

Leeds is latest council to consider scrapping free transport to religious schools

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Leeds City Council is the latest to consider scrapping free transport to religious schools. The plan will mostly affect Catholic schools.

The council needs to save £54.9m over the next year and has estimated it spends around £4.76m a year on non-statutory free home to school travel for some children.

John Grady, of the Diocese of Leeds, has said that scrapping passes could lead to falling numbers at Catholic schools as parents weigh up costs and school choice.

Council officials say that pupils who are legally entitled to free home to school transport will not be affected by any proposed changes. Free transport would also remain available to faith schools for pupils from low income families.

Coun Judith Blake, executive member responsible for children's services, said: "In these times of economic uncertainty, it is necessary for us to assess that we are spending council tax payers' money as wisely as possible. This is why we have decided to look at what we currently spend on non-statutory services to make sure these are both fit for purpose and value for money."

But she added: "Should the existing policy be changed we would ensure future provision is implemented carefully and coupled with imaginative and innovative solutions to ensure children and young people are provided with affordable and effective support."

In neighbouring Wakefield, free bus passes for children attending Catholic schools are to be withdrawn through a phased approach from September 2013.

Council chiefs say a final decision on the future of the transport policy would be made following a 28-day consultation which starts this month.

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