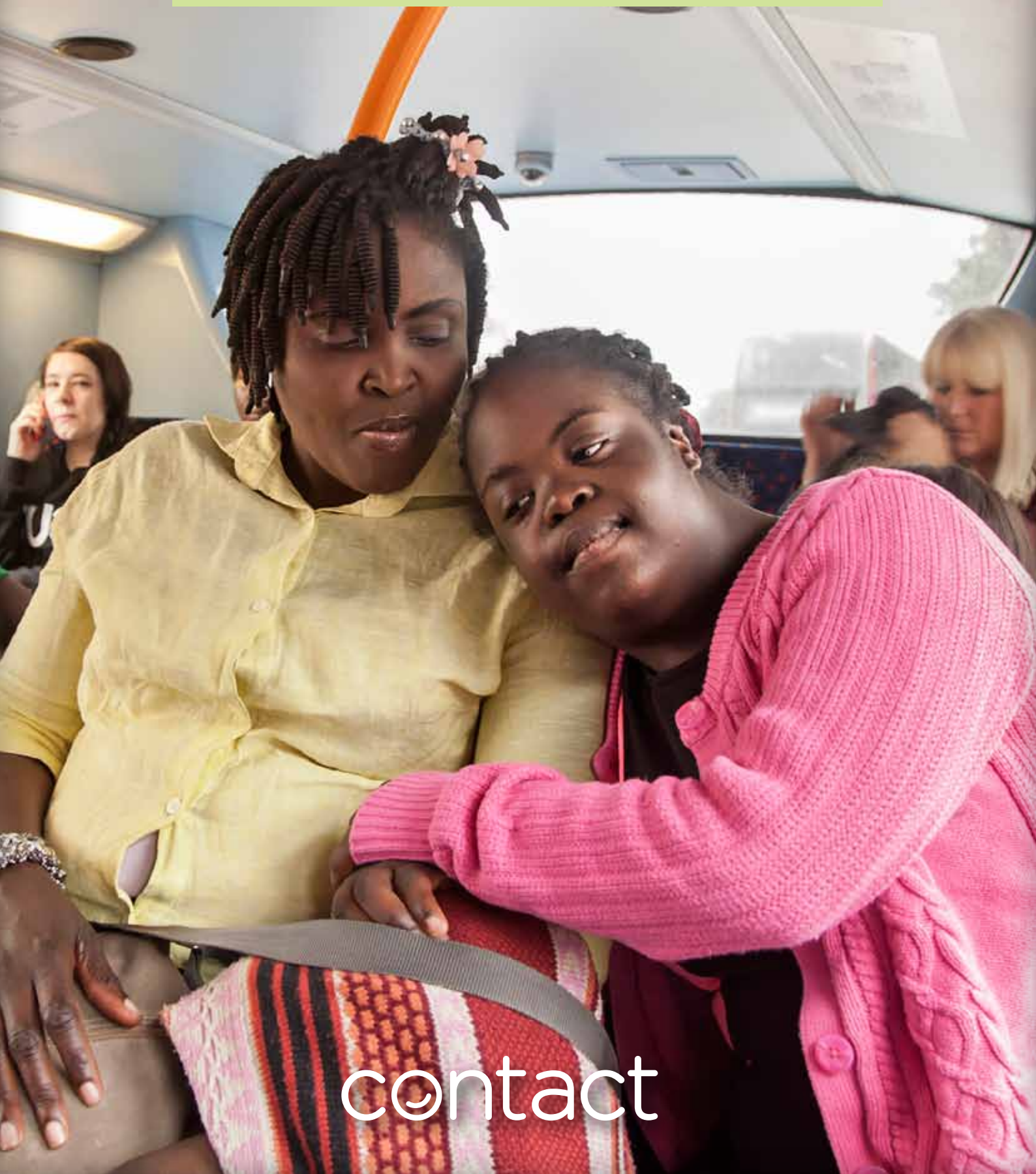


CLOSE THE LOOPHOLE

POST-16 SCHOOL TRANSPORT SURVEY RESULTS 2020

England



contact



79%

of disabled youngsters denied
or charged for school transport

CAMPAIGNING TO CLOSE THE LOOPHOLE
#SchoolRunCrisis | contact.org.uk/school-transport-inquiry



50%

experience stress and financial
difficulties due to transport costs

CAMPAIGNING TO CLOSE THE LOOPHOLE
#SchoolRunCrisis | contact.org.uk/school-transport-inquiry



1 in 10

families with disabled youngsters
pay over £1,000 per year

CAMPAIGNING TO CLOSE THE LOOPHOLE
#SchoolRunCrisis | contact.org.uk/school-transport-inquiry

CLOSE THE LOOPHOLE

BACKGROUND TO THE SURVEY

School transport is one of the top issues our helpline gets calls about. Contact has seen a 40% increase in enquiries about the school transport loophole in the last three years.

School transport is an integral part of a child's education. If a child can't get to school or college, or has a stressful experience getting there, they are not able to learn and take part in the school or college day like other children and young people.

REVISED GUIDANCE FOR 5 – 15 YEAR-OLDS

Our influential School Transport Inquiry in 2017 highlighted a range of difficulties facing families and we were successful in getting the Department for Education to revise statutory home to school guidance for children of compulsory school age 5-15. We hope the revised guidance, when it is published, will better support local authorities in meeting their statutory duties and help parents to understand their rights.

"I constantly have to fight for the right to having transport for my son. Not only is it necessary for his needs but I will be unable to sustain my job if transport was not provided."

16 – 18 YEAR-OLDS

Our School Transport Inquiry also highlighted that more and more disabled young people aged 16 -18 were being charged or refused school transport, due to a loophole in the law. Subsequently we handed in a 10,000 strong petition to 10 Downing Street calling on the government to close the loophole.

The government's response to our petition was that discretionary funds are available to young people to help with the costs of transport when they turn 16. We wanted to find out more about this and the impact of the loophole in the law.

We ran an online survey in October and November 2019. There were a total of 1,856 responses from parents overall and 525 responses from parents with children aged 16-18. Thanks to SEND Action and the Close the Loop parent campaign group for helping us design and share the survey.

"When my daughter turned 16 a charge was introduced, which I couldn't afford. I used to transport her myself, but was out of pocket and it took four hours a day. It just adds to the stress that we are under as a family and seems so unfair when she still needs to go to school."

Background to the survey (cont)

WHAT IS THE LOOPHOLE IN THE LAW?

Despite the requirement for all 16-18 year olds to participate in education or training, once a young person ceases to be of compulsory school age (5-15) there is no direct entitlement to free home-to-school transport, even if they were previously eligible.

Local councils can ask families to contribute to the cost of transport. Once a young person is over 18 there is a stronger right to transport under the adult transport duty, leaving 16 and 17 year-olds at a disadvantage compared to other age groups.

The local council must have a transport policy which sets out how they will support young people aged 16– 18 to get to school or college, including disabled students. Help could mean a taxi or bus, discounted fares, travel cards, or travel training. Local councils should always consider the young person's individual needs before making a decision.

“The County Council approved changes to school transport policy which means no free transport for 16-18 year olds. My son has a place on a school bus and we have been very happy with the arrangement. But now we face costs of £700 a year. My son has Down Syndrome and Autism and can't use public transport so is unable to take advantage of discounted fares that other children get. It all seems so wrong, when he is still expected to be in school. Nothing has changed except his age.”

CAN LOCAL AUTHORITIES CHARGE FOR TRANSPORT?

The introduction of a charging policy may be within the law as far as transport law goes. However, a local council may be failing in their duty under the Equality Act to:

‘advance equality of opportunity for disabled learners’

if the charge in their transport policy has a:

‘significant negative impact on the ability of disabled students to access education’.

Apart from what we already know about the financial impact of raising a disabled child, transport costs may be higher for disabled students because they are more likely to travel further to school or college, and unlike their non-disabled peers, many can't travel independently or use public transport.

Many disabled youngsters also need to be in education or training for longer to achieve the skills they need. So school transport is fundamental to enable them to access education.

“My son, Rowan, moved into further education last September but stayed at the same school. I knew I was likely to face new charges of over £1,300 per year for Rowan's school transport because he was now 16. But Hampshire introduced a new policy which meant we were turned down flat for any school transport, without even being given the option to continue the existing arrangements and pay the charges.”

SURVEY RESULTS FOR 16–18 YEAR-OLDS

The majority describe their child's journey to school or college to be safe (55%), suitable (45%) and reliable (45%). But:

22% (almost a quarter) said their child's journey to school or college was stressful

19% spend more than an hour travelling to school (one way)

18% (almost a fifth) said it was long

8% of families say that their child is late two or three times a week

CHANGES TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT PROVISION WHEN A CHILD TURNS 16

73% said changes were made to their child's school transport arrangements when they turned 16

The changes families faced were:

53% charge was introduced

16% are denied school transport or face changes that are not always suitable

11% transport changed

5% transport stopped

2% charge increased

PAYING FOR TRANSPORT

79% of disabled young people are denied or charged for school transport or face disruptive changes when they turn 16

63% of disabled young people aged 16-18 are being charged for their school transport (compared to 20% of children aged 5-15 years-old)

43% (nearly half) are paying more than £500 per year

8% (1 in 10) are paying over £1,000 a year

"Our daughter needs to attend a particular college 25 miles away which the local authority agree is the nearest suitable place to meet her complex needs. Transport charges are based on distance so our daughter has to pay the maximum transport fee of more than £1,242 per year for 4 days, all from her benefits, due to no choice of her own."

"It's very stressful. He won't be staying on at 6th form."

Survey results (cont)

IMPACT OF CHANGES IN SCHOOL TRANSPORT ON FAMILY

Families talk about financial strain when transport is refused, mostly due to reducing working hours. Respondents repeatedly talked about the stress on them and their whole family, and sadly the loss of independence for their disabled children and young people. Some examples include:

47% experienced financial difficulty

45% experienced increased stress levels

13% of children were upset by the changes to transport arrangements

7% had to reduce working hours or give up work as they had to transport themselves/be around for changed pick up and drop off arrangements/couldn't afford to pay charge

4% took legal advice/challenged the decision in court

3% child stopped school/college

“My daughter was 17 in August and in November I received an invoice for the school minibus. It came as a great shock because there was no letter informing me that this change would be taking place. They want £500 for the year. I need to assess my circumstances, do I take her out of college or not? How will it impact my job as I'm a lone parent. It's really stressful and worrying.”

WHEN THERE'S NO HELP WITH TRANSPORT

33% of families don't get local authority help with school transport.

Of those:

64% drive their child themselves

19% child stopped school/college

13% pay for public transport

12% arrange for a family member or friend to drive their child

11% pay for a taxi

7% arrange for a family member or friend to drive their child

52% pay more than £500 a year transporting their child to school or college

IMPACT ON FAMILIES WHO HAVE TO ARRANGE TRANSPORT THEMSELVES

69% experienced increased stress

58% are in financial difficulty

7% have had to reduce hours or give up work

5% say their child has had to stop school or college

Survey results (cont)

BURSARY FUNDS

There are two types of bursary. The first is a discretionary bursary for which any young person can apply. However, whether you receive a payment is at the discretion of your school or college.

The second is the 16-19 bursary for vulnerable students of £1,200 per year for certain groups, including disabled students who receive Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment, and who also get either Universal Credit or Employment and Support Allowance. This may be paid in kind rather than in cash.

16 - 19 BURSARY FUND

23% of families have applied for the 16-19 bursary to help with education costs including transport.

12% of families only are successful in getting the 16-19 bursary

6% only say it covers the full costs of transport

4% only got the full amount of £1200

DISCRETIONARY BURSARY

Only 7% of families have applied for a discretionary bursary from their child's school or college. Of these:

20% were refused

15% get £1,000 per year

24% got under £600

These findings are important because in response to our petition Minister of State (Education), Nick Gibb MP stated the 16-19 bursary fund is available to help students with transport costs. Yet this evidence shows it is neither accessible nor sufficient to cover travel costs.

“She is left with a weekly debt of £16 as a result of paying fixed charges for transport, materials and meals whilst at college because her bursary is not sufficient to cover all of these. £16/week means she can't afford to pay the cost of her heating, lighting and water each week. Or, on top of other disability related expenses not allowed, our daughter is nearly £100 in debt each week and can't afford treats such as a trip to the cinema or bowling unless provided by charities.”

HOW CONTACT CAN HELP

We are Contact, the charity for families with disabled children. We understand that life with a disabled child brings unique challenges, and we exist to help families feel valued, supported, confident and informed.

Contact's website provides advice and information about any concern you might have about raising a child with additional needs – from diagnosis, entitlement to services and benefits, to childcare and support when your child is at school or college.

To help find the advice you're looking for quickly and easily take a look at our website:

 www.contact.org.uk

Can't find the information you need or answer to your questions on our website? Call our free helpline. Open between 9.30 am – 5 pm Monday to Friday

 **0808 808 3555**  helpline@contact.org.uk

HELP WITH TRANSPORT TO SCHOOL AND COLLEGE

We have information to on our website about transport to school and college, including a school transport myth-buster and information about how to challenge a decision about your child's transport to school or college.

 www.contact.org.uk/transport

We are a charity so we need your donations to help us keep campaigning and providing life changing advice. Please donate www.contact.org.uk/donate

JOIN OUR CAMPAIGN!

Contact is campaigning to close the school transport loophole in the law. By getting involved in our campaign network of more than 20,000 families across the UK, you'll be joining a movement campaigning for families with disabled children. Find out more about our campaigning work including how to join our network of families and our latest campaigns at www.contact.org.uk/campaigning or you can email Una.summerson@contact.org.uk to find out more.



We are Contact,
the charity for
families with
disabled children.

We support
families, bring
families together
and help families
take action
for others.



GET IN CONTACT



0808 808 3555



info@contact.org.uk



www.contact.org.uk



twitter.com/contactfamilies



facebook.com/contactfamilies



youtube.com/contactfamilies

Contact Head Office
209–211 City Road
London EC1V 1JN