

FAQs

Re: Admissions and the new School Travel Policy from September 2019

As you are aware Suffolk's School Travel Policy 2019/2020 has been amended. It is important that parents/carers understand how this might affect their child's eligibility for Suffolk County Council (SCC) funded school travel before they apply for a school place. Children living in Suffolk who will be starting at a new school in September 2019 will be eligible for SCC funded school travel when they meet the statutory walking distance criteria from their home to the nearest suitable school that would have had a place available for them. This would be whether or not an application was made for a place at that school.

1. What is changing?

For children starting a new school from September 2019, Suffolk County Council will only provide funded school travel to their nearest suitable school and when they live more than 2 or 3 miles away (depending on age), as measured by the shortest available walking route. The routes used will include Rights of Way.

In addition, no child (Year R to Year 11) will automatically be sent a bus pass. **All parents will have to apply for a pass (funded or paid for) if they want their child to travel by bus to school.**

Therefore, any child currently attending your school and eligible for funded school travel will continue to receive this until they leave your school or move house. We are not suggesting that any child needs to move schools.

2. When were the changes to the new School Travel Policy consulted on?

Suffolk County Council undertook a significant review of school and post-16 travel arrangements and explored how to achieve a sustainable set of policies for the medium term. During the school year 2017/2018, officers were involved in a significant campaign of stakeholder engagement followed by extensive consultation. This was prior to recommendations being made to Cabinet who reached a decision on 19 June 2018, to proceed with implementation, on a phased basis, of a new school travel policy for those commencing or moving school with effect from September 2019 and including those moving home address.

Prior to any decisions being reached by Cabinet on 19 June 2018, members of the Cabinet fully considered the feedback to the three options out to consultation, together with other relevant critical analysis and information, including an Education Impact Assessment and an Equalities Impact Assessment. The pre-engagement and consultation were both extensively reported in the public press, social media together with local television and radio, throughout the school year 2017/2018. Headteachers were asked to play an active role in publicising the school and post-16 travel consultations with their families.

The Parental Information published by Suffolk County Council for the 2019 admissions round, provides clear information for families in terms of making their preferences for a school place and draws attention to the importance of considering the new school travel policy before making these preferences. Scenarios are provided for families to consider and there is an online nearest school checker in relation to the school travel policy. These are set out in our website www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions. In accordance with the School Admissions Code and the DfE home to school travel and transport guidance (July 2014), Suffolk County Council has followed the good practice suggested, that the introduction of these changes is phased-in, so that children who start under one set of

transport arrangements continue to benefit from them until they either conclude their education at that school or choose to move to another school.

3. For parents who have to make their secondary school applications by the closing date of 31 October 2018 but feel unsure of what to do next, what advice can schools give to their parents?

We have provided clear information for parents in terms of school admissions and school travel for the 2019/2020 school year, initially in the Unique Identifier (UID) Letters and then throughout the online application process and notes attached to the paper CAF1 application form. We have made parents aware that the School Travel policy has changed and have provided guidance to help them make their school preferences. We do accept that for some families, their eligibility to SCC funded school travel may be affected by the new policy. We have published scenarios to help families understand when they would be eligible for SCC funded school travel. These are set out in our website www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions 'Apply for a secondary school place 2019/2020' page, Step 4. We advise parents to use the Nearest School Checker to identify their three nearest schools for school travel purposes.

Where a parent decides that SCC funded travel is essential, and they meet the walking distance criteria for their nearest school, then they should be aware that by applying for their nearest, second nearest and third nearest schools in that order, then they would receive SCC funded school travel. If, on the other hand, they didn't want to apply for their nearest school then they do not need to do so. However, if that school would have had a place available for their child on national offer day (or whenever their application is determined for a late application), they would not be eligible for SCC funded school travel to another school. It is not possible to advise parents on which schools will be oversubscribed. However, we do provide information based on the previous admissions round in the Directory of Schools in Suffolk, Secondary for the 2019/2020 school year.

4. How do parents know which school is their nearest suitable school?

Suffolk County Council has published a nearest suitable school checker on its website <http://nearestschool.suffolk.gov.uk/> This will provide parents with the three nearest suitable schools to their home address. This is used for travel purposes only.

Their nearest suitable school may not be their catchment area school or a school that their current primary school (if applying for a secondary school place) normally feeds into.

This may mean that you get applications from families for whom you are the nearest suitable school because funded school travel is important to them. These families may be from schools that you would not normally do transition work with. Once we understand the impact on parental preference, due to these travel changes, this may affect the detail of your transition arrangements for admission September 2019, e.g. you may need to work with more schools, or a different set of schools on transition.

5. Can parents still apply for a place at their catchment or preferred school?

Yes, absolutely. A parent can apply for any schools they wish. However, if the catchment area school or preferred school is not the nearest suitable school the parents will be responsible for planning how they will get their child to and from this school should they be offered a place; unless the school place offered is the nearest suitable school that would have had a place available for your child and you meet the distance criteria.

See the Sustainable Modes of Travel Bitesize or Strategy on our website www.suffolkonboard.com/smot which provides sustainable options.

Each school will have an admissions policy and oversubscription criteria which sets out how they will rank applications when there are more applications than spaces available.

Some schools, including academies, no longer use catchment areas as part of their oversubscription criteria.

The closing date for secondary applications, including high and upper, is 31 October 2018 and 15 January 2019 for a primary, including infant, junior and middle school place.

6. What happens if a parent applies for their nearest suitable school and it is full?

The admissions policy is separate to the School Travel Policy.

In line with the admissions policy we will offer the family a place at another one of their preferred schools where we can. If we are unable to meet any of the parent's preferences, we will offer a place at the next nearest suitable school with a place available. We would only provide SCC funded school travel to the offered school if it is the nearest suitable school with a place available to the child's home and they meet the distance criteria.

Once we know the outcome of their admissions application, if the parents apply for funded school travel to the school offered, we will assess eligibility for school travel based on the principal of the nearest suitable school that would have had a place available, had the parent applied for that school, on the National Offer Day or when the application was decided. The Admissions Team will not have this information until after the National Offer Day for each transfer round (1 March 2019 for secondary and 16 April 2019 for primary).

7. What information is available for parents whose child is not entitled to funded school travel, but who is willing to pay for them to travel to school. Will it be possible to buy a bus ticket and how much will it cost?

Children who are receiving funded school travel in July 2019, continue to attend the same school from September 2019 and live at the same address will continue to receive funded school travel until they leave the school or move house.

Where there are spare places on closed contract routes, Suffolk County Council will make them available to purchase at a cost of £750 for the first year. Places will be allocated on a first come, first serve basis. In some cases, private operators may run buses. Costs for these will depend on the operator.

Schools and/or parents may also contact SCC's brokerage service to consider local solutions.

Alternatively, parents can visit our website www.suffolkonboard.com/schooltravel for information on sustainable modes of travel, including car sharing and park and stride.

8. Is there any help for children who do not qualify for free transport and where the parents cannot afford to pay for transport but where they still want them to attend a school that isn't their nearest suitable school?

Suffolk County Council is required by law to provide funded travel where pupils are entitled to free school meals or their parents are in receipt of maximum Working Tax Credit if the relevant distance criteria is met, even if it is not the nearest suitable school in some circumstances. In this case, parents are asked to contact Suffolk County Council to confirm their eligibility.

Suffolk County Council has a transport review process which can look at individual requests for travel exceptionally. Please see www.suffolkonboard.com/appeals for more information.

If parents do not qualify for assistance in either of these ways, the local authority may be able to help families consider alternative travel arrangements, including informal car

sharing and routes that are run by others, such as public transport services and communities. We also suggest that they talk to us about ways in which they can work together to find a solution that will enable them to get their child to their preferred school.

9. What do parents have to do if they believe the route to a particular school is unsafe?

All queries relating to the safety of the route must be looked at by Suffolk County Council so they can check if the route has been assessed before.

10. Families who already have a sibling at a school, for which their younger child would have received free travel under the old policy – what should they consider?

Families need to decide whether it is important to keep their children together at the same school or if it is more important to receive funded school travel to the nearest suitable school for the younger child.

Each child is assessed for school travel individually, regardless of having an older or younger sibling.

There is no requirement for parents to move their older child to another school. They may decide to send their younger child to a different school or to make their own sustainable travel arrangements. A better solution may be for schools to work with SCC to consider local solutions and brokerage to identify potential travel options. The published Suffolk Sustainable Modes of Travel Strategy provides information for schools and parents about the sustainable travel options and also highlights for schools the importance of maintaining an up to date school travel plan. Use the link www.suffolkonboard.com/smot.

11. How is distance measured to determine free transport?

For eligibility for travel arrangements, Suffolk County Council measures routes in accordance with the Department of Education's statutory guidance. This guidance states the route should be measured "by the shortest available route along which a child, accompanied as necessary, may walk safely". As such, the route measured may include footpaths, bridleways, and other pathways; as well as other recognised routes. Rights of Way will only be used in the distance measurement where they are available all year round. A family is not expected to use this particular route to walk to school, as it is used for measurement purposes only. If a path is regularly not passable then it would not be used for the measurement. There is a right of appeal on safe walking routes to the child's nearest suitable school. Parents must contact Suffolk County Council if they wish to appeal and the Education Transport Appeals Committee will consider such cases.

12. Will a school be able to provide its own bus to school for children who would not normally be eligible?

Yes a school can. We are able to provide capacity building support to support schools, parents and communities to find local solutions. We will also be willing to broker arrangements with transport providers if required to do so, where demand exists.

We are interested in any ideas about local sustainable travel options, including schools sharing their own local good practice. Please get in touch by emailing passenger.transport@suffolk.gov.uk.