

Reading Council proposes end to faith school travel subsidy

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Reading Borough Council has opened a [consultation](#) on a proposal to end taxpayer funding for parents who opt to send their children to faith schools even though a nearer school is available.

In their proposal the Council says, "There is no legal duty for Local Authorities to provide free transport" to parents who send their children to a faith school which is not the closest school.

The Council currently provides free transport for pupils at a Catholic secondary school, two Catholic primary schools and one Church of England school.

"Since it is not a legal duty to provide free transport, the Council is proposing that the current arrangements will cease from July 2017. This will generate savings of £20k per annum."

If the recommendation is supported in the Council's public consultation, it has guaranteed that "All children who currently receive free transport will continue to do so until either the end of year 6 for primary pupils or the end of year 11 for secondary pupils" to minimise disruption for parents of current pupils.

Councillor Tony Jones, the Lead Councillor for Education, [commented](#): "Reading council has continued to cover the cost of children travelling to faith schools even though it has no statutory obligation to do so.

"In the face of drastic budget cuts and recent changes in Government guidance we are having to review school transport provision and this is one of the areas we are looking to change.

"With a shrinking pot of money the council is looking at ways of efficiently delivering a school transport service for those who need it most. We are now inviting comments on the proposals we are putting forward."

NSS campaigns director Stephen Evans said: "The taxpayer shouldn't have to pick up the cost of parents choosing a more distant faith school for their child on religious grounds.

"Transporting pupils to and from faith schools encourages the segregation of young people along religious lines and represents an unfair privilege for religious parents. We're therefore pleased to see councils phasing this out."

Lancashire Council [recently announced plans](#) to remove its subsidy for travel to faith schools when a nearer suitable school is available.

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