

Primary Free Travel Pass Policy 2026/27

This document sets out the policy of Manchester City Council in relation to the provision of free travel for children of compulsory school age in Reception – Year 6 at primary school. These arrangements will apply to pupils who will be attending schools in these year groups and considered against the school application submitted resulting in gaining a place at the school. Starting from 1 September 2026.

This policy reflects the current up to date eligibility for free travel to school which is set within a framework of statute (the Education Act 1996 and the Education and Inspections Act 2006) and associated statutory guidance (Home to School Travel and Transport Guidance, January 2024).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/home-to-school-travel-and-transport-guidance>

A parent or guardian has the legal responsibility for ensuring their child's attendance at school.

A local authority is only under a statutory duty to provide transport assistance if the nearest qualifying school is not within statutory walking distance of the child's home by the nearest available as set out in the Education Act 1996 (as amended) or to certain children whose families are on a low income (Schedule 35B to the 1996 Education Act). Otherwise, the provision of transport is at the local authority's discretion.

Eligibility

Applications for free travel are usually considered following the normal admissions round (when a child moves from into reception or from primary to secondary school). School preference listed at the time of applying for a school place will be taken into consideration. The local authority expects parents to list their nearest school on their school place application form if they intend to apply for free travel to school.

Parents/carers can find out which is their nearest school for admissions purposes and whether this is also their nearest school for school travel purposes, by searching on the postcode checker which can be found on our website below

[The area covered by Manchester City Council | Manchester City Council](#)

Travel passes will only be issued if the application for free travel fulfils the criteria as set out within this policy. Eligibility is reviewed annually, and parent or carer is required to complete a new application form on an annual basis. The Local Authority reserves the right to withdraw a travel pass where the applicant has given fraudulent or deliberately misleading information to obtain the pass.

If you have been refused a Free Travel Pass, you cannot apply again in the same academic year unless you have had a change in circumstances, for instance a change of address.

Only where children meet the criteria set out in this policy will they be entitled to transport assistance between their home and school. This policy does not apply to children with Education, Health and Care Plans.

Primary arrangements

Free transport assistance will be provided for primary children who reside in the borough of Manchester City Council who meet one of the following criteria:

Group 1 – Looked after child, a looked after child from overseas and previous looked after child

- A child aged 4 - 11 years old and looked after by Manchester City Council or previously LAC/LAC from overseas; and is
- attending a primary school or academy beyond 2 miles from their LAC placement.

Previously looked after children are children who were looked after but ceased to be so because they were adopted, became subject to a residence order or special guardianship order immediately following having been looked after. Previously looked after children returned to the care of their parents must have a residency order in place to qualify under this criterion.

Group 2 – Distance / nearer similar provision

A child aged between 4 - 7 years old and living in Manchester and

- is attending their nearest suitable school which is beyond 2 miles from home;

A child aged between 8 - 11 years old and living in Manchester and

- is attending their nearest suitable primary school beyond 3 miles from home

and where nearer, similar provision in a qualifying school in Manchester is not available.

It will also include any school placement or alternative school placement offered in conjunction with any school application. Faith or single sex school, this will not solely be considered when looking for other available schools nearer to the home address. A school's performance and Ofsted rating are not applicable when assessing for nearer similar provision.

A qualifying school is defined as any community schools, foundation schools, voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools; • academies (including those which are free schools • alternative provision academies.

Note that if your child attends an independent school (fee paying) you cannot apply for Free Travel assistance

When assessing for nearer similar provision for Group 2 and Group 3 the following dates will be used:

Transition applications

Application period	Availability
When defining nearer/similar provision for children entering Reception in September 2026 and the application is received by the LA before the start of the academic year	Availability during the offer process for national offer day on 16 April 2026

In-year applications

Application period	Availability
When defining nearer/similar provision for applications received before the start of autumn term 2026 for Year 1 - Year 6	Availability on 17 July 2026 (used for summer processing period only)
When defining nearer/similar provision for applications received in the autumn term 2026 for Reception – Year 6	Availability on 11 September 2026
When defining nearer/similar provision for applications received in the spring term 2027 for Reception – Year 6	Availability on 8 January 2027
When defining nearer/similar provision for applications received in the summer term 2027 for Reception – Year 6	Availability on 23 April 2027

Group 3 – Low income. Free school meals due to Universal Credit

A child aged between 4 - 11 years old and living in Manchester who is

- Attending their nearest suitable school provided it is more than 2 miles but not more than 6 miles from their home and:
- nearer similar provision in a qualifying school is not available.

Low income is defined as a pupil who receives free school meals due to low income and the family claim Universal Credit.

A similar school will be defined when looking at the school(s) applied for or the school attended. A school's performance and Ofsted rating are not applicable when assessing for nearer similar provision.

A qualifying school is defined as any community schools, foundation schools, voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools; • academies (including those which are free schools) • alternative provision academies.

The parent must supply evidence of low income. This must be a full copy of the breakdown of their Universal Credit claim. If your annual earnings are over the threshold "*as defined in the government guidelines*" you may not be entitled to Free Travel.

Exceptions

- (a) Route Safety - Where a child attends their nearest suitable school, and it is within the statutory walking distance of their home, and the nature of the route means they could not be expected to walk there in reasonable safety even if accompanied by their parent, and there is no alternative route within the statutory walking distance that they would be able to walk in reasonable safety, even if accompanied by their parent.
- (b) A child living in homeless family's accommodation
 - which is more than 2 or 3 miles (dependent on age) from their current school; and
 - evidence of homeless accommodation is provided.

Photographs

All parents need to provide attached to the application forms, a passport sized photo of the child. The child's name, date of birth should be written on the back of the photo for correctly matching the photo with the child's application form

Further guidance

Child's home address

All applications will be assessed from the address where the child permanently resides. Parents are required to submit any evidence requested by the Local Authority in connection with the application. This may include proof of residence.

Siblings

There is no sibling category, and all applications are assessed individually.

Shortest walking route

For all free travel applications, the distance between the child's home address and the school will be measured by the shortest walking route using the local authority's GIS computerised measuring system.

The processing of applications

For all eligible applications for use in September 2026, the service will aim to issue and make the Free Travel pass available for collection from the child's school during the first week of term in September 2026.

Any applications received after 31 July 2026, will be available for collection approximately 20 working days after the form arrives at the School Admissions office.

Refunds

Where School Admissions has been unable to process the application within 20 working days, a refund may be issued for travel expenses incurred for travel after the 20-day processing period and up to the time the pass arrives at the child's school.

Refunds will only be issued on receipt of evidence of the child's travel expenses, therefore only the original bus/tram/train tickets will only be accepted as evidence. The refund will not include school holidays and where a pupil is absent from school.

A refund will not be issued where the application was delayed after the 20-day processing period due to the parent failing to provide the necessary or correct information and documentation at the time the request was submitted to support their free travel application. For example, benefits evidence or a photograph.

The appeal process

A parent or carer who wishes to appeal against a decision not to provide a free travel pass may do so through Manchester City Council's appeal procedure:

- Stage 1 – this is a review of the parent's case by the Director of Education.
- Stage 2 – this is a review of the parent's case by panel of Senior Officers who are independent from all Admissions and Free Travel processes.

Parents have the right to submit an appeal against the initial decision where they believe the application was not considered correctly based on one or all of the following:

- Entitlement
- Distance measured
- Route safety
- Consideration of exceptional circumstances that was submitted along with the original application.

The parent must submit a Stage 1 appeal within 20 working days from the date of the original refusal decision letter along with the appeal reasons and any supporting evidence. The information received will be considered as a formal Stage 1 appeal and a reviewed decision of the case will be made within 20 working days of receipt of the appeal request.

Written appeals should be sent to the following address:

Free Travel Appeals (Stage 1)
The Corporate Complaints Team
PO Box 532
Town Hall Extension
Manchester
M60 2LA

Alternatively, parent's appeal and supporting documents can be emailed to school.admissions@manchester.gov.uk

If the parent's Stage 1 appeal is not upheld, a letter will be sent to the parent within 5 working days from the date the appeal was heard. The parent will have the opportunity to submit a further appeal to Stage 2 of the appeal process within 20 working days from the date of the refused Stage 1 letter. A panel, independent to the education service, will review the parent's appeal reasons and the Stage 1 appeal. Stage 2 appeals should be sent to the following address:

Free Travel Pass Appeals (Stage 2)
The Corporate Complaints Team
PO Box 532
Town Hall Extension
Manchester M60 2LA

Email: school.admissions@manchester.gov.uk

The information received will be considered as a formal Stage 2 appeal and a reviewed decision of the case will be made within 40 working days of the receipt of the appeal request.

If the Stage 2 appeal is not upheld, a letter will be sent to the parent within 5 working days from the date the appeal was heard. If the parent feels that there was a failure to comply with the procedural rules or if there are any other irregularities in the way the appeal has been handled, the parent can submit a complaint to Local

Government Ombudsman. All correspondence should be sent to the following address:

Local Government Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
Coventry CV4 0EH

Telephone: 0300 061 0614 (local call charge from a landline or mobile)

Text: 0762 480 4299

Fax: 024 7682 0001

Email: www.lgo.org.uk/making-a-complaint