



SCHOOL TRANSPORT SCHEME FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS ARISING FROM A DIAGNOSED DISABILITY

1. Introduction

The following is intended to provide detailed information on the School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs arising from a Diagnosed Disability. It contains information under the following headings:-

- **Purpose of the Scheme**
- **Eligibility Criteria**
- **Application Process**
- **Level of Service**
- **Escorts**
- **Charges**
- **Grants**
- **Concessionary Transport**
- **Appeals Board**
- **General**

2. Purpose of the Scheme

The purpose of the scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children with special educational needs arising from a diagnosed disability.

School transport services are operated by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department of Education & Skills (Department).

3. Eligibility Criteria

Children are eligible for transport where they:

- have special educational needs arising from a diagnosed disability in accordance with the designation of high and low incidence disability set out in Department of Education and Skill's (DES) Circular 02/05

and

- are attending the nearest recognised: mainstream school, special class/special school or a unit, that is or can be resourced, to meet their special educational needs

Eligibility is determined following consultation with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) through its network of Special Education Needs Organisers (SENO).

Decisions regarding transport eligibility will be based on the prevailing circumstances at the time of first enrolment.

Eligible children will retain their eligibility while they remain enrolled in the special class/special school or unit.

Eligible children who are enrolled in an autism class/unit attached to a mainstream school and who subsequently mainstream in that school will retain their transport eligibility for the duration of their primary education in this school. Should these children transfer to a different school; a new transport application will be required.

The provision of therapeutic services such as Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Psychological Services etc. which are matters for the Health Service Executive will not be a factor in identifying the nearest recognised placement for transport eligibility purposes.

4. Application Process

Applications for transport provision, under the terms of this scheme, should only be completed in circumstances where children are not in a position to avail of standard school transport services.

An Application Form should be completed and signed by the Parents/Guardians, School Principal and the SENO prior to or at the time of first enrolment.

Completed Application Forms should be forwarded by the SENO to School Transport Section.

5. Level of Service

Bus Éireann is responsible for the planning and timetabling of school transport routes. Bus Éireann endeavours, within available resources, to ensure that each eligible child has a reasonable level of school transport service.

Where practicable, and subject to consideration of cost and logistics, the Department will consider, based on information provided by the SENO, Parents/Guardians, School Authorities etc. the provision of specific/individual transport arrangements in circumstances where travel in the company of other children is not deemed feasible.

These services will be subject to periodic review and may be withdrawn and/or replaced with an alternative service/grant where circumstances change. Examples of such changed circumstances, which are not exhaustive, include other children applying for transport or a child's independence increasing to the extent that an individual service is no longer necessary.

School transport services for eligible children will generally operate during the 'Standard School Year' and will facilitate a child's attendance during normal school opening and closing times.

6. Escorts

The SENO will advise the Department, where s/he is aware, by reference to Department criteria, from relevant professional reports or through information supplied by the School Authorities that a child's care and safety needs are such as to require the support of an escort.

The Department allocates funding to schools, for the employment of escorts to accompany these children.

The continuing need for such escorts will be reviewed periodically in the context of a child's ongoing needs, independence and maturity.

7. Charges

Eligible children are exempt from school transport charges.

8. Grants

A Special Transport Grant (STG) towards the cost of private transport arrangements may be provided at the discretion of the Department in situations where:

- Bus Éireann is not in a position to provide a transport service;
- a child's age, behavioural difficulties or medical needs are such as to make the provision of a transport service impracticable;
- an escort is considered necessary and the provision of such support is not feasible;
- the cost of establishing/maintaining a service is considered prohibitive.

Grants will only be considered for the school year in which an application for transport is received. Grants will not be paid retrospectively.

The STG will be paid annually into an applicant's Bank Account via Electronic Fund Transfer on receipt of a completed Statement of Attendance Form. More frequent payments (school term) will only be considered in exceptional situations.

Grants are subject to periodic review and may be varied or withdrawn where circumstances change.

9. Concessionary Transport

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for concessionary transport subject to the following:-

- a Transport Application Form is completed and submitted by the SENO to School Transport Section;
- there is a suitable service, as determined by Bus Éireann, operating into their school of attendance;
- there is spare capacity on the service;
- routes will not be extended or altered, nor will larger vehicles or extra trips be provided to cater for concessionary transport; no additional cost will be incurred;
- the appropriate annual charge is paid;
- concessionary transport is not available on public scheduled bus services;
- additional facilities or equipment are not required to ensure a child's safety while travelling;
- parents/guardians are responsible for ensuring that children are brought safely to and collected safely from Bus Éireann designated pick up and set down points.

The availability of concessionary transport may vary from year to year and cannot be guaranteed for the duration of a child's enrolment at a particular school.

10. Appeals Board

The Terms of Reference for the School Transport Appeals Board are available on the Department's website.

The School Transport Appeals Board examines and determines appeals against the school transport application process regarding the provision of school transport services and/or grant aid under the terms of the School Transport Schemes.

The Board does not examine cases deemed by Bus Éireann to involve serious misconduct or behaviour which poses a threat to the safety and well being of children and/or the driver or to the safe operation of the service generally.

An appellant who is dissatisfied with the determination of the Board has the right to raise the matter with the Ombudsman for Children.

11. General

Any changes in the circumstances under which transport or a grant payment was approved must be notified to the Department immediately.

The fact that children have availed of transport services or a grant, contrary to the terms of the scheme, in no way confers on the recipients a continuing right to this facility.

This scheme may be amended or updated from time to time to reflect operational, budgetary or other changes.

Queries regarding this scheme should be addressed to:

School Transport Section,
Department of Education & Skills,
Portlaoise Road,
Tullamore,
Co. Offaly.

Phone No. 057 9325466/7.

This scheme and associated documentation are available on the Department's website at www.education.ie .

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