



Home to School Transport: Update for the Select Committee

July 2024

Progress and Updates

There has been progress with home to school transport since we attended the Select Committee in December 2023.

Over the next few slides we will update you on the progress that has been achieved with the 8 recommendations we made following our survey in November 2023.

Progress

We are pleased that our relationship with the home to school transport team has continued to strengthen. We meet with them monthly and are able to have honest conversations.

They are keen to develop their relationship with parent carers through engagement events and communication.

They have been far more efficient with their communication to families and are being forward thinking in terms of planning which should be celebrated.

Recommendation 1: Timely Communication

To have a clear and robust roadmap of how the current application/assessment and delivery processes are going to be significantly changed to ensure that families are not:

- Left without transport at the start of term
 - That families are given a fair and timely decision
- That families have regular communication and updates throughout the process at different stages of the year.
- That families are given clear and consistent information about the specific transport arrangements **at least 7 days before the start of term** so that they can prepare their child or young person.

To have a robust communication process which should include a central one point of contact email address and telephone number that parents can contact the transport team on. There should be clear timescales of when parents will receive a response. (e.g. 48 hours for a call back and 5 working days for an email) This information should be on the automated email response, displayed on the website and be on all communication sent out to parents. There should also be a clear escalation route included in this information should a response not be received within the specified timescales. There should also be a separate safeguarding contact method that can be used in situations where an urgent response is required. (More details on this are in recommendation 3)

UPDATE:

We are pleased that a commitment has been made that for applications received by the 31st July families will receive notification of the specific transport arrangements at least 7 days prior to the start of term.

We have been working with the team on the revision of the parent guide. This is an excellent resource and contains the key information in an accessible format. Unfortunately this has only been finalised at the end of June. This means that it was not ready for families to access prior to applying for transport. This means that families this year may have missed crucial information. We do however feel it will be an excellent resource for next years cohorts.

There have been significant challenges with children under statutory school age who are starting reception. Communication surrounding eligibility was not given at the right time and this has had a huge impact on families. (Please see slides 9-12 for more information)

Recommendation 2: Safeguarding & Safety

To have a clear and transparent information available to families about the training and safeguarding checks drivers receive prior to driving children. This should also detail refresher training and checks

A clear and transparent process of how to report concerns about drivers or PA's or incidents with other children and the process that follows this. This should include clear timescales and how to escalate if this is not followed.

Clear steps and guidance on measures to keep children safe to include;

Car seats

Drivers use of mobile phones

Seatbelts

Information about a child passed to the driver

To implement a safeguarding contact line that parent carers and schools can report urgent safeguarding concerns about transport (driver or other occupants) These concerns should be responded to within 24 hours and dealt within 5 working days depending on the level of risk.

Guidance should be put together to demonstrate how parents and carers and schools will be kept up to date and the process they will follow.

UPDATE:

We are pleased that more detailed information has now been included in the revised parent guide. We are also pleased to see that there is an option on the online enquiry form to report a safeguarding concern and a commitment to respond to these within 24 hours.

We are also reassured to learn that a revised operation guide that was launched in April has a section on service standards.

We will monitor this over the coming months and hope to see a reduction in reports from parents regarding safeguarding.

**Recommendation 3:
Collaboration and
Communication**

To develop a robust process where SEND, Admissions and transport work together and communicate effectively to ensure the experience for the family is joined up and seamless journey.

This should include journey times being factored in to placement decisions and communicated with the transport team at the earliest opportunity

UPDATE:
Whilst we have seen some improvements in this area there is still a long way to go to really ensure all services are joined up. The issues with the under 5's has really highlighted a huge gap in collaboration between the SEND, admissions team and transport team when finding placements - communication to families should include details of transport including under 5's and post 16.

**Recommendation 4:
Journey Times**

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to the recommended statutory timescales (max journey of 45 mins for primary and max 75 mins for secondary) whenever possible, and assurance that these times won't be exceeded by adding too many children to a route.

This should include journey times being factored into placement decisions and communicated with the transport team at the earliest opportunity.

UPDATE:
We have been assured that they will continue to work out the routes with the statutory timescales in mind.

We will monitor this over the next academic term.

**Recommendation 5:
Consistency**

Information should be readily available to families about what to do in the instance that the child's driver changes suddenly or frequently.

This should include:
what should happen if there are changes
How should changes be communicated to families (by who and within what timescales)
What to do if there are frequent changes
How to escalate concerns or request a change

UPDATE: We are pleased that more detailed information has been added to the FAQ's on the website and in the newly revised parent guide.

We will monitor this over the coming months.

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Recommendation 6: Alternative Provision & EOTAS

Initiate a working party to ensure that children accessing alternative provision or EOTAS have transport in place this will ensure children who are receiving this type of provision are able to attend their education setting and receive the education they are entitled to without unnecessary delays. (Explore ITA's, SEND team budget, who is responsible)

UPDATE: We are pleased to hear that a full review has taken place to explore this and we have received the following feedback:

Discussions with the operational teams have now been complete and a new framework has been agreed which has now been introduced.

- Discussion with the ALPS and consultative meeting taken place to outline the process. Eligible children can utilise transport at the start and end of the school day.
- Exam timetables - some transport will be available for the start, middle and end of the school day. Some provisions will make their own arrangements for pupils to go home after the end of the exams that fall outside of this.
- In discussion some units will transition more slowly to change transport arrangements at the start of the new academic year.
- A2E packages that are not named in the EHCP and consequently pupils will not be eligible for travel assistance, it is suggested that the Case Officer has the initial conversation around getting that child to the agreed placement as it is parental responsibility. This should be the first discussion point.
- However, it is also acknowledged that this may be a challenge, and to ensure we meet our Section 19 obligations we may offer a personal travel budget (PTB) by way of support to the families to get their children to and from those provisions.
- Transport will only be provided with families who have extenuating circumstances.

**Recommendation 7:
Independent Travel
Allowance**

Complete a benchmarking exercise to look at other LA's and how much they reimburse families.

This could be an opportunity to increase the take up of an ITA, reduce financial hardship, build trust, reduce transport costs, reduce safeguarding concerns and support alternative provision

UPDATE:
We are aware of work surrounding this looking at personal travel budgets to take into consideration the individual circumstances and medical needs which is a welcome change.

We are awaiting a further update on how this work is progressing, but we are very positive that this is being looked at. We will also gather feedback from families as to its effectiveness and the impact it has had.

**Recommendation 8:
Preparation for
Adulthood**

To have preparation for adulthood in mind for all young people and ensure families are aware of the independent travel training offer and can consider this for their young person where appropriate. To look at existing public transport routes and commission more routes to enable young people to travel independently if they are able to.

UPDATE:
We are pleased to see that a self referral form has now been developed. This is a great addition and we hope it will allow more young people to access this.

We would like to see more promotion of travel training as our understanding is that the take up is still very low. We will work with the transport team on how we can support the promotion of this.

Challenges

Some of the challenges that have arisen since the last Select Committee meeting...

Under 5's Starting Reception

This year the home to school transport team took a more robust approach to their statutory duty in line with their policy.

Unfortunately, this meant that families with children who were starting reception but were under the statutory school age (but would be eligible the term following their 5th birthday) were left in a stressful situation as this had not been communicated to them prior to the placement being agreed.

This has highlighted an urgent need for SEND, Admissions and transport to work closely together. The SEND and Admissions team need to take transport into consideration and discussing it with families prior to a placement being agreed and named in a plan as it is the overall LA's responsibility to ensure children and young people can get to their education placement.

Under 5's Starting Reception:



What are the challenges?

Lack of consideration for transport within the SEND & Admissions teams when naming a placement for children under statutory school age.

Lack of communication to families around the process and eligibility.

Lack of collaboration between SEND team, admissions team and H2ST team prior to placements being finalised.

FVS's understanding was that historically under 5's starting reception have been allocated transport.

The extenuating circumstances were not clear.

Risk of children being unable to get to their school.

Under 5's Starting Reception: A Way Forward...

FVS met with the home to school transport team on a number of occasions between March and May 2024 following feedback from parent carers who had their transport application declined. Given the circumstances we asked the transport team to consider revoking their stance on this for this year and that although we didn't agree with this aspect of the policy, we are aware it is not a statutory duty and would support them with the communication of this next year, to ensure parent carers are fully aware prior to a placement being finalised.

Following these meetings, it was agreed that because the more robust stance on this area of the policy had not been effectively communicated to parent carers prior to the placement being finalised that as a compromise for this year they would:

Produce some relaxed parameters for assessing appeals for the under 5's.

Make the extenuating circumstances that are considered clearer.

Review all of the appeals that had been received for this cohort against the revised parameters.

Impact

FVS although disappointed that the stance was not being fully revoked, we did welcome and appreciate the compromise that had been offered.

We heard from the transport team that following the review of appeals using the updated parameters 13 cases were subsequently awarded transport and 14 were upheld.

We are not aware of how many of the 14 went onto a stage 2 appeal or what the outcomes of those were.

We were pleased that updated and explicit information regarding the under 5's was included in the updated parent guide. We have also suggested that this guide is given to all parents at draft EHCP stage.

Post 16

As with the under 5's this year the home to school transport team took a more robust approach to their statutory duty for post 16 transport in line with their policy.

This has meant that an increased amount of families have had transport declined. This has created a lot of stress and confusion.

Post 16:



What are the challenges?

Lack of consideration for transport within the SEND & Admissions teams when naming a placement for post 16.

Lack of communication to families around the process and eligibility.

Lack of collaboration between SEND team, admissions team and H2ST team prior to placements being finalised.

A much more robust stance to previous years.

The extenuating circumstances were not clear.

Risk of young people being unable to get to their education placement.

Post 16

The home to school transport team have taken huge steps to increase awareness and communication of the statutory duty change when a young person moves into post 16. Whilst there is still more to be done it should be acknowledged that this is an area that a lot of progress has occurred. There is still a lack of joined up working between SEND and transport and the conversations around placement and transport are not happening early enough. FVS have asked the transport team to attend an engagement event with parent carers to explain more about post 16 transport and answer questions we are delighted that this has been embraced and senior managers have all committed their time to join this is hugely appreciated and shows a real desire from the team to speak to families and support in the best way possible.

The next steps we have identified for this cohort are:

Transport team to join an engagement event for parent carers on the 10th July.

Make the extenuating circumstances that are considered clearer.

Finalise the post 16 parent guide and include this with annual reviews and KST paperwork.

Next Steps...

Closely monitor the parent carer experience over the summer months and feedback any challenges and themes to the home to school transport team.

Continue to monitor the roll out of the new processes aligned to the recommendations and report any issues to the home to school transport team.

Rather than take on individual case work which is not our remit nor do we have capacity to do so. Instead we have requested some regular engagement sessions throughout the summer that parent carers can book onto to speak with the transport team directly.

Ensure families are given the revised parent guide at the earliest opportunity - they should be given this at draft EHCP stage and prior to placements being finalised it should also be given with Key stage transfer paperwork.

Continue to work closely with the home to school transport team and feed in the lived experience.

Re-run our survey in the Autumn term to get an understanding of progress. Report the findings to the home to school transport team and Select Committee members.



Questions?

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