

ACT Supported School Transport Guidelines

1. Aim

The aim of these guidelines is to ensure Supported School Transport (SST) services, are provided for eligible students in a fair, consistent, safe, timely and efficient manner.

2. Purpose

These guidelines provide clear advice to all relevant parties, such as students, parents/carers/guardians and schools on the Supported School Transport eligibility criteria as well as the rights and responsibilities associated with the Supported School Transport service. These guidelines provide the criteria against which student eligibility for Supported School Transport is determined.

3. Context

The Supported School Transport program provides transport assistance for eligible students with disability who are residents of the ACT and who attend ACT public schools. Transport Canberra works closely with the Education Directorate to manage this program.

Parents/carers/guardians are responsible for transportation of their children to and from school each day. Supported School Transport only assists parents, rather than removes their responsibility for school transport. Parents/carers/guardians must be at their home address or arrange for someone (consent required) to meet their child after school when the bus is scheduled to arrive. When applying for these services parents must demonstrate reasons for their inability to transport their child.

The Education Directorate provides a range of enrolment options for students with disability including support for students with disability in local schools* and specialist schools*. Transport is generally not provided for students attending a school in their priority enrolment area. It is expected these students will be transported to school by their parent/carer/guardian. Where students are receiving substantial or extensive adjustments at a local school outside of their priority enrolment area, or at a specialist school, they may be eligible for transport assistance. Specialist school transport may only be possible for children and young people accessing the specialist school closest to their place of residence (Malkara and the Woden School on the southside, and Cranleigh and Black Mountain on the northside).

*Local schools: Non-specialist ACT public schools, also known as mainstream schools.

*Specialist schools: The ACT has four specialist schools for children and young people who have been diagnosed with moderate, severe or profound intellectual disability:

Malkara (P-6) and The Woden School (7-12) on Canberra's south side, and Cranleigh (K-6) and Black Mountain School (7-12) on Canberra's north side. Where capacity has been reached at the preferred specialist school, the applicant may have the opportunity to be accommodated at another ACT specialist school.

***Adjustments:** Students with disability in ACT public schools receive levels of adjustment as defined by the NCCD.

Substantial adjustments: Students with disability who have more substantial support needs are provided with essential adjustments and considerable adult assistance. Adjustments to the usual educational program occur at most times on most days.

Extensive adjustments: Students with disability and very high support needs are provided with extensive targeted measures and sustained levels of intensive support. These adjustments are highly individualised, comprehensive and ongoing. Adjustments to the regular educational program occur at all times.

It is the responsibility of parents/carers/guardians and/or the school to arrange transport for excursions, therapy and other school-based activities such as work experience.

Transport and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

Jurisdictions and the NDIA are working to determine how specialist school transport could be provided under the NDIS. While this work is occurring, states and territories will continue to provide specialist school transport. In the ACT, this is the Supported School Transport program. This means Supported School Transport will continue to be provided in the same way it has been in the previous school years. However, it may mean a change in the way student eligibility for Supported School Transport is assessed in future years and eligibility will be dependent on a reasonable and necessary decision. Parents and schools will be provided with further updates as planning for the transition of Supported School Transport to the NDIS progresses.

Please refer to the [Frequently Asked Questions about the NDIS and student transport](#) for further information.

4. Eligibility

Students applying for Supported School Transport must be registered NDIS participants with an approved and active NDIS plan. If your child's NDIS plan is not approved or active this will result in a hold up with the application process. Exemptions may apply for students who are not eligible for the NDIS because they do not meet Australian residency. These applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Students must also meet the Directorate's criteria for access to transport as specified below.

Transport is generally not provided for students attending the school in their priority enrolment area. It is expected these students will be transported to school by parents/carers/guardians. Transport may be provided if the student has a physical disability requiring use of a wheelchair, walking frame or other mobility aids resulting in the need for specialist transport, and is unable to be transported to school by their parent/carer/guardian.

Where students with disability are receiving substantial or extensive adjustments (such as accessing a small group setting) at a local primary or high school outside of their priority enrolment area, they may be eligible for transport if they fit into one or more of the categories below:

1. they have been assessed as in need of transport; and
2. the school is the closest appropriate school that meets the student's individual needs
3. the student has a disability affecting mobility requiring the use of a wheelchair, callipers, walking frame or similar specialist transport support such as vision loss/impairment.

Transport for students attending a public college will be considered on a case-by-case basis and if approved will be reviewed each semester. Evidence of progress toward travel training may be requested. Transport to respite care is not available for college students.

Assessment of need

Assessment of a student's need is based on:

- the parents or caregivers demonstrated inability to provide or arrange transport, either fully or in part; **and**
- the student's inability to use public transport with reasonable safety; **and**
- the availability of public transport which does not involve multiple bus changes (three or more each trip) and or excessive travelling time (more than 90 minutes each trip); **and**
- the lack of potential for independent mobility in the short or long term.

5. Assessment and application process

An application for Supported School Transport is made by completing the application form, available electronically on the [Transport Canberra website](#) or by requesting an application form from the Supported School Transport Coordinator (SST Coordinator) on 6205 3555. Only completed forms (with all questions answered) will be processed for approval.

Each application is assessed against the above eligibility criteria to ensure equity of access. Students already accessing Supported School Transport must reapply each year and have their eligibility reassessed. This process will occur between October and November each year to facilitate planning of bus routes for the following year. Late applications cannot be guaranteed transport, and applications will be placed on a waiting list.

Parents/carers/guardians will be sent written notification of the outcome of their Supported School Transport applications in the second half of January, and the Supported School Transport Coordination Centre will organise appropriate transport for the student to and from school. The Supported School Transport Coordination Centre

will advise parents/carers/guardians of the transport arrangements and any conditions on this arrangement, such as, the schedule, duration and ongoing review process.

6. Review of application

A review of a decision denying transport is available. If transport is not approved, the parents/carers/guardians will be advised in writing. An outline of the reason/s the student was not found eligible will be provided. Parents/carers/guardians seeking a review can provide additional information to support their application for review. The review is conducted by the Executive Branch Manager, Bus Operations or delegate. All requests for reviews can be emailed to CED.SupportedSchoolTransport@act.gov.au

7. Variations to transport arrangements (permanent and temporary)

Parents/carers/guardians must provide timely advice to the Supported School Transport Coordination Centre in relation to changes to transport arrangements for a student. This includes changes to:

- student residential address; and/or
- educational setting; and/or
- after school care arrangements; and/or
- attendance patterns; and/or
- residential care arrangement at Respite such Ricky Stuart House or Emma Ruby House.
- Any travel aids to provide safe and comfortable travel

The Supported School Transport Coordination Centre must be provided with at least two weeks' notice for permanent variations and at least one week notice for temporary variations.

Approval will be given if there is space on the appropriate bus and the adjustment can be managed within the existing supported school bus routes, or, where students are already transported by taxi, if there is no additional cost incurred. If the change in circumstances results in the student accessing a different bus and there is not a space on the bus, students may be placed on a waitlist. If the student is no longer attending the closest appropriate school, the parents/carers/guardians will have the responsibility of arranging transport.

The Supported School Transport Coordination Centre also considers distance travelled and travel time. If the variation is approved, the Supported School Transport Coordination Centre liaises with the service provider to finalise the arrangements. Ad hoc variations are not possible.

In the case of a family emergency, the Supported School Transport Coordination Centre may be contacted with changes to transport at short notice. These variations will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

In the case of a student not attending school on any given day due to illness etc the parent/carer/guardian must notify the provider as soon as possible. [CDC Canberra](#) can

be contacted on 6128 9313 or contact Transport Canberra on 6205 3555. If the student is transported by taxi, changes must go through the SST Coordinator on 6205 3555.

8. Maximum travelling times and distances

Every effort is made to keep trip times to a minimum and bus routes are planned to ensure students are not in transit for any longer than 90 minutes.

9. Roles and responsibilities

The safe transportation of students with disability is the joint responsibility of parents/carers/guardians, the school, the transport providers and Transport Canberra. The Supported School Transport program requires all parties to work in partnership to ensure the student's needs immediately prior to travel, during travel and return home are met.

Transport Canberra

- Providing information about Supported School Transport guidelines to families and assisting families to complete their Supported School Transport application.
- Assessing and approving Supported School Transport applications in consultation with the Education Directorate, based on eligibility criteria including placement in the closest appropriate setting.
- Liaising with families regarding long-term changes to their service provision, such as change of school, education setting, change of home address, reduction or increase of trips required.
- Where an incident or change of circumstances occur, reassess travel support needs of students currently accessing Supported School Transport.
- Informing and consulting with providers on travel variations in response to requests from families.
- Liaising with transport providers in relation to equipment required by the student during transportation, such as car seats, booster seats, seat belt locks etc.
- Liaising with transport providers and facilitating advice on specific student's complex behaviours and transport requirements
- Supporting families to resolve operational issues with providers by liaising with service provider managers.
- Liaising with parents/carers/guardians, schools, transport providers and external support agencies around the management of behavioural issues of students on the bus.
- Receiving, documenting and managing incidents and/or complaints and, when required, escalating incidents and/or complaints to the relevant authorities and stakeholders, including the Education Directorate.
- Ensure the Supported School Transport database is kept updated as changes occur.
- Monitoring the quality-of-service provision.

- Managing the budgetary processes including authorisation of payments to the service providers.
- Managing transport related critical incidents.

Education Directorate

- Advising families of supports available for their child or young person with disability at ACT public schools.
- Actively working with Transport Canberra to address incidents or matters that relate to the transportation of students.

Parent/carers/guardians

- Reviewing the ACT Supported School Transport Eligibility Guidelines before applying for the Supported School Transport program and accept the T&C in this Guideline on the transport application form
- Lodging the Supported School Transport application before the specified closing date.
- Providing a copy of the student's **Known Medical Condition Response Plan** if the student has a known medical condition, such as anaphylaxis, epilepsy, asthma or diabetes.
- Providing accurate and up to date information in the Supported School Transport application form and providing additional information as requested in a timely manner.
- Providing advice, support and guidance to the Supported School Transport Coordination Centre in relation to specific seating arrangements, safety and health care needs of the student (this includes supporting alternative means of travel to and from school if behaviour, health or safety needs indicate it is unsafe for the student to use Supported School Transport services or if the student's use of the service would jeopardise safety of others).
- Informing the Supported School Transport Coordination Centre of any personal items the student will require during their transportation for their safety (such as a booster seat or harness) prior to the commencement of the service. An Occupational Therapist assessment must be provided to support the use of any safety equipment considered a restrictive practice required for transport.
- Informing the Coordination Centre of any safety items required for safe and comfortable travel, and ensuring it is supplied with the student for each instance of travel. Ensuring such items are replaced if they are broken, damaged, lost or succumb to wear and tear, noting travel may be temporarily halted until the item is replaced
- Informing the Supported School Transport Coordination Centre of any items the student may require for their travel support (such as phone, video games, toys, iPads). It is the parents/carers/guardians responsibility to provide these items and it is expected any valuable items such as iPads, phones etc are included on the parent's household contents insurance. While the bus staff will take all due care of these items, they will not be held responsible for any damage that occurs immediately prior to travel, during travel and while exiting the transport. Students

will be allowed to handle these items during transit if considered safe and appropriate by the transport provider.

- Ensuring a nominated responsible adult is present at the agreed arrival/departure times (a 5-minute allowance on times must be adopted). In order to ensure all students spend no more time in transit than necessary, drivers are advised to wait no longer than 5 minutes and will contact student's identified emergency contact if a nominated responsible adult is not present in the afternoon to collect the student at the designated drop-off address. Repeat occurrences of service interruptions affecting other students or staff due to inability to drop off student to designated parent/guardian at designated address may result in students' transport being temporarily suspended.
- Notifying the Supported School Transport Coordination Centre of any changes of circumstances likely to affect the student's entitlement to or ongoing need for transport assistance.
- Escorting the student to and from the vehicle (including students using wheelchairs).
- Reporting incidents to Supported School Transport Coordination Centre.
- Where students are accessing transport via taxi, the parent/carer/guardian is responsible for assisting the student into the taxi for departure to school and collecting them from the taxi upon arrival home.

Students

- Behaving in a manner that ensures the comfort and safety of themselves and all people travelling with them, with consideration being given to a student's age, individual needs, disability and developmental level.
- Food must not be eaten on the bus, and only water in an enclosed bottle is permitted.
- When appropriate, reporting any incidents to the Supported School Transport Coordinator or school staff.

Transport providers

- Ensuring there is an attendant on every bus.
- Ensuring drivers and attendants have up to date information on student's transport requirements and personal information provided by parents in the application and they comply with the service requirements in relation to delivering students into the care of a nominated responsible adult.
- Provision of Disability Awareness Training for drivers and attendants.
- Ensuring at least one member of the bus staff has a current first aid certificate.
- Ensure all drivers and attendants have a current Working with Vulnerable People registration.
- Ensuring the driver and/or attendant has a working mobile phone.

- Informing the Supported School Transport Coordination Centre if there has been an incident and completing the appropriate incident form.
- Informing the Supported School Transport Coordination Centre if the service will be more than 15 minutes late.
- Assisting Transport Canberra staff to resolve issues between the providers or issues raised by parents about the Supported School Transport service or Supported School Transport coordination centre.

Drivers and attendants

- Ensuring the safety of students throughout the journey, checking all seat belts and restraints are fastened correctly, the aisles are clear and dangerous items are inaccessible.
- Providing assistance on and off the bus as required.
- Informing the receiving adult if any student has been distressed and requires special assistance, or if there has been an incident during the journey.
- Informing the Supported School Transport Coordination Centre immediately of any behaviour that jeopardises the safety and wellbeing of those on the bus.
- Maintaining a courteous, respectful and caring relationship with students and families.
- Ensuring students are delivered into the care of a nominated responsible adult.
- Ensuring compliance with Restrictive Practice guidelines and legislation.
- Reporting any incidents to the Supported School Transport Coordination Centre.

Schools

- Assisting families to access Supported School Transport services and directing them to the Supported School Transport Coordination Centre and/or providing copies of the current Supported School Transport application and Supported School Transport guidelines and other attachments.
- Assisting with the smooth operation of the service by ensuring there is supervision at transport drop-off and pick-up times and helping students on and off the buses.
- Having students ready and in a designated area at pick up times.
- Providing suitable areas for the buses/taxis to drop off and pick up.
- Reporting any incidents to the Supported School Transport Coordinator.

10. Monitoring

The Supported School Transport Program is monitored by Transport Canberra in relation to the:

- continuing eligibility of students, particularly in regard to parental capacity to meet transport responsibilities

- changing transport needs of students
- availability of transport services
- the quality of service and total cost of the scheme.

This process may result in changes to transport arrangements at any time during the year. Parents/carers/guardians and schools will be given one weeks written notice if a change of bus is required.

11. Reporting incidents

All incidents (events that involve student behaviour and safety concerns, injuries to students or staff, potential injury or traffic accidents) must be reported to the Supported School Transport Coordination Centre. Parents/carers/guardians, drivers, attendants and schools are all responsible for reporting incidents as soon as possible. Some incidents may be resolved by the Supported School Transport Coordination Centre. Some incidents may require a more detailed investigation process conducted by Transport Canberra, or in some cases, a particular authority or agency.

Transport Canberra is committed to ensuring Supported School Transport is a safe environment for all students and staff. In some cases after an incident involving unsafe student behaviour, withdrawal of Supported School Transport may be required. Parents/carers/guardians will firstly be notified of these incidents by phone and then in writing.

Transport Canberra will work alongside the student, their family, transport staff, the school and in some instances external support agencies in order to resolve the issues.

12. Suggestions and complaints

Families are encouraged to provide feedback at any time. To provide feedback, contact the SST Coordinator on 6205 3555 or email CED.SupportedSchoolTransport@act.gov.au

Transport Canberra takes all complaints seriously and will take all reasonable steps to investigate them. Complainants should receive a response to a feedback or complaint within 10 working days. Transport Canberra is committed to addressing complaints it receives from parents, carers, guardians, students and members of the community about Supported School Transport in a courteous, efficient, fair and prompt manner.

Complaints provided face-to-face to bus or school staff or anonymously will not be considered to be a formal complaint and may not be actioned. Parents, carers, guardians, students and members of the public are advised to use one of the methods identified above in order to ensure their complaint is actioned.

To assist with the complaint resolution, complaints, including allegations of misconduct involving operators, drivers, attendants or students, should include the following details:

- name and contact details of the complainant
- nature of complaint
- names individuals directly involved

- time and date of incident
- how the complainant wishes the complaint to be resolved.

If complainants are dissatisfied with the response to their complaint, complaints can be made to an external review agency such as the ACT Ombudsman or Human Rights Commission.

The ACT Ombudsman investigates complaints from people who believe they have been treated unfairly or unreasonably by an ACT Government directorate or agency, phone (02) 5117 3650 or complete the [online form](#).

The Human Rights Commission assists in the resolution of complaints, including those relating to services for children and young people, phone (02) 6205 2222.

13. Information management

The day-to-day operation of the Supported School Transport requires student's personal information, including details of their disability, to be shared and discussed with the transport providers. All ACT Government Directorate officers, including consultants and contractors, are obliged to adhere to the principles of the Information Privacy Act 2014 for example, information collected about a student and/or their family will only be used for the purpose of ensuring the safe transportation of the student.

It is essential the student's personal information remains accurate therefore, parents/carers/guardians are encouraged to contact the Supported School Transport Coordinator on 6205 3555 or email if they wish to amend the information being held.

Parents/carers/guardians will be asked to indicate their consent to the sharing of their child's personal information at the time of applying for access to Supported School Transport. Children of parents who do not wish to consent to the sharing of personal information will be unable to access Supported School Transport.

14. Records management

All ACT Government Directorate officers, including consultants and contractors, are obliged to create, keep, protect, preserve, store and dispose of its records in accordance with the legislative requirements of the Territory Records Act 2002, the Territory Records Office Standards and the Australian Standard on Records Management AS ISO 15489 (the Standards). The Supported School Transport coordinator will maintain appropriate file notes to ensure all relevant information is recorded and accessible to relevant parties.