apply to:

- children not of compulsory school age (separate information is provided in relation to students of Sixth Form age)
- children attending private schools

This policy applies to children attending "qualifying schools" which include all community, foundation and voluntary schools, pupil referral units, or city technology colleges or a city college for the technology of the arts. It may also apply where alternative educational provision has been arranged for a child by Merton education authority.

3. Children living and travelling in London aged under 16 can travel free of charge on Transport for London buses and trams provided they have a child Oyster photocard. Children under 11 also travel free on the London Underground, DLR, London Overground and TFL Rail if they are accompanied by an adult or with a 5-10 Zip Oyster Photocard. Please go to <https://tfl.gov.uk/fares-and-payments/travel-for-under-18s/zip-oyster-photocards> for details.
4. Travel assistance normally available will be in the form of a Travelcard to enable a child to use the London Underground or a train. Where a pupil is eligible, Travelcards are not issued to parents.
5. A Travelcard will not normally be awarded if a timetabled journey of under 45 minutes for a primary school child or 75 minutes for a secondary school child, is available on free transport in '3' above.

6. Assistance will not normally be provided where the child has been subject to a voluntary change of address. This includes a temporary Council Housing move where the family has rejected local housing options.
7. No assistance is normally available towards the cost of an Oyster photocard. More information about Oyster Cards is available from <https://tfl.gov.uk/fares-and-payments/travel-for-under-18s/zip-oyster-photocards>
8. Under this policy, Merton will provide assistance with home to school transport under four headings:
 - Distance to school and nature of route to school
 - Low income families
 - Faith or belief based preferences
 - Local Authority directions

Within each of these, where school applications are made within coordinated schemes for starting school and transferring to secondary school, the school application(s) must normally have been made by the relevant closing dates.

Distance to School

9. Assistance available (see also paras 3-5) under 'distance to school' is based upon statutory walking distance and reasonable travel time.
10. Statutory walking distance is defined as 2 miles for a child under 8 and 3 miles for a child 8 and over. It is measured by the shortest reasonably safe route along which a child (accompanied as necessary) may walk and may include footpaths, bridleways, pathways and other recognised roads. Assistance will be given if the distance from the child's home to school is greater than the statutory walking distance or the child could not reasonably be expected to walk to school because of the nature of the route to school. Assistance will not be given if the child could travel to school in a reasonable travel time using free bus, tram or train travel. Consideration will be given to any special circumstances which prevent the parent accompanying the child to school, such as if the parent has a disability, provided that appropriate medical evidence is supplied.
11. Reasonable travel time is defined as 45 minutes for a child at primary school and 75 minutes for a child at secondary school, by a timetabled journey. Merton will normally use the Google Maps journey planner for this purpose.
12. To be eligible for assistance the child must attend the nearest qualifying school to their home or be attending alternative education provided by the authority. Assistance may also be given if the child is required to attend alternative education provision during a period of exclusion from school, and that provision is further than the statutory walking distance from the child's home.

13. Assistance will be given if the parent is unsuccessful in applying to all qualifying schools within these definitions. By this we would also consider qualifying schools that a parent would have been awarded a place at if they had applied to them and were closer than those named on the application. No assistance will be given if, by preference, the child attends a school which is not the nearest qualifying school to the home address.

Low Income Families

14. A low income family is regarded as one where the child is eligible for Free School Meals or where the parent/carer that the child normally lives with is in receipt of the highest level of Working Tax Credit (i.e. they have no deductions from their award based on income).
15. Assistance (see paras 3-5) will be given to a low income family where:
 - The child is aged 8-10 to their nearest qualifying school if it is more than 2 miles travel distance
 - The child is aged 11-16 to their nearest 3 qualifying schools if they are over 2 and under 6 miles travel distance
 - The child is aged 11-16 to their nearest school chosen by reason of faith or belief if it is over 2 but under 15 miles travel distance (see 17-20)
16. In calculating these distances, the minimum distance will be by shortest walking route defined in 9. The maximum distances will be measured along roads.
17. Where assistance is granted to a low income family, their continuing status will be reassessed on an annual basis.

Faith or Belief Based Preferences

18. Assistance (see paras 3-5) for low income families (see para 13) on faith based preference will be considered where the parent has a specific requirement based on the parent's religion or belief for a child aged 11 to 16 to attend a particular school and their nearest school which meets the requirements of the parents' faith or belief is over 2 but under 15 miles travel distance.
19. No assistance will be given on faith grounds if, by preference, their child does not attend their nearest school of that faith or meeting the requirements of their faith or belief.
20. No assistance will be given on faith grounds if they have a higher preference for schools not of that faith or meeting the requirements of their faith or belief.

21. Assistance on grounds of belief will be considered on a case by case basis, but may include such things as a requirement for a single sex school, providing higher preference schools are not mixed sex.

Local Authority Directions

22. Assistance (see paras 3-5) may be granted where the Local Authority has directed a child to attend an educational establishment, such as a Pupil Referral Unit or other alternative education provision.
23. Assistance may also be granted where a child is placed at a school as a result of Merton's Fair Access Protocol to a school, where the child cannot reasonably walk to school or the distance exceeds that defined in 9 & 10 above.

Application

24. Applications should be made on a Travel Assistance Form, available from the School Admissions Team, and return it to them at Merton Civic Centre, London Road, Morden, Surrey SM4 5DX.
25. Parents unsuccessful with an application will be entitled to ask for a review of the decision based on any evidence they may provide to support their case. Details of this will be notified in the decision letter.
26. Parents whose case falls outside of the terms of this policy may ask for their case to be considered under exceptional grounds. All such cases will be considered on an individual basis on the evidence provided at the time of application.

Changes in Circumstance

27. Where assistance is granted and the family circumstances change, these must be reported immediately to assess the continuing need for assistance.
28. If assistance is no longer required, any Travelcard issued must be returned to the School Admissions Team immediately.

Appeals

29. Letters rejecting claims for travel assistance will provide details of the appeals procedure.

Further information is available from:

School Admissions Team,
10th Floor, Civic Offices,
London Road,
Morden,
Surrey SM4 5DX
Admissions@merton.gov.uk