



Changes to Bracknell Forest Council's Education Transport Policy for children aged 5 – 16 – Academic Year 2027/2028

Following a public consultation, Bracknell Forest Council has approved changes to its Education Transport Policy for children aged 5 to 16. **The changes will apply only to children starting at a new school from September 2027.**

Why is it changing?

The Department for Education (DfE) says local authorities should decide if a child can get help with education transport by looking at their **nearest suitable school**. This means the council checks which school is the closest one that can **meet your child's needs** and **offers them a place**. That school is then used to decide whether your child qualifies for transport support.

In the previous policy, Bracknell Forest Council included references to **designated area schools**, which meant that some children could qualify for transport support even when there was another suitable school closer to home. The Council's previous policy did not fully follow the national guidance.

To follow national guidance, the Council will **stop using designated area schools** in its Transport policy for children and young people aged 5-16 from September 2027 academic year. **From that date, education transport support will normally be decided if a child qualifies for education transport by looking at their nearest suitable school.**

What stays the same?

If your child or young person **already gets education transport support**, nothing changes. They will continue to receive transport **as long as their circumstances do not change**.

Existing pupils attending a designated area school will not be affected.

If your child already receives education transport support because they attend a designated area school, their support will continue, provided their circumstances do not change. For example, eligibility may be reviewed if you move home or your child changes school.

Local authorities are required to review their education transport policies annually. Should any changes be proposed in the future, the Council will undertake the necessary consultation as part of the annual policy review process.

The policy change does not affect eligibility for children who qualify because of:

- Your child or young person lives further than the **statutory walking distance**;
- Your child or young person has **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)**;
- You are a **low-income family**; or
- Due to **unsafe walking routes**.

These eligibility criteria remain unchanged.



We know parents want to understand what these changes mean in practice. The questions and answers below explain the changes in more detail.

Frequently Asked Questions

What does "nearest suitable school" mean?

This was one of the most common questions raised during the consultation.

For transport purposes, a nearest suitable school is generally the closest qualifying school that:

- is right for your child's age, ability and aptitude;
- can meet any Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) your child may have; and
- was able to offer your child a place through the normal admissions process.

This means that the nearest suitable school is **not always** the school that is geographically closest to your home.

For example:

- the closest school may not have had a place available; or
 - a specialist school named in an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan may be the nearest school able to meet your child's needs.
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Why is the Council changing the policy?

The Department for Education expects local authorities to assess transport eligibility based on a child's nearest suitable school.

Updating the policy will:

- align Bracknell Forest Council's approach with national guidance;
- ensure transport decisions are made consistently and fairly; and
- make eligibility criteria clearer and easier for families to understand.

The changes relate only to **education transport** and do not affect school admissions arrangements.

Will my child lose their education transport support?

If your child already receives education transport support because they attend a designated area school, they will **keep it**, unless your circumstances change (for example, moving house or changing school).

The revised policy only applies to children starting at a new school from September 2027.

Local authorities are required to review their education transport policies annually. Should any changes be proposed in the future, the Council will undertake the necessary consultation as part of the annual policy review process.

What if my designated area school is not my child's nearest suitable school?

From September 2027, new pupils will be assessed using the **nearest suitable school**, not the designated area school.

This change does not affect existing pupils attending a designated area school who already receive education transport support.

If your child's nearest suitable school is beyond the statutory walking distance, or they meet another eligibility criterion, such as SEND, an unsafe walking route, or low-income transport entitlement, they may still qualify for education transport support.

The eligibility criteria themselves are not changing. The change is simply about which school transport eligibility is assessed against.

Does this change school admissions or catchment areas?

No.

The policy change does not affect:

- school admissions arrangements;
- school catchment areas;
- or parents' ability to express preferences when applying for school places.

Families will continue to apply for school places through the normal admissions process.

What happens if my child's nearest suitable school cannot offer a place?

If the nearest suitable school could not offer a place, the Council will look at the **next nearest suitable school that did offer a place**. Parents will not be expected to secure a place at a school that could not admit their child.

How is distance measured?

The Council measures distance using the shortest available walking route between your home and your child's nearest suitable school.

Walking routes may include:

- roads;
 - pavements;
 - footpaths;
 - bridleways; and
 - other recognised public rights of way.
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How are walking routes assessed for safety?

Where transport eligibility depends on the safety of a walking route, the Council assesses routes in line with national guidance.

This assessment may consider:

- traffic volume and speed;
 - road crossings;
 - availability of footways;
 - lighting and visibility;
 - the age of the child; and
 - any relevant SEND or mobility needs.
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Will children still qualify for education transport support in other circumstances?

The policy change does not affect eligibility for children who qualify because of:

- statutory walking distance;
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND);
- low-income family transport rights; or
- unsafe walking routes.

These eligibility criteria remain unchanged.

Can I still choose which school I would prefer my child to attend?

Parents and carers can continue to express preferences for schools through the normal admissions process. However, choosing a school that is not your child's nearest suitable school may affect eligibility for education transport support.



Need More Information?

Further information about the Education Transport Policy, including eligibility criteria and how transport applications are assessed, is available on the Bracknell Forest Council website.

If you have questions about your own circumstances, please contact the Education Transport Team:

Email: Education.Transport@bracknell-forest.gov.uk