

**MAIN PROVISIONS OF THE PATHFINDER SCHEME PROVISIONS**

1. The draft Prospectus and Guidance for Pathfinder schemes begins by summarising the background behind their introduction:
  - It confirms that although parents have, since 1980, had a right to express a preference for the school they wish their child to attend, local authorities do not generally have to provide transport except to the nearest suitable school, where this is beyond the statutory walking distance.
  - This has led to criticism that the need to make private transport arrangements has led to inequalities in the ability of parents to express a real choice, with evidence that lack of transport, or the cost of transport, acts as a barrier to low income families attending any but the local school. Alternatively, wealthier families may be able to move house to live within the catchment area of a preferred school, an option that would not be available to those on lower incomes.
  - There has also been criticism that pupils living just within the statutory walking distance may find it difficult or impractical to walk or cycle, and may not have a suitable bus service, leaving parents with no realistic alternative to the family car.
2. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 seeks to overcome these issues as far as they affect low income families through the provisions to extend free transport that are described in **Appendix 1**. However, the Pathfinder provisions seek to go further and to encourage authorities to come up with proposals that will extend the availability of transport to all groups of children in their area.
3. The Government intends to approve up to 20 Pathfinder schemes, which must cover the entire area of a local authority or of two or more authorities working collaboratively. Applications will be submitted for approval in 2007, with most anticipated to start in September 2009. The Government will commission an independent evaluation of the schemes to be published in 2012, following which the Pathfinder provisions might be repealed or made more widely available.
4. Pathfinder authorities will continue to have to provide free transport to 'eligible children', but in addition will be expected to go 'well beyond the minimum' and put forward proposals that address at least the following:
  - Transport arrangements that support parental preference
  - Transport arrangements for children living within two miles from school, and
  - Reducing levels of car use on the home to school journey.

5. In addition to these compulsory features, there is a list of 'optional features' that could be included, such as transport arrangements to support extracurricular activities, religious or philosophical preference, or the 14-19 curriculum. Successful bids will be expected to demonstrate a coherent and comprehensive strategy which identifies and meets the travel needs of all pupils, including those who walk or cycle to school as well as those who travel by bus or car.
6. To pay for the extensions of transport envisaged by the above, Pathfinder authorities will be allowed to make a charge for home to school transport, including some that is now provided free. However, there are limits and exceptions to this:
  - No charges must be made to 'protected children'. These include:
    - (i) Children of compulsory school age with a special educational need or disability that makes it unreasonable for them to walk to school
    - (ii) Children of compulsory school age for whom travel arrangements are made on grounds of route safety and
    - (iii) Children from low income groups for whom travel arrangements are made.
  - Any charges must be phased in over time so that free transport is not withdrawn from children who are currently receiving it.
  - The level of the charge proposed is not expected to exceed £1 per day.
  - Authorities are encouraged to give consideration to lower charges for children from large families, and for graduated charges for families on low incomes but who are just above the threshold for protection from charges, and to explain how they propose to take into account the needs of these groups.
  - Authorities will be expected to explain why they are confident that charging will not increase car use.
7. Authorities are expected to fund schemes from resources already committed to funding school transport, together with any charges levied on pupils, and any approved revenue funding provided by DfES ('pump-priming' money of up to £200,000, depending on pupil numbers, will be provided to each of the approved pilot schemes).

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