



Westmorland
& Furness
Council

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School Transport

The Spare Seat Scheme 2025-2026:
Children in school years 0 (Reception) - 11



Introduction

The aim of this Information Sheet is to explain to parents/carers the nature of the Spare Seat Scheme. You are advised to read it **very** carefully if you wish to consider participating in the Scheme. The Spare Seat Scheme is for children in years 0 – 11.

Post-16 students should contact their Post-16 education provider to check whether a seat may be available through the Post-16 Spare Capacity Scheme.

Who is responsible for pupils' transport to school?

The provision of transport services for those pupils who qualify for free transport is the statutory responsibility of the Local Authority. In relation to most pupils, however, there is no such statutory duty. In these cases it is the parents/carers who have the entire responsibility for their children's transport arrangements.

What is the Spare Seat Scheme?

The scheme operates to assist parent/carers who are responsible for making their children's school transport arrangements. It involves making available, at a charge, spare capacity on vehicles contracted to take children entitled to free transport to and from school.

- Spare seat(s) can only be sold if they are available based on capacity limits of the vehicle, and if in doing so the Public Services Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 2000 are not contravened.

Whilst the Council encourages spare seats on school transport vehicles to be used, you should understand the following conditions and constraints before taking part in the Scheme:

- Entitled children always take precedence;
- Seats will only be available for as long as they are not required by children entitled to free transport;
- A seat is a concession not an entitlement;
- The availability of a seat will not be known until after the start of a school year (usually by mid-October).

The cost of a spare seat is reviewed each year as part of the Council's budget setting process.

Parents choosing to send their children to William Howard School, Brampton; Queen Elizabeth School, Kirkby Lonsdale or Ulverston Victoria High School, Ulverston,

should be aware that the costs of a spares seat on some routes will be charged at a higher rate than the standard seat. This is to ensure the costs of providing the extra seat is fully recovered by the Council. This charge will be reviewed annually. For more information, please contact the Integrated Home to School Transport Team.

How much does it cost

The cost for Spare Seat travel for 2026/2026 is still to be determined. The cost for the current 2025/2026 academic year is set out below:

Autumn Term	Spring Term	Summer Term
£289.68	£234.26	£230.00

Pro-rata payments based on the **annual** cost will be required for passengers who take up a seat after the start of the academic year. Single or one way journeys are not available at a discounted rate.

* This fee applies to the 2025/2026 academic year and is reviewed annually. Please be aware that it is highly likely cost will increase to above inflation.

Refunds

A refund will be given on a pro-rata basis if it is necessary for the Integrated Home to School Transport Team to withdraw a Spare Seat prior to the expiry of a valid permit. The refund will be payable from the date of withdrawal.

Refunds for permits which are no longer required by the holder will not be made.

The charges are reviewed annually and any increases may exceed the current rate of inflation.

When will I know if my child can have a spare seat?

The position regarding the availability of spare seats will not be known until after the start of the academic year. **This is likely to be as late as October half term.** This is partly because a number of parents/ carers of children for whom the Council has a responsibility to provide transport often make a late application, despite being encouraged to apply by June. (As there is a legal obligation involved, the Council cannot adhere to a fixed deadline for return of applications). Furthermore, the exam results which influence decisions regarding the continued education of older pupils at schools are not known until the end of August.

It must be stressed that, until you are advised by this office that a seat is available, you must make appropriate arrangements to get your child to school.

Whilst a clear picture will not be known by the start of the academic year, parents/carers are still advised to make an early application for a spare seat as date of receipt may have a bearing on spare seat allocation. New applicants should not forward any payment until asked to do so. Payment for ongoing Spare Seat Scheme passengers must be made by the given deadline. If, after payment has been made it is unfortunately not possible to offer a seat, a full refund will, of course, be given.

Which spare seat applications would be offered a seat first?

New spare seat applications are allocated as follows and dependent on seat availability:

Primary Transport	Secondary Transport	Joint Transport
	Spare seats will be offered to education providers as a priority for Post-16 students	
Infants living between 1 and 2 miles	Year 11- in order of date received	Year 11 - in order of date received
Juniors living between 2 and 3 miles	Year 10 - in order of date received	Year 10 - in order of date received
Infants living within 1 mile	Years 9 – 7 - in order of date received	Primary – as shown opposite
Juniors living within 2 miles		Secondary years 9 – 7 - in order of date received

Where would my child board the vehicle?

The routes of private hire vehicles are organised to meet the Council's responsibilities for children who are entitled to free transport. Your child would therefore be collected at the nearest boarding point determined by the Council.

If a spare seat is withdrawn, how much notice is given?

The withdrawal of a spare seat or the provision of a less convenient boarding point, whilst most regrettable, is sometimes unavoidable. Where possible a minimum of one week's notice will be given to parents/carers.

However, on occasions it may be necessary to make such changes at very short notice ie 24 hours. This is because the Council must give priority at all times to children who are entitled to free transport.

This boarding point may be some distance from your home and **it is your responsibility to ensure your child is taken to and collected from the boarding point.** The Council reserves the right to alter boarding points according to circumstances.

Which spare seat passengers would lose their seat first?

If it is necessary to withdraw spare seats, it would be done on an individual basis in the following order:

- Non-catchment children;
- Catchment children whose parents are not receiving their maximum Working Tax Credit;
- Catchment children with parents receiving their maximum Working Tax Credit.
- Post-16 students

Criteria has also been agreed to prioritise, if necessary, within the above categories. Details of these are as set out in the table below:

Primary Transport	Secondary Transport	Joint Transport
Juniors living within 2 miles – oldest child first off	Years 7-9 – last on first off	Secondary years 7-9 – last on first off
Infants living within 1 mile – oldest child first off	Year 10 – last on first off	Primary – as shown opposite
Juniors living between 2 and 3 miles – oldest child first off	Year 11 – last on first off	Year 10 – last on first off
Infants living between 1 and 2 miles – oldest child first off		Year 11 last on first off
	Seats offered to education providers for Post-16 students	

Can the Council increase capacity to accommodate applications for spare seats?

Under current policy, capacity cannot be increased or unnecessarily maintained at the Council's expense to cater for spare seat passengers. As a result, routes are rationalised to reflect the needs of children who are entitled to free transport. This can lead to fewer or no spare seats being available on a particular route.

On existing contracted runs, where reasonably possible and the increased costs are **fully** met by parents/carers, vehicles can be rerouted or larger ones provided to cater for pupils not accommodated on the existing provision. In these situations the increased costs would be in addition to a 30p per day administration charge.

Where such arrangements are impossible or impractical, parents/carers of non-entitled children may wish to enter into a private arrangement with an operator.

Why does the Council not operate a more generous spare seat scheme?

Many parents/carers in both rural and urban areas find it difficult and costly to get their children to school. The Council recognises that spare seat travel is both economic and convenient for parents/carers and that many would like to see a more generous scheme in operation. However, the introduction of a more generous policy to extend the transport network and increase capacity across the County would have significant financial implications for the budget.

The Spare Seat Travel Pass

Once your child has been allocated a spare seat, a travel pass will be issued provided that an application form has been completed and the appropriate payment made.

The travel pass must be carried by your child and produced for the driver on each journey otherwise your child may be refused access to the 'vehicle'. The travel pass can be used only on the designated service by the named holder and must not be given to anyone else to use.

If your child loses their travel pass, a replacement may be obtained from the Integrated Home to School Transport Team at a charge of £15.50.

Should I rely on the availability of a spare seat?

Absolutely not.

Every year despite advice not to do so, a significant number of parents/carers assume the continuing availability of a Spare Seat Scheme seat and find themselves in difficulties regarding their responsibility for getting their children to and from school.

Consequently, it is felt to be very important to stress to an even greater extent than before that parents/carers:

- Should not base their choice of school on the hope that a spare seat will be available.
- Should ensure that at all times throughout the school year they are able, if necessary, to make their own arrangements for their children's school transport.

Who can I contact?

The Integrated Home to School Transport Team

Tel: **0300 303 1591 (option 2)**

Email: school.transport@westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk

If you require this document in another format (e.g. CD, audio cassette, Braille or large type) or in another language, please telephone: 0300 303 2992.