



Travel Assistance Consultation – Tekford & Wrekinham: NSS response

Submitted by email to: travelassistancepolicy@telford.gov.uk and online

Background

1. This submission is made by the National Secular Society (NSS). The NSS is a not-for-profit non-governmental organisation founded in 1866, funded by its members and by donations. We advocate for separation of religion and state and promote secularism as the best means of creating a society in which people of all religions and none can live together fairly and cohesively. We seek a diverse society where all are free to practise their faith, change it, or to have no faith at all. We uphold the universality of individual Human Rights, which should never be overridden on the grounds of religion, tradition or culture.
2. Religious discrimination and the privileging of faith groups is widespread in school transport provision. Inequity in school transport provision is one of several ways in which faith schools undermine choice for many families.¹ We seek equitable school transport policies, free from religious privilege, fair to families and taxpayers alike.

Q4. To what extent would each of these proposals impact on you, your household or organisation? Please mark one response on each line

	Negative impact		Neither negative/positive		Positive impact	
	1	2	3	4	5	
Stopping the offer of discretionary travel assistance to children on the basis of their faith who are not classified on a low income						X

Q6. Do you have any alternative suggestions on how education travel assistance could be provided in the future? Please provide details in the space below:

3. Within the limits of the current statutory requirements (which are already more generous for those attending faith schools) Tekford & Wrekinham is correct to restrict discretionary travel assistance to the nearest qualifying school.

¹ <https://www.secularism.org.uk/faith-schools/choicedelusion.html>

4. We note that these changes will not affect provision for current pupils and that provision for those on low income remains more generous for those whose families have chosen schools on the grounds of their religion or belief if “having regard to that religion or belief, there is no nearer suitable school to their home”.
5. School travel assistance should always prioritise genuine need and access to suitable education, rather than simple parental preference. Community schools are inherently inclusive by their nature. Such schools are suitable and appropriate for pupils of all faith and belief backgrounds.
6. We note the consultation document’s inconsistent references to “basis of their faith” and “grounds of their religion or belief”. We assume this is a recognition that such privileged transport provision is effectively exclusively for those of faith or wishing to attend a faith school and that in practice similar assistance is not usually available to those wishing to attend a community ethos school because nearer faith schools are not suitable for them.

Q7. If you have any further comments please provide details in the space below:

7. Over the last decade pressure on council budgets has led to many local authorities reviewing the generous subsidies for transport to faith schools. Unfortunately, such reductions in privilege have often been disingenuously presented as discriminatory. Where local authorities have refused to review faith school transport it leads to a disproportionate burden falling on other groups with less organised lobbying to support their interests.
8. We welcome the recognition of faith schools as “parental preference”. While some may prefer a faith-based school over more local suitable schools, this does not convey a duty on the state to subsidise such a preference. The case law on Article 2 of Protocol 1 (the right to education) is clear that this does not convey a duty on the state to subsidise a particular type of education. The 2015 case of *Diocese of Menevia v. City of Swansea* affirms that the state is not obliged to be “[subsidising] and/or paying the whole cost for transportation between home and school”.²

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² <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2015/05/court-rules-parents-have-no-right-for-state-to-subsidise-transport-to-faith-schools>