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Eligibility for School Transport Assistance (non-special education)



Caregivers are responsible for getting students to and from school each day. However, in some circumstances caregivers face difficulties getting students to and from school because of distance or a lack of public transport where they live. The Ministry of Education provides school transport assistance to help ensure equitable access to compulsory education.

School Transport Assistance may be provided to help students whom meet the eligibility criteria get to school each day. The assistance provided may not cover the whole or the full transport cost.

This fact sheet outlines the School Transport Assistance eligibility criteria. The eligibility criteria are applied according to four categories, with each category having a set of criterion:

- › students attending the closest **Mainstream state** or **state-integrated school** that they can enroll at
- › students attending a **Māori Medium School**
- › students attending a **Partnership School**, or
- › any other education settings approved by the Secretary for Education as appropriate.

Students attending state or state-integrated schools

- › To be eligible for School Transport Assistance a student attending the closest **mainstream state** or **state-integrated school** that they can enroll at must meet all of the following criteria:
- › The student must:
- › live at or more than 3.2 kilometres from the **closest school they can enroll at** if they are in years 1 to 8, or
- › live at or more than 4.8 kilometres from the **closest school they can enroll at** if they are in year 9 or over.
- › Suitable public transport is not available anywhere between the student's home and the closest school that they can enroll at. The Ministry is currently working with providers of public transport to determine a mutually appropriate understanding of what constitutes suitable public transport. This is expected to be concluded, including engagement and communication by December 2016 for effect at the start of the 2017 school year. Until that time a public transport service is deemed to be suitable if it meets all of the following criteria:
 - the public transport service travels within 2.4 kilometres of the roadside gate of the student's home, and
 - the public transport service travels within 2.4 kilometres of the closest school they can enroll at, and
 - the public transport service does not require the student to change transport services more than once on a journey, and

What is a suitable timetable?

A suitable timetable:

- › allows morning pickup no earlier than 7.00 am and enables the student to arrive at school before the school's start time, and
- › allows afternoon drop-off no later than 5:00 pm that same day.

Ideally students should not be on the vehicle for any longer than 60 minutes.

There may be some exceptions to this timeframe due to local circumstances such as route length, school starting times, and the number of schools on the route.

What do we mean by 'closest school that the student can enroll at'?

The **closest school that the student can enroll at** is the closest school to the **student's home** that the student can enroll at. For this purpose, unsuitable schools are deemed to be:

- › single sex **mainstream state** or **state-integrated** schools of the other gender to that of the student
- › **mainstream state** or **state-integrated schools** that don't offer the student's current year level
- › **mainstream state-integrated schools** having a **special character** that the caregiver does not identify with
- › **mainstream state** or **state-integrated schools** that do not teach the curriculum predominantly in the caregiver's chosen language (either Māori or English language only)
- › **mainstream state** or **state-integrated schools** with enrolment schemes that prevent the student from enrolling
- › a **mainstream state** or **state-integrated school** from which the student has been stood down, suspended, excluded, or expelled.

Students attending Māori Medium Schools

To be eligible for School Transport Assistance, a student attending a Māori Medium School must:

- › live at or more than 3.2 kilometres from the **Māori Medium School** they attend if they are in years 1 to 8
- › live at or more than 4.8 kilometres from the **Māori Medium School** they attend if they are in year 9 or over.

Assistance for eligible students attending **Māori Medium Schools** is paid directly to the school via central funding. The school is then responsible for providing transport arrangements for its eligible students.

How is distance measured?

For students attending the closest **school they can enroll at**, the shortest public road or public pedestrian route is used to measure the distance. The measurement is taken from the roadside gate of the **student's home** to the closest public road to the school's front gate.

Students not attending the closest school they can enroll at

Sometimes caregivers choose to enroll their child/children at a school that is further away from the **student's home** than their **closest school they can enroll at**. Whilst the Ministry supports caregiver choice, School Transport Assistance is not provided in this instance.

Historically students have been able to transfer their entitlement for School Transport Assistance under guidance called **Transport Entitlement Zones**. Routes reviewed and designed during 2016 and onwards will not be using **Transport Entitlement Zones** as a consideration for route design.

Applying for School Transport Assistance

To apply for School Transport Assistance, the student's caregiver fills out an application form (the School Transport: application for assistance). The application form is available online at www.education.govt.nz/schooltransport or from the Ministry of Education's **service agents**.

The **service agent** uses the application form to assess a student's eligibility for School Transport Assistance and to determine the type of assistance to be provided.

At the end of the assessment process, the **service agent** will write to the student's caregiver about their decision regarding School Transport Assistance.

Reviewing decisions made

If a caregiver would like a decision regarding School Transport Assistance reviewed, they should first discuss it with the school principal or the **bus controller**. If a caregiver would like to discuss the decision further, they should contact their **service agent** or ask their **bus controller** to do so on their behalf.

Can students deemed ineligible for school transport assistance still travel on a Ministry funded service?

Currently ineligible students can, at the discretion of the bus operator and under certain conditions, travel on existing Ministry funded transport services. These conditions are that:

- A. there is capacity on the service
- B. they do not disadvantage eligible students (i.e. through timetable changes/seating)
- C. they pay a fare
- D. they/the bus operator has the permission of schools affected by the route to transport the ineligible student/s

Services providers are contractually responsible for making sure all the above conditions are met. The arrangement of travel for ineligible students is considered a private arrangement between the bus operator and the student/caregivers which the Ministry is not party to.

Where can I find more information?

This series of fact sheets and our website www.education.govt.nz/schooltransport are designed to provide you with information about School Transport Assistance you may need. Please read these resources first.

If you still have questions about School Transport Assistance, talk to your school's principal or **bus controller** – they can provide you with the information you need or direct you to the person who can best answer your questions.



Glossary of defined terms

Bus controller

The bus controller is responsible for school bus route administration and safety. Generally the bus controller is the principal or a full-time teacher.

Closest school that the student can enroll at

Used as a reference to replace the term Nearest Appropriate School with no meaning change.

The closest school that the student can enroll at is the closest school to the student's home that is suitable for the student. For this purpose, unsuitable schools are deemed to be:

- › single sex mainstream state or state-integrated schools of the other gender to that of the student
- › mainstream state or state-integrated schools that don't offer the student's current year level
- › schools of a special character that the caregiver does not identify with
- › private schools
- › mainstream state or state-integrated schools that do not teach the curriculum predominantly in the caregiver's chosen language (either Māori or English language only)
- › mainstream state or state-integrated schools with enrolment schemes that prevent the student from enrolling
- › a mainstream state or state-integrated school from which the student has been stood down, suspended, excluded or expelled (during the period of that intervention)

Kura See Māori Medium School

Kura Kaupapa Māori See Māori Medium School.

Level 1 Mainstream Māori immersion school

Level 1 Māori immersion schools provide 81% to 100% of tuition in te reo Māori. In Level 1 Māori immersion schools:

- › te reo Māori is the principal language of communication and instruction
- › the principal curriculum is taught entirely in te reo Māori
- › it is expected that all students in the programme will interact freely in te reo Māori.

Level 2 Mainstream Māori immersion school

Level 2 Māori immersion schools provide 51% to 80% of tuition in te reo Māori. In Level 2 Māori immersion schools:

- › te reo Māori is, for most of the time, the language of communication and instruction
- › English is accepted as a temporary language of instruction and communication
- › there is an agreement between the school and parents that the programme will achieve a particular level of immersion over a specified period of time
- › the level of fluency of the teacher will vary considerably, from not very fluent to native-like fluency
- › there is a reliance on Kaiarahi Reo to increase the amount of spoken Māori in the programme
- › it is expected that not all students in the programme will interact freely in te reo Māori.

Level 3 Mainstream Māori immersion school

Ministry School Transport Assistance is not provided to Level 3 Māori immersion schools

Level 4 Mainstream Māori immersion school

Ministry School Transport Assistance is not provided to Level 4 Māori immersion schools

Māori Medium School

A Māori Medium School is a kura, kura kaupapa Māori, wharekura or designated character school providing education in te reo Māori established under Section 155 or Section 156 of the Education Act 1989.

Māori Medium School Funding Programme

Under this programme, School Transport Assistance is paid directly to the school Board of Trustees, which is then responsible for arranging school transport services.

Nearest appropriate school

Replaced in terms use by **closest school the student can enroll at**.

Private school

A private school is registered or provisionally registered as a private school. Private schools are not part of the state network of schools.

Public transport service

This includes buses, ferries, or train services that:

- are registered by the appropriate local or regional council, and
- run regularly and on all school days, and
- are fare-paying services.

All commercial services are required to be registered with the appropriate local or regional council.

School of special character

A school providing an education within the framework of a particular or general religious or philosophical belief as associated with observations of that belief.

A school of special character has been established as part of the state school system under the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act 1975. See also state-integrated school.

School's address

A school's address is defined by the Ministry using Geographic Information Software.

Service agent

A service agent is the transport agent contracted by the Ministry of Education to manage and administer School Transport Assistance on its behalf.

State school

Most New Zealand schools are state schools which receive government funding. State schools can be primary, intermediate, middle, secondary, or area/composite.

Generally they accept both boys and girls at primary and intermediate levels (Year 1 – 8), although some secondary schools offer single sex education. Lessons are based on New Zealand curriculum.

For School Transport purposes, state schools and state-integrated schools are considered separately.

State-integrated school

These are schools integrated into the state school system under the provisions of the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act 1975. Section 34 of the Act makes provision for School Transport Assistance to integrated schools. See also **school of special character**.

Student's home

A student's home address is defined as the point on the closest public road that is closest to the student's roadside gate.

Suitable public transport

The Ministry is currently working with providers of public transport to determine a mutually appropriate understanding of what constitutes suitable public transport. This is expected to be concluded, including engagement and communication by December 2016 for effect at the start of the 2017 school year. Until that time a **public transport service** is deemed to be suitable if it meets all of the following criteria:

- › the public transport service travels within 2.4 kilometres of the roadside gate of the **student's home**
- › the public transport service travels within 2.4 kilometres of the **closest school that the student can enroll at**
- › the public transport service does not require the student to change transport services more than once on a journey
- › the public transport service has a suitable timetable



This fact sheet provides information about Ministry of Education daily school bus routes and how they are designed.

How are daily bus routes designed?

Routes are designed to transport eligible students who want to access a Ministry funded vehicle to and from the closest school that they can enroll at. Routes are designed to transport as many eligible students as efficiently as possible. Routes will generally only travel down main roads and students are expected to make their own way to a central bus stop.

Route design takes into account the following factors:

- › the location of current eligible students
- › bus stop location
- › student and road safety
- › that the route runs within a suitable timetable
- › that the route is within Ministry's cost limits
- › any approved exemptions

Students who bypass a closer school(s) to attend their school of choice will not be considered when designing routes.

The exact design of the route will be at the discretion of the service agent following discussion with the transport service provider (TSP), and the affected school(s).

Who are the people involved in Ministry school bus services?

Service agent: A service agent is the transport agent contracted by the Ministry of Education to manage and administer School Transport Assistance on its behalf. Go to the Ministry's website, www.education.govt.nz/schooltransport, for a list of service agent contact details.

Bus controller: The bus controller is responsible for school bus route administration and safety. Each school has a school bus controller. Generally this person is the principal or a full-time teacher.

Transport service provider: The transport service provider is the company contracted by the Ministry of Education to run a school transport service on a route.

At what times do school buses operate?

Services should not start picking up students before 7am, and all students should be set down by 5pm. Ideally students should not be on the vehicle for any longer than 60 minutes.

There may be some exceptions to this timeframe due to local circumstances such as route length, school starting times, and the number of schools on the route.

Can a school bus service be redesigned, reduced or stopped?

Yes. If a **service agent** determines that an individual school bus service is no longer viable, they may recommend that the service be redesigned, reduced or stopped. This could be due to low eligible student numbers using the bus.

If this happens, a **Conveyance Allowance** may be paid to caregivers of eligible students. Where a school bus service will be reduced or stopped, a minimum of one full term's notice is given.

Can a school bus service be extended?

Schools may seek an extension to a current route to service more eligible students. While Ministry services generally only travel along main roads extensions may be approved along main or side roads not currently travelled by the route.

Extensions will be considered if:

- › there are four or more eligible students living on or around the road that the extension is being sought for; and
- › the distance to the home of the furthest eligible student is at least 2.4km from the road the bus currently travels along.

Extensions will be approved if the above criteria, and the other route design guidelines are met.

If the route extension is approved the vehicle will travel along the route to a central point where the vehicle can safely turn around. Students may need to travel to meet the vehicle at this central point. A final decision on where the route will travel to, along the extension, will be decided by the service agent in consultation with the **transport service provider** and school.

Bus stops

Stops will be decided by the service agent in conjunction with the **transport service provider**.

Do these route design guidelines apply to Direct Resourcing Funding Programme routes?

Yes, these route design guidelines apply to the design of school bus routes provided under both the **Daily Funding Programme** and the **Direct Resourcing Funding Programme**. Schools funded under the **Direct Resourcing Funding Programme** are provided funds directly and the amount of funding is based on the Ministry-designed bus route.

Historically students have been able to transfer their entitlement for School Transport Assistance under guidance called **Transport Entitlement Zones**. Routes reviewed and designed during 2016 and onwards will not be using **Transport Entitlement Zones** as a consideration for route design for either the **Daily Funding Programme** or the **Direct Resourcing Funding Programme**.

Glossary of defined terms

Main road

A major road or arterial road for motor transport.

Public transport service

This includes buses, ferries, or train services that:

- › are registered by the appropriate local or regional council, and
- › run regularly and on all school days, and
- › are fare-paying services.

All commercial services are required to be registered with the appropriate local or regional council.

School's address

A school's address is defined by the Ministry using Geographic Information Software.

Side road

A minor road branching off a main road. These may connect to other main roads, to other side roads, or may be dead ended.

State school

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Generally they accept both boys and girls at primary and intermediate levels (Year 1 – 8), although some secondary schools offer single sex education. Lessons are based on New Zealand curriculum.

For School Transport purposes, state schools and state-integrated schools are considered separately.

State-integrated school

These are schools integrated into the state school system under the provisions of the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act 1975. Section 34 of the Act makes provision for School Transport Assistance to integrated schools. See also **school of special character**.

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Suitable public transport

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- › the public transport service travels within 2.4 kilometres of the roadside gate of the **student's home**
- › the public transport service travels within 2.4 kilometres of the **closest appropriate school**
- › the public transport service does not require the student to change transport services more than once on a journey
- › the public transport service has a suitable timetable



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4 School bus safety – behaviours and responsibilities

New Zealand has a very good school transport safety record. To maintain this record and minimise risks and hazards, everyone using school buses should follow the behaviour protocols and safety tips outlined in this fact sheet.

For Special Education School Transport Assistance safety requirements please see Fact Sheet 5.

Expected behaviour of students using school buses

1. Passengers sit down straight away and remain in their seats for the whole journey.
2. If a passenger is standing, they should stay behind the driver at all times, stand quietly, and not push or move around the bus.
3. Passengers do not eat or drink in the bus.
4. Passengers do not throw objects inside or out of the bus.
5. Passengers use socially acceptable language when talking to the driver and/or other students, and speak quietly so they do not distract the driver.
6. Passengers respect the transport service provider's property at all times (for example, do not stand on seats or vandalise the bus in any way).
7. Passengers do not harass, bully, or abuse other passengers or the driver in any way, whether verbally or physically.
8. Passengers respect others' property and do not interfere with it in any way.
9. Passengers listen to and follow the requirements and instructions of the bus driver and the teacher/s on duty at all times.
10. Passengers do not engage in any behaviour that could put other passengers, the driver or themselves at risk.
11. Bus operators have their own code of conduit for travelling as a passenger on their service. Passengers are expected to comply with these requirements.

Safety tips for students using school buses

Getting on the bus	Getting off the bus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › wait in the designated place – well back from the road › wait until the bus has stopped before getting on › carry your bag in front of you so it does not get caught in the door › if seated, put your bag (and anything else you are carrying) on your lap or under the seat in front of you › if there are no empty seats, fill the bus from the back first. Put your bag on the floor and hold on to a seat-back or handrail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › wait until the bus has stopped › carry your bag in front of you so it does not get caught in the door › get off the bus through the front door if possible › get off the bus carefully without pushing › wait well back from the road until the bus has moved away › if you need to cross the road, find a safe place, wait until the bus has moved away and you can see clearly up and down the road, then cross

What happens if a student behaves unsafely or inappropriately on a school bus?

If a student behaves in an inappropriate or unsafe manner, the student's school will take steps to manage this behaviour, as in any other area of school life. Students not meeting expected behaviour standards risk losing their place on the school bus either temporarily or permanently.

Can a student's place on a school bus be taken away?

Yes. Where a student's behaviour is an ongoing or serious problem, the school and the **transport service provider** may decide to withdraw the privilege of a place on a school bus. This could be a temporary measure or, in more serious cases, a permanent one.

In such circumstances, it is up to the caregiver to make their own arrangements to ensure they are meeting their legal obligation to get their child to school. Caregivers are not entitled to a **Conveyance Allowance** in this situation.

What can caregivers do to keep bus students safe?

To help make a school bus trip safe, caregivers who are dropping off/picking up students at the bus stop should:

- › when dropping students off at the bus, get out of the car and go with them to the bus stop
- › when collecting students, get out of the car and meet them as they get off the bus, on the same side of the road that the bus has stopped on, and go with the student to the car.

These practices will help to stop students running across the road to or from the bus into the path of passing traffic.

Caregivers should also spend time with students to help them understand how they can keep themselves safe and how they are expected to behave on the bus.

What can schools do to keep bus students safe?

Schools have a responsibility to support a safe environment for students getting on and off buses. They can help keep school buses safe by:

- › deciding on and documenting a process for safe loading and unloading of students (in conjunction with New Zealand Police, New Zealand Transport Agency, or the **transport service provider** if expert advice is needed)
- › supervising loading and unloading every morning and afternoon if there are hazards (for example, several buses are unloading in the same area)
- › posting a senior student or adult to signal to the driver when it is safe to turn and when it is not if a bus is turning near a loading area
- › giving students instructions on safe loading and unloading from buses and safe storage of school bags on buses
- › working with the **transport service provider**, caregivers and, if necessary, the New Zealand Police around managing student behaviour on buses.

How do bus drivers contribute to the operation of a safe school bus?

There are a number of things that bus drivers can do to help keep school bus students safe.

Picking up and setting down students	On the road	General
<ul style="list-style-type: none">› pick up/set down students on the left-hand side of the road› pick up/set down students on the same side of the road as the school, if possible› wait for the all-clear from the duty teacher before departing on the home run	<ul style="list-style-type: none">› report any inappropriate student behaviour to the transport service provider who will contact the bus controller or school	<ul style="list-style-type: none">› check the vehicle before each trip to make sure it is safe› give students instruction on using the emergency door at least once a term› check vehicle loading

Can a driver remove a student from a bus before they have reached home or school?

No. Where a student is not meeting expected behavioural standards on a bus, the bus driver cannot simply pull over and remove the student from the bus. In the interest of safety, the bus driver must finish the route and deliver all the students to their usual stops.

In extreme cases, where the bus driver judges that it is no longer safe to continue the route with the student on board, the driver will pull over and contact the police or the school to remove the student.

Are standing passengers allowed on a Ministry-contracted school bus?

Standing passengers may be allowed on school buses but there are strict conditions. The New Zealand Transport Agency determines the legal loading limit for every passenger service vehicle, including the number of standing passengers. This limit is specified in the vehicle's Certificate of Loading. **Transport service providers** are responsible for ensuring that they do not exceed these loading limits.

What does the Ministry of Education do to ensure good safety standards?

Safety is a priority for the Ministry of Education in providing school bus services. School transport service is a large operation, assisting approximately 105,000 students twice a day, and has a very good safety record. The Ministry continually assesses ways to improve the school transport service to maintain its high standard.

The Ministry uses the following processes to ensure good safety standards are maintained:

Tender process

When a school bus service is established, the Ministry of Education calls for tenders from potential **transport service providers** to run the route.

The Ministry will not award a **transport service provider** a contract to supply school bus services without first:

- › confirming details of driver training, business experience, school transport experience, accounting systems, and other relevant aspects of the potential bus service provider
- › checking maintenance records and relevant information about the vehicles that will be used to supply the service
- › getting technical advice from the New Zealand Transport Agency on the safety of the vehicles that will be used on the service.

During the tender process, the tendered cost is not considered until the Ministry of Education is satisfied that the tenderer has met specific safety and qualification requirements.

Transport service provider contract

The contract between the Ministry of Education and the **transport service provider** requires the **transport service provider** to comply with a number of contractual and legislative requirements, including, but not limited to, requiring the **transport service provider** to:

- › provide a safe and reliable service
- › observe all transport laws, regulations and rules
- › make changes when they know a problem exists. Note:
- › not all school buses are required to be fitted with seatbelts. Where seats are fitted with seatbelts, they must be used
- › there is no requirement for all students to be seated on a bus. To clarify whether children can stand on the bus they are travelling on, refer to the loading certificate for that bus.

If you are concerned that a school bus service is not meeting safety requirements, you can make a complaint. For more information, see Fact Sheet 6: Contacts and feedback processes.

Safety checks

The Ministry of Education's **service agents** are required to:

- › visit **transport service providers** at least once every two years to monitor contractual and legislative safety requirements
- › contact **transport service providers** by telephone at least once a year to discuss operational issues
- › communicate with schools regularly to stay informed of any operational or safety concerns.

Who else is involved in school bus safety standards?

New Zealand Transport Agency

- › sets vehicle standards
- › identifies issues on vehicle design, construction and maintenance
- › checks vehicles for safety (together with vehicle inspection agents and NZ Police)
- › › issues/declines passenger service licenses, which are required for all school **transport service providers**
- › › monitors school **transport service providers** to ensure they continue to meet legislative criteria
- › advises the Minister of Transport on transport safety matters and helps draft transport law
- › works with New Zealand Police to produce guidelines and training for school traffic safety teams
- › › participates in **transport service provider** tendering evaluation, as well as identifying vehicles and/or operators with unsafe history.

New Zealand Police Commercial Vehicle Investigation Unit

- › polices all aspects of commercial vehicle use including vehicle and driver fitness, driving hours and logbooks
- › administers road user charges as they apply to vehicle, road, bridge limits and vehicle dimensions
- › attends and reports on commercial vehicle accidents or incidents.

What protocols are in place if there is a bus crash or incident?

New Zealand has a very good safety record for school buses, and serious crashes and incidents are thankfully very rare. However, when an accident or incident does occur, the following actions are taken:

- › the driver/operator obtains medical aid and contacts emergency services, the school(s) serviced by the route and the local **service agent**
- › the police notify caregivers or next of kin by phone as soon as possible where there has been serious injury or death
- › the school **bus controller** notifies the principal(s) of the school(s) serviced by the route and also immediately telephones a report through to the local **service agent**
- › for less serious injuries, the principal(s) or bus controller(s) immediately notifies caregivers of any students who have sustained injuries
- › the service agent immediately notifies the Ministry of Education's national office
- › as soon as possible, the **transport service provider** completes a written report detailing the circumstances of the accident/incident. The **transport service provider** provides additional written reports for any new developments for the local service agent, as needed
- › the **service agent** will liaise with the school, the **transport service provider** and the Ministry's national office as needed.

Glossary of defined terms

Bus controller

The bus controller is responsible for school bus route administration and safety. Generally the bus controller is the principal or a full-time teacher.

Conveyance allowance

A conveyance allowance is funding paid directly to a caregiver or school as a contribution to the cost of transporting an eligible student to and from school.

Service agent

A service agent is the transport agent contracted by the Ministry of Education to manage and administer School Transport Assistance on its behalf.

Transport service provider

The transport service provider is the company contracted by the Ministry of Education to provide a school transport service.



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Special Education School Transport Assistance (SESTA)



Special Education School Transport Assistance (SESTA) helps caregivers with students who, because of their special needs, do not have ready access to education at their closest school or the closest school that is able to meet their special educational needs. The assistance provided may not cover the whole journey or the full transport cost.

Eligibility

To be eligible for SESTA, a student must:

- › be aged between 5 and 21 years, and
- › meet the mobility and/or safety eligibility criteria (see below), and
- › be on the roll of a state or state-integrated school, and be attending the closest school or educational setting that is able to meet their special education needs.

To be eligible for full SESTA, a student must attend the closest school to their home that is able to meet their special educational needs. A student who meets the mobility and safety criteria, but who attends a school further away, may be eligible for limited SESTA. This assistance will only be provided in the form of a **Conveyance Allowance** based on distance to the closest school able to meet the student's needs and the caregiver will need to meet the remaining costs.

What is the closest school eligibility requirement?

Full SESTA eligibility is based on the student attending the closest school or education setting to their home that is able to meet their special education needs. The age range, gender, and special character of a school will be considered when deciding what is the closest school able to meet a student's special education needs.

How is the closest school or educational setting determined for SESTA?

The closest school or education setting is determined by considering the needs of the student and matching them with the closest school or education setting to the **student's home** that is able to meet those needs.

Mobility and safety criteria

To be eligible for SESTA, a student must fall within one of the following two categories:

Mobility criterion

SESTA is provided for students whose mobility needs prevent them from travelling independently to and from school. Examples of where assistance may be provided for mobility needs are:

- › where wheelchairs or other specialist equipment must accompany the student, or
- › where mobility reasons prevent the student from independently making their way to school (e.g. students who are not able to walk freely).

Safety criterion

SESTA is provided for students whose safety needs prevent them from travelling independently to and from school. A safety need is where there is a significant risk of harm or danger to the student, or to others, during travel to and from school. This significant risk may relate to a learning disability and/or serious behavioural or medical condition.

Are the needs of the student's caregiver taken into account?

No. Eligibility is based on the needs of the student not of the caregiver. Students whose caregivers have a safety or mobility need, but do not have these needs themselves, are ineligible.

Are students under ACC care for temporary incapacitation eligible?

No. Students temporarily incapacitated as the result of an accident are ineligible as the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) assists those accidentally injured.

Are the financial circumstances of a caregiver taken into consideration?

No. There is no financial assessment or consideration of parental income made when determining whether a student is eligible for SESTA or the type of assistance that may be provided.

Is transport assistance available for students boarding at residential schools?

There is no SESTA available to transport boarding or residential students home or back to school, or for the weekend, or for the start or end of the school term.

What types of assistance are available?

Assistance may be provided for students eligible under the safety/mobility criteria in the form of:

- › a place on a school bus, and/or
- › a place on a contracted special education transport service, and/or
- › a **conveyance allowance**.

What journey does the assistance cover?

SESTA supports the journey between the student's home and school only. It is not provided to transport students to or from medical appointments, therapy sessions, counseling, etc.

Limited assistance to transport a student between school and an alternative home address may be arranged – for example, where formal respite or alternative care arrangements have been made at an address other than the student's usual home, or in situations of shared custody where the student is resident at more than one home address. In all cases, however, transport between the **student's home** and/or care addresses is the responsibility of the caregiver. You should speak with your transport **service agent** for more information regarding the type and level of assistance available in this circumstance.

Applying for SESTA

To apply for SESTA, the student's caregiver needs to fill out an application form (the Special Education School Transport Assistance Form). The application form is available online at www.education.govt.nz/schooltransport, from the Ministry of Education's **service agents**, or from local Ministry Special Education offices. A new application should be completed if a student's circumstances change (for example, they move house or school). The application has three sections:

- › section A – information provided by the caregiver
- › section B – information provided by the school, and
- › section C – Ministry Special Education confirmation that the student meets the SESTA eligibility criteria and the student is attending the closest school able to meet the student's special education needs.

The **service agent** uses the application form to assess a student's eligibility for School Transport Assistance and to determine the type of assistance to be provided.

At the end of the assessment process, the **service agent** will write to the student's caregiver about the decision regarding SESTA.

Reviewing decisions made

For students with special education needs, there is a process for reviewing decisions on applications, if required. Contact the school principal or the local Special Education Manager (Ministry of Education) who will discuss the final decision and provide advice on the review process. A review is able to consider the following:

- › a student's eligibility for assistance
- › the closest school able to meet the student's needs
- › the type of assistance to be provided
- › the level of assistance to be provided.

How long will a student receive SESTA?

A student will continue to receive SESTA for as long as they remain eligible. SESTA will only stop or be reassessed if:

- › a student's circumstances change (for example, they move house or school), or
- › there is a specified review or stop date for their assistance.

What is the process for resolving complaints?

The Ministry of Education aims to provide a safe and efficient transport service for all students who are eligible for SESTA. If you have concerns about the service or the level of assistance provided, you can raise your concerns with your **transport service provider, service agent**, or school.

Please follow the steps below to raise a concern about your service.

- › contact your **transport service provider** and raise your concern
- › the **transport service provider** will ensure that your concern is noted and will respond to you within 24 hours.
- › However the **transport service provider** will work towards resolving the issue immediately
- › if you think that your concern has not been adequately addressed, you can then contact the **service agent** who manages all school **transport service providers**
- › the **service agent** will ensure that you receive a response within 24 hours from the time you raised your concern.
- › A solution may be provided by the **service agent** at this time
- › where concerns are serious or ongoing, the service agent will contact relevant agencies and the Ministry of Education
- › if you are not happy with how your concern has been dealt with, you can contact the Ministry of Education for further advice.

Where can I find more information?

This series of fact sheets and our website www.education.govt.nz/schooltransport are designed to provide you with all the information about SESTA you need. Please read these resources first.

If you still have questions about SESTA, talk to your school's principal. They can provide you with the information you need or direct you to the person who can best answer your questions.

Glossary of defined terms

Conveyance allowance

A conveyance allowance is funding paid directly to a caregiver or school as a contribution to the cost of transporting an eligible student to and from school.

Student's home

A student's home address is defined as the point on the closest public road that is closest to the student's roadside gate.

Service agent

A service agent is the transport agent contracted by the Ministry of Education to manage and administer School Transport Assistance on its behalf.

Transport service provider

The transport service provider is the company contracted by the Ministry of Education to provide a school transport service.

