

End discriminatory school transport

Children shouldn't face discrimination on the school bus because of their parents' religion or lack of it. Religious discrimination is prominent in the provision of both discretionary and statutory home-to-school transport. We seek equitable school transport policies, free from religious privilege, fair to all families and fair to taxpayers.

What's the problem?

Statutory school transport arrangements give preferential treatment to those attending the nearest school preferred on the grounds of religion and belief. By law, local education authorities must provide free transport to a child's nearest school if that school is beyond a walking distance of two or three miles depending on the age of the child. Local authorities provide free transport to pupils from low-income families attending faith schools up to 15 miles from their home; meanwhile, those with no religious preference are given free transport only up to 6 miles.

In addition, many councils also provide school transport on a discretionary basis to children attending schools on the grounds of religion and belief. This almost exclusively applies to children attending faith schools.

Incredibly, pupils can miss out on subsidised transport to a particular faith school if they don't come from the same religious background as the faith of the school. We have dealt with cases of parents who have to pay the full amount for transport because their children aren't Catholic, while pupils from Catholic backgrounds have their bus travel to the same school subsidised.

Provisions of the Equality Act 2010 which place a duty on local authorities not to discriminate against a person on the grounds of their religion or belief do not apply to the exercise of an authority's functions in relation to school transport.

We are against this unfair and discriminatory religious privilege and campaign for a fairer system. Our arguments are based on principle rather than cost, but the cost implications are significant. Expenditure on home-to-school transport is currently running at around £1 billion per year and is spiralling above the rate of inflation.

We understand that some parents wish to send their children to a school with a particular 'faith ethos', but we regard the associated additional transport costs as a parental responsibility, not the responsibility of the state.

What are we doing?

- Our attempts during the passage of the 2011 Education Act to make discrimination in school transport on the grounds of religion and belief unlawful were resisted by the Government. We are however seeking to persuade local authorities to implement more equitable school transport arrangements. Many local authorities are now phasing out discretionary spending on free or subsidised travel to faith schools in a bid to cut out unnecessary expenditure.
- Where such proposals meet religious objections, we are supporting the right of local authorities to end unnecessary financial assistance to parents to send their children to faith schools when other schools are available more locally.
- In November 2019 we [submitted evidence](#) to a consultation by Tekford & Wrekinham Council, supporting proposals to reduce privileged and discriminatory transport subsidies for faith schools.

What you can do:

Sign the petition

Please consider supporting our petition to end religious discrimination/privilege in school transport.

- [Take action](#)

Write to your MP

Please raise this issue with your MP using our general letter.

Enter Postcode: _____

Find my MP

[Children shouldn't face discrimination on the school bus because of their parents' religion or lack of it. Local councils shouldn't have to subsidise families' choice to attending distant faith schools.](#)
[Click to tweet](#)

Parents, pupils, and teachers: need advice?

Concerns about religious discrimination in school transport? Our campaigns pages have plenty of information, but if you need more, please:

- [Visit our advice page](#)
- [Get in touch](#)

Share

You can use the share buttons on the right to share this campaigns page with your social networks. Help show the importance of this campaign by sharing your story.

- [Share your story](#)

More information

- [Faith Schools School Transport Briefing Paper](#) (PDF, 222 Kb)

Learn more about the legal background to this problem.

While you're here

Education is a huge part of our campaigning, policy and casework. Please consider a donation to enable us to continue making a difference.

- [Support us from just £1 a month](#)