

72% support council's bid to cut free travel subsidy for faith schools

Posted: Tue, 26th May 2015

Kirklees Council is considering ending free travel to faith schools in a bid to cut out unnecessary expenditure. The move has widespread local support, with 72% of 926 consultation responses in support of the measure.

Currently, pupils receive free bus passes to faith schools- funded by the council- for secondary schools over three miles away and for primary schools more than two miles away from their home even if a closer school exists.

A council report stated: "Returning to a statutory provision will remove the risk of requests for transport provision in the future from people of other religions and beliefs."

The council is therefore proposing a return to the minimum transport provision it is required to provide. This is expected to save £110,000 a year.

The cuts, if approved, are expected to come into force in September 2016 and will affect 456 pupils currently in receipt of free bus passes to attend faith schools. The Council says it is "impossible" to say how many children would change schools to save transport costs.

National Secular Society campaigns manager Stephen Evans commented: "There are huge costs involved in organising educational provision along religious lines. As well as being morally wrong and leading to [social segregation](#), it is expensive and inefficient. As the [Kirklees Council report finds](#), providing free transport to all faith schools when closer schools exist is not a cost taxpayers should be expected to pay."

A final decision will be made by Kirklees Council in early June.

The news follows a [court ruling last week](#) in which a judge concluded that the state is not obliged to subsidise transport costs between a child's home and a faith school if a closer mainstream school exists. Though the court ruled in favour of a Catholic school affected by transport-subsidy cuts proposed by Swansea Council, the judgment made clear that local authorities are not under any obligation to provide subsidised transport for pupils attending faith schools.

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