

SEN Transport Policy Consultation 2015

Introduction

A revised SEN Transport Policy was agreed by Education Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 30 September 2014 which clarified eligibility criteria, transport assistance offers and availability, supported travel training and use of public transport, introduced the offer of personal budgets to parents of children receiving sole transport and others where it would be in the interest of the Council and parents and adopted the Department for Education appeal process. At the subsequent Education Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 27 January 2015 the trialling of muster points was agreed. Education PDS also agreed that consultation with stakeholders be carried out with a view to introduce the policy at the start of the 2015/16 academic year.

Methodology

Individual letters were sent to all 765 families using SEN Transport in February 2015 inviting them to comment on the draft Policy through a survey which was predominantly carried out on-line. Families had access to the draft SEN Transport Policy, the Appeals process document and a Frequently Asked Questions document and were encouraged to read them prior to completing the survey. For families without internet access, hard copies of these documents could be requested from the SEN Transport Team and returned using a Freepost address. 20 sets of hard copies were requested and 7 responses received.

A Bromley Schools Circular was sent to relevant stakeholders informing them of the consultation process and inviting them to complete a separate questionnaire for schools and other organisations.

Both surveys were open between 23 February and 28 March 2015.

Additionally Bromley Parent Voice held its own engagement process consisting of two focus groups attended by 40 parents and a survey, although it is not specified how many responded to this. This engagement was not limited to the draft Policy as it also looked at the quality of the current SEN Transport provision. Comments relating to the draft Policy will be included in this report.

Findings of the Survey with Parents/Carers

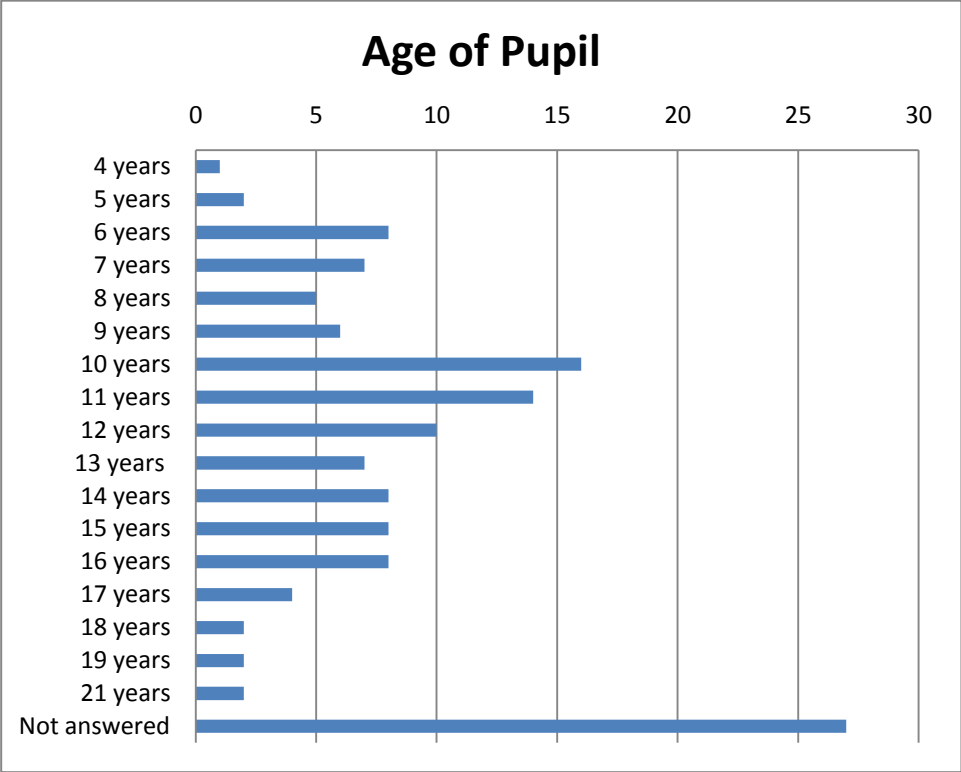
Respondents and information about the SEN Transport User

The survey was answered by 137 respondents, 130 of these were completed on-line and 7 using hard copies of the questionnaire. This represents 18% of families currently using SEN Transport

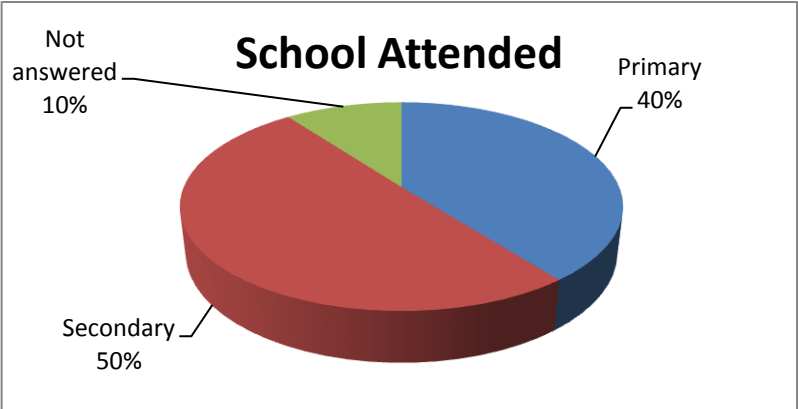
Families were asked to provide information about the child or young person who used SEN Transport so that it would be possible to see if this affected their responses to the questions. If more than one child used SEN Transport they were asked to provide information on the eldest.

Firstly families were asked the age of their child. 20% of respondents did not answer this question. The three most mentioned ages were 10 – 12 years.

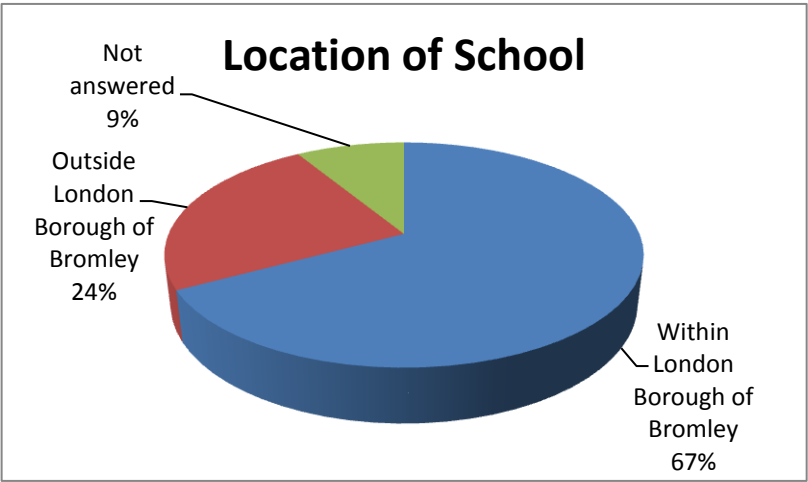
The two largest age groups of users of SEN Transport are 7-10 years and 11 – 13 years which is reflected in ages of children and young people whose family answered the survey. There is some under-representation in those 6 years and under and 16-18 years. This may be accounted for in those who age was not given.



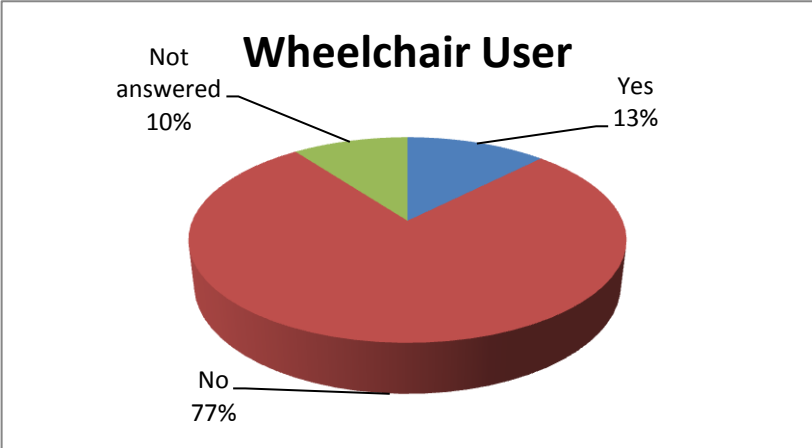
Attendance at school was fairly evenly divided between those at secondary school (50%) and those at primary school (40%). 10% did not answer this and the other questions in this section. Users of SEN Transport are split as follows: 40% of primary age and 60% of secondary school age. Therefore the survey is fairly representative of actual users of the service in this respect.



For families completing the survey 2 out of 3 pupils attend schools within London Borough of Bromley whilst 1 in 4 attend schools outside the Borough. 12 families did not answer this question. Of those using SEN Transport 76% attend education in borough while 24% attend out of borough provision. Therefore the survey proportionately represents those attending outside Bromley, although this is only 33 respondents, and is slightly under for those attending in-borough.

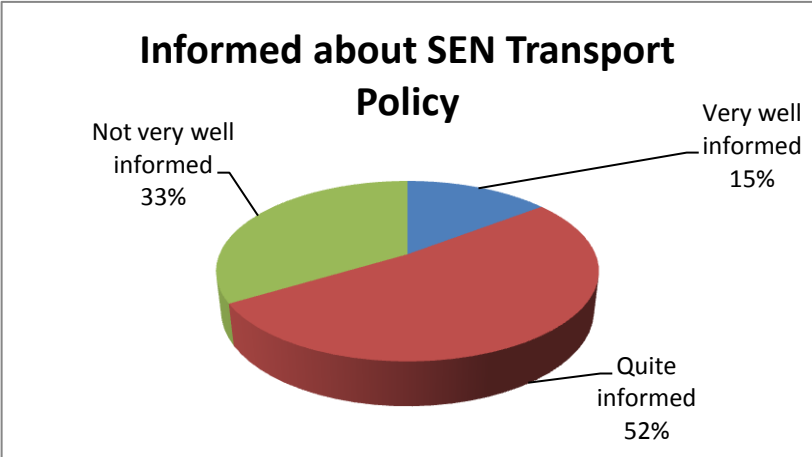


Finally families were asked if the pupil uses a wheelchair or not. Only 17 (13%) families stated that their child uses a wheelchair which is in line with all users of SEN transport where 13% use a wheelchair.



Understanding of Draft Policy

Families were asked how well informed they felt about the draft Policy. 2 out of 3 respondents said that they felt either very well or quite informed. Only 46, a third of respondents said that they were not very well informed.



Families were then given the opportunity to comment on what else would make the policy easier to understand. 50 comments were received – 20 from those who did not feel very well informed, 25 from those who felt quite informed and 7 who said they were very well informed. The most frequent responses are outlined below:

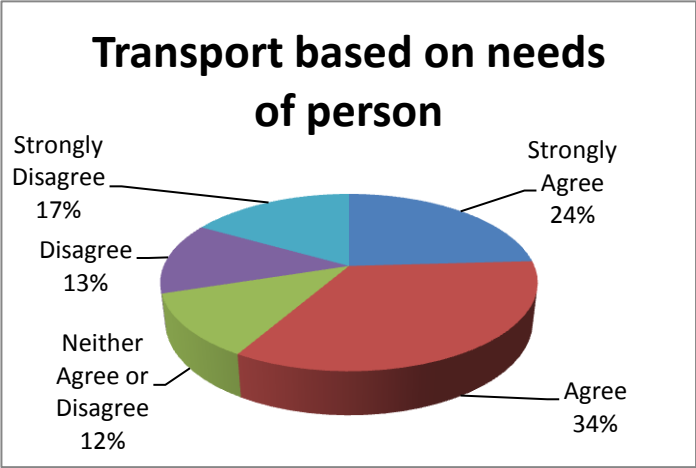
Comments	Number of respondents
Plainer English and more user friendly	10
Automatically sending the policy and any changes made to parents	9
Use of a summary or bullet points to highlight main points	8
Nothing	7

Other respondents had interpreted the question to mean an understanding of why the policy is being amended and 2 wanted to understand the expected financial savings from the proposed changes.

Needs of the child or young person

Families were asked if they agreed that transport assistance should be provided based on the needs of the child or young person in accordance with statutory guidelines.

58% of respondents stated that they either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 30% disagreed or strongly disagreed with it. 12% neither agreed nor disagreed.



Only 45% of those whose child is educated out of borough agreed and 45% disagreed. This presumably reflects that for this group of families only providing transport on the needs of their child using transport would impact their family more than those whose child is being educated in Bromley. Fewer families whose child attends primary school (21%) or is educated in-borough (23%) disagreed with this principle than the average.

59 comments were made about this question – 15 from those who agreed or strongly agreed, 9 from those who neither agreed nor disagreed and 35 from those who disagreed or strongly disagreed. Half of those who commented on this question stated that the needs of the family, as a whole, or other members of it should be taken into account, including needs of siblings and transportation to their school and the impact on the employment status of parents. The most frequent responses were:

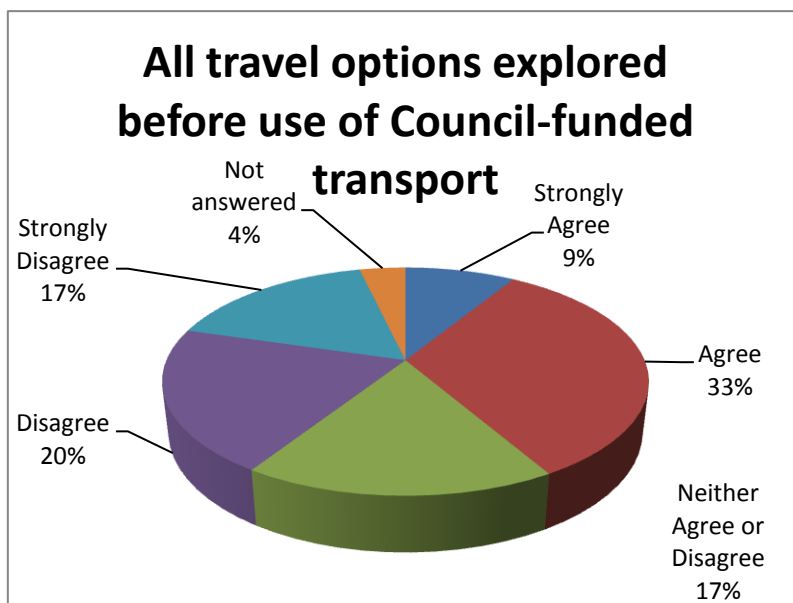
Comments	Number of respondents
Needs of the family taken into account, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs of siblings (especially getting them to school) • Impact on employment of parents • Stress of transporting child • Lack of alternative ie own transport or public transport routes 	29
Need for individual review/assessment	11
Safety/vulnerability of child	5
Being flexible in implementation of government guidelines	4

Exploration of all travel options

Question 4 asked families whether they agreed that all travel options should be explored before Council funded transport assistance is provided.

42% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed and 37% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Seventeen percent neither agreed nor disagreed.

Families whose child is educated out of borough varied from these responses as 54% agreed and 27% disagreed. The reverse was true for families whose child uses a wheelchair, with 36% agreeing and 47% disagreeing. However it should be remembered that these are the two smallest groups of respondents who answered the survey.



58 comments were made about this question – 20 from those who agreed or strongly agreed, 8 from those who neither agreed nor disagreed and 30 from those who disagreed or strongly disagreed. Opinion was split. On one side were those who agreed that all travel options should be considered, surprise that it wasn't already done and those who stated that parents would have already done so. On the other hand, there were comments about the additional worry that this would cause to already stressed families and that parents know better than officers what is appropriate for their child. As in the previous question many commented that the whole family situation should be considered and that all families should be considered individually factoring in the young person's abilities and difficulties in making journeys to school independently. It was also stated that the needs of the child/family should outweigh any financial considerations.

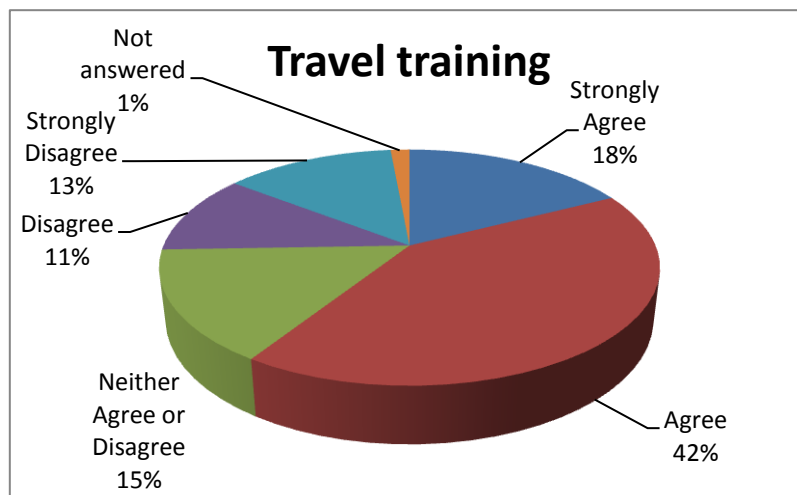
Comments	Number of respondents
Needs of the family taken into account	11
Needs paramount over money	9
All or some options should be explored	8
Situations should be considered individually according to abilities and safety of child	8
Additional stress on families caused by uncertainty when options being considered or by providing transport themselves	5
Surprise this doesn't happen already or parents already explore options before seeking assistance	6

Travel Training

Families were next asked their opinion on travel training for children and young people in Year 6 and above to help them develop independent travel skills for their future, if they are able to do so.

60% were in agreement with this statement whilst 24% either disagreed or strongly disagreed with it.

Families whose child is educated out of borough varied from these responses as 70% agreed and 15% disagreed. For families whose child uses a wheelchair 71% agreed and 30% disagreed. However it should be remembered that these are the two smallest groups of respondents who answered the survey.



73 comments were made about this question – 40 from those who agreed or strongly agreed, 16 from those who neither agreed nor disagreed and 17 from those who disagreed or strongly disagreed. Although the majority of respondents were in favour of travel training in principle, a number of caveats were made. Some parents felt that travel training should be automatically provided by families and schools to all children and young people. However, concern was expressed that many children would never be able to travel independently and that it depended on them having the capability and confidence to do so in all circumstances as well as the complexity of the journey. The safety of the young people was of concern, both from other people and as a result of their own condition. It was also felt that pupils in Year 6 would generally be too young to travel independently owing to their slower development and maturity. Even when a young person had completed travel training they should not automatically be assumed to be able to travel to school. Some parents also commented that the Council would be ultimately responsible if something went wrong or a child was adversely affected.

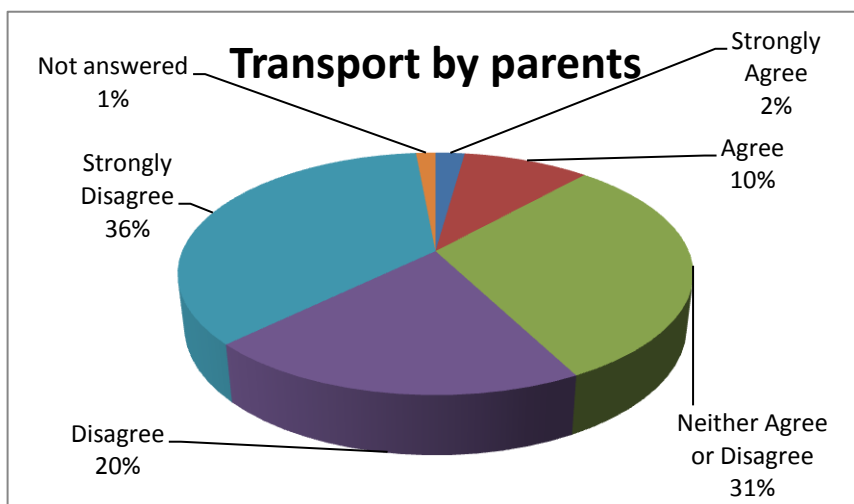
Comments	Number of respondents
Only if child truly capable and confident to do so all the time	31
Safety issues	16
All young people should receive long term travel training through family and/or school	13
Year 6 too young as not developed and matured enough	10
Some SEN pupils will never be able to travel independently	10
Parents should make the final decision	10
Completing training should not automatically mean able to travel independently to and from school	6

Families providing Transport to School

The next question provided the least positive response. Families were asked whether families should be encouraged to transport their children to and from school.

Only 12% agreed with this premise, with over half (56%) disagreeing with it. Nearly a third, 31% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Only 47% of respondents whose child is educated out of borough disagreed with this proposition. However 76% of those whose child uses a wheelchair disagreed with only 6% agreeing.



This question produced the most comments with 92 responses. 9 were from those who agreed or strongly agreed, 25 from those who neither agreed nor disagreed and 58 from those who disagreed or strongly disagreed. 17 parents commented that the problem was the lack of SEN provision in the borough creating lengthy journeys and 6 stated that they would transport their child if they could. 8 people mentioned that they lacked their own transport or public transport was inadequate. Once again family circumstances was the factor most frequently stated with over half of these citing the need to take siblings to other schools or their work commitments. Others

mentioned the potential increase to traffic congestion and pollution and issues of safety near schools. Another factor was the independence that travelling without parents gave their child together with the social experience of using a mini-bus. Comments supporting the principle were dependent on factors such as the school being within a reasonable distance, if parents could afford to supply alternative means of transport or if the family received benefits and were physically and mentally capable of taking their child.

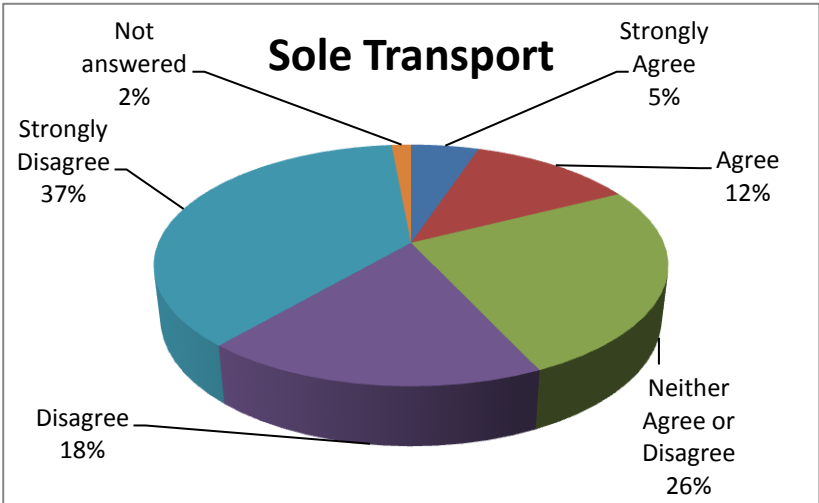
Comments	Number of respondents
Family circumstances, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other siblings' school runs • Impact on employment 	40 23 17
Distance needed to travel because of lack of SEN provision in-borough	17
Lack of own transport/availability of public transport	8
SEN transport provides independence from family and social opportunities	8
Families would take their child if they could	6
Traffic/pollution issues	5
Safety at school gates	5

Sole Transport

Parents were asked about the expectation for families who own cars, where their child travels by sole transport in an individual vehicle, to take the child to school. Reimbursement would be provided through a personal budget.

17% of parents either agreed or strongly agreed, 26% neither agreed nor disagreed and 55% disagreed.

Parents of those using wheelchairs only 6% agreed and 70% disagreed.



68 comments were made about this question – 6 from those who agreed or strongly agreed, 14 from those who neither agreed nor disagreed and 48 from those who disagreed or strongly disagreed. Again the majority of comments spoke about the impact on family circumstances including the difficulties of combining two school runs, often in opposite directions and how this would affect working parents. The time it would take to accomplish such journeys and the stress caused were also highlighted leading to some families indicating that it would lead to a breakdown in the family or the need for residential education. The lack of SEN provision in-borough was stated as a reason for the need for transport.

Others agreed with the statement, but only if the distance involved was limited and other circumstances made it possible. One parent who already uses a personal budget for transport stated that it worked for their family.

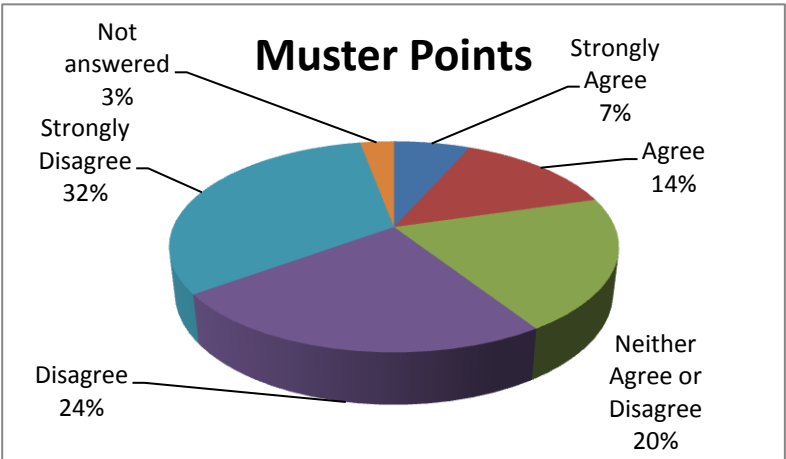
Comments	Number of respondents
Family circumstances, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other siblings’ school runs • Impact on employment 	43 24 25
Time required and stress caused too great	10
Lack of SEN provision in-borough	8
Only if within a certain distance	7

Muster Points

This question asked whether young people should be picked up from a safe muster point, if assessed that this is suitable.

Over half of parents (56%) disagreed with this idea. 20% neither agreed nor disagreed and 21% agreed or strongly agreed.

Parents whose child attends school outside Bromley were less in favour of this aspect as 12% agreed and 63% disagreed.



69 comments were made about this question – 2 from those who had not answered the question, 5 from those who agreed or strongly agreed, 17 from those who neither agreed nor disagreed and 45 from those who disagreed or strongly disagreed. The lack of information about the muster points raised a large number of concerns. Parents were particularly concerned about the safety of the child or young person,

including: the difficulties of waiting safely because of the child’s condition; dangers from traffic and nearby roads; ensuring adequate supervision (if children left at waiting point or travelled there independently) and being vulnerable to bullying or abuse. Travelling to muster points from the home was also an issue for many parents: the distance involved, if up to 2 miles; adequate parking at the muster point; difficulties in walking to a muster point or issues of travelling alone. There were also concerns about waiting in bad weather, especially as a number of children would be prone to illness/infection. Toilet provision at the muster point was also an issue. Parents were also concerned about failing to connect with the transport and possibilities of delays in transport arriving.

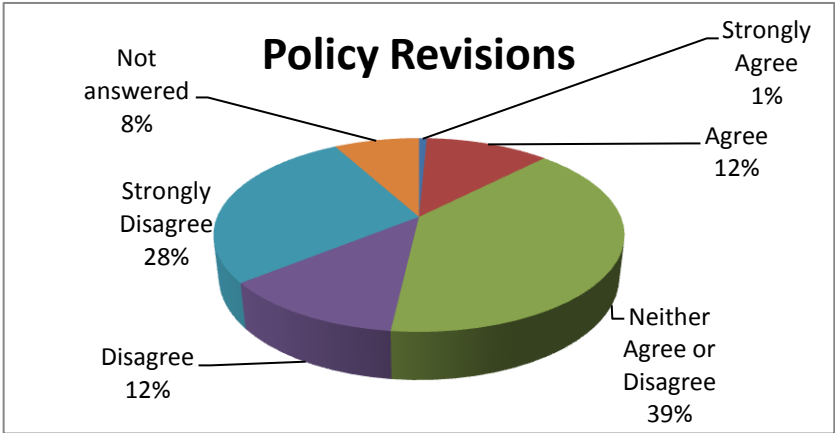
Comments	Number of respondents
Safety of child, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child’s condition making waiting dangerous • Traffic/nearby road • Adequate supervision • Vulnerability to bullying/abuse 	41 18 13 12 10
Travelling to muster points, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distance • Parking • Walking • Travelling alone 	25 11 7 4 3
Shelter for inclement weather	18
Delays in transport/missing the transport	12
Toilet provision	6

Agreement with Revised Policy

The final question asked whether families agreed with the revisions outlined in the Policy.

Numbers of those who disagreed (40%) or neither agreed nor disagreed (39%) were very close, whilst those who agreed were only 13%.

No respondents whose child uses a wheelchair agreed with the revisions and 47% disagreed.



45 comments were made about this question – 2 from those who had not answered the question, 1 from those who agreed or strongly agreed, 12 from those who neither agreed nor disagreed and 30 from those who disagreed or strongly disagreed. 14 commented that the policy was not family friendly and did not show an understanding

of life with a child or young person with a special educational need. 8 people disagreed with all or some aspects of the policy, whilst 8 comments felt it was purely a money saving change. 2 people were unclear why transport for pupils aged 16-18 years was means tested when statutory school age is now up to 18 years.

Comments	Number of respondents
Policy not family friendly – does not understand realities of life with a child with SEN	14
Disagreed with all or some aspects of policy	8
Purely cost saving	8
Had not seen or did not fully understand policy	7

Improvements to SEN Transport

Finally parents were asked for any further comments or suggestions to make SEN Transport more efficient, responsive or cost effective.

60 responses were given to this question. There was a wide range of answers from specific suggestions to make improvements to comments that current arrangements should not be changed or that all children with a special education need should automatically be offered transport.

Among the specific suggestions were:

- Charging parents for transport either through means-testing or asking for a contribution
- Schools organising transport themselves
- Reviewing transport needs for each child or young person annually, including the need for an escort
- Running the current system more efficiently ie making sure minibus or car is full
- Breakfast/after school clubs at schools.

Parents also stated that the needs of the family, especially any siblings, should be taken into account.

Comments	Number of respondents
Parental contribution/means testing	7
Keep existing arrangements	6
Schools should have the responsibility to organise/provide transport	6
Annual transport review	5
Needs of sibling to be taken into consideration	5
Run the system more efficiently	5

Findings of the Survey with Organisations

4 responses were received from organisations, 2 were from special schools (one response stated it was on behalf of the school and the Governing Body, one did not state who was responding), 1 from a unit at a mainstream primary school and one from a mainstream secondary school.

Answers to the quantitative questions were as follows:

- All felt very well or quite informed about the policy
- The 2 respondents from the special schools strongly disagreed that transport provision should be based on the needs of the child or young person in accordance with statutory guidelines. Respondents from mainstream schools agreed with this.
- 3 of the respondents agreed that all travel options should be explored before Council funded transport is agreed. The respondent from one of the special schools strongly disagreed.
- All agreed that travel training for children and young people in Year 6 and above should be provided.
- Respondents from the special schools disagreed that parents should be encouraged to transport their children to and from school, whilst those from mainstream schools agreed.
- 3 organisations neither agreed nor disagreed that parents with a car should be expected to transport their child if they receive sole transport. One special school strongly disagreed.
- 3 organisations agreed that, where suitable, young people should be picked up from a safe muster point. One special school disagreed.
- The two special schools strongly disagreed with the revisions in the Policy, the mainstream schools agreed with them.

Comments accompanying these questions included:

- One special school commented that greater clarity in the eligibility criteria was needed, especially around the statement that 'the provision of travel assistance by the Council will be based on individual needs and circumstances.'
- One special school thought that SEN transport should be provided for all pupils at their school due to their severe and complex needs, unless families prefer to make alternative arrangements.
- One special school stated that where pupils are unable to attend their local mainstream school, they should be entitled to transport as there is often no choice for suitable provision.
- Access arrangements at the attending school should be taken into account as there may be limited parking affecting safety in school car parks and surrounding roads.
- One mainstream school stated that family circumstances should be considered, for example some parents have more than one disabled child or are disabled themselves.
- 2 schools supported investigating other travel options, one special school would be happy to work with the Council supporting families with this when in the young person's best interest. One mainstream school supported using

public transport where appropriate and was pleased that the policy emphasised judging each individual's situation separately.

- The 3 respondents who commented on travel training supported this where it is appropriate.
- Both special schools were very concerned about the safety of their pupils if more families brought them to school by car due to the lack of parking nearby and volume of traffic on nearby roads. One school, with two sites, commented that the current situation is already difficult and would be exacerbated by more vehicles compromising the safety of all pupils. Travelling by foot or public transport would be very challenging for their pupils.
- One mainstream school commented that the school often has poorer relationships with those families whose child uses SEN transport.
- All schools commented on the expectation of parents transporting the child if sole transport is the only option. Whilst supporting regular reviews of this situation, one special school commented that sole transport is usually provided because of the pupil's challenging behaviour and it may be unsafe for families to do so if they do not have appropriate support. This could affect school attendance. The other schools commented that family circumstances, such as a sibling at another school or work commitments should also be taken into account.
- All schools commented that factors such as suitability of the pupil, due to their condition, and family circumstances should be considered when assessing pupils for use of muster points.
- 3 schools commented on agreement with revisions to the policy: one special school thought that use of the appeals process would create stress for families and take up significant officer time if those within statutory walking distance were automatically refused transport and then had to appeal; One special school thought that the current policy is sufficient to review individual access to transport and one mainstream school was concerned about personal budgets being open to abuse or families struggling with processes.
- Final comments not made previously included: ensuring that all drivers and escorts are CRB checked and transport being used to collect pupils who live close to each who go to different schools.
- One special school stated it was opposed to the Council withdrawing transport from any pupils at their school or not providing it for new pupils.

Report from Bromley Parent Voice (BPV)

Understanding of Draft Policy

The report indicated that many parents would struggle to read and understand the SEN Transport policy in its current format and that the language and format needs to be more accessible. It was also stated that the tone of the policy was not 'parent, child or young person centred'.

Needs of the child or young person

Some confusion was expressed that family circumstances would not be considered by the Council, but would then be considered during the appeals process. The need to take siblings to other schools, the cost of childcare, if needed, and the impact on the ability of parents to work were all highlighted in the report as factors which should be taken into consideration.

Travel Training

Whilst welcoming travel training, BPV were concerned that the Council may not realise that some young people are too vulnerable and/or disabled to travel independently. A robust assessment of young people's ability and competence to travel should be undertaken before SEN transport is withdrawn. A further risk assessment after travel training would also be needed. The difficulties of travelling at such busy times were highlighted with issues such as bullying occurring as well as the crowded environment being difficult for those with sensory impairments to deal with. Additionally public transport links to schools, including special schools, are limited and require walking some distance.

Muster Points

BPV's report highlights a number of issues about muster points, predominantly around safety and suitability. In principle BPV welcomes the use of muster points for those who have been assessed as being able to safely use them. However there were a number of areas where further clarification was sought as they were regarded as potentially negative issues. These include: availability of shelter from the weather; difficulties if transport is delayed; toilet/changing facilities; availability of disabled/suitable car parking; increase in number of times young people using wheelchairs are transferred; number of children at muster points; distance to muster point and the impact on siblings.

Revised Policy

Bromley Parent Voice suggests that Department for Education guidelines have been misinterpreted and that statutory walking distances do not necessarily apply to those with special education needs. Additionally they state that parents cannot reasonably be expected to accompany their child to school if there are siblings who need to be taken to other schools.

Assessment and Appeals Process

BPV considers that the proposed application form, which does not include details of the family's circumstances, should be amended to include this information so that more decisions can be made without the need to resort to appeal. Greater transparency on who will undertake assessments for transport assistance and be involved in the appeals process was requested.

Comments/Suggestions

The report offers a number of suggestions for making SEN Transport more cost effective, efficient and responsive. These include:

- More frequent review of transport needs especially where it could be envisaged that the need for transport provision or escort may cease
- More flexibility on pick-up and drop-off points to include pre- and post- school clubs etc
- After travel training pupils should 'buddy' with older pupils who already travel independently
- Schools being given the budget to provide SEN transport for their pupils
- Charging pupils not entitled to free transport to fill empty spaces
- Exploration of other options suggested by the Department of Education such as cycling or having an escort on public transport

- Longer commissioning cycle
- Changes in school hours to allow parents to make more than one 'school run'
- Using self-employed drivers rather than taxi firms
- Breakfast and after-school clubs or increased childcare options to allow parents to provide transport and fulfil other commitments
- Increased specialist provision in Bromley rather than reliance on out of borough provision
- Alternative provision covering part of a week eg from family, friends, volunteers etc

Conclusion

Following comments from a number of contributors, and in line with the need to make information available in an accessible manner, the policy should be reviewed to ensure that it is written in plain English and that the format enhances understanding. It should also be readily available to all parents currently using SEN transport and when families are being assessed for it.

Some elements of the policy were supported by a majority of respondents: that transport should be based on the needs of the child/young person and travel training should be provided to develop independent travel skills.

Less than half of those surveyed agreed that all travel options should be explored before Council-funded transport assistance is provided with a third neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

Just over half of parents disagreed with three of the questions: families being encouraged to transport their child to school; muster points and those currently receiving sole transport being expected to take their child themselves. The expectation that families should be encouraged to transport their child to school provoked the most comment with two-thirds of respondents doing so. Most of these comments were against the idea.

Many of the comments about the use of muster points were provoked by a lack of clarity about how these would operate and which children or young people would be eligible to use them. Further clarification may increase the number of families supporting this idea.

Overall only 13% of the respondents to the survey agreed with the revision in the draft policy.

Some of the responses to the consultation questioned the Council's motives and suggested that any change in SEN transport policy is purely a money-saving exercise with disregard for the impact it would have on families.

Even where respondents agreed in principle to a question, they still felt a need to question whether assessments would be carried well enough not to put their child at risk when being assessed for travel training or using muster points.

A major concern was the impact that the revised policy would have on families as a whole if only the needs of the child or young person being assessed for transport were considered during that assessment. This was mentioned many times by a number of respondents. It was stated that this was against the principle of addressing the needs of the whole family and could adversely affect other members of the family or impact on parents' ability to work.

A sense of injustice was expressed that families were going to be penalised because their child was assessed as needing educational provision which was not offered at a reasonable distance from their home.

However, whilst there is one group of parents who advocate keeping the current policy or express an option that all pupils with a statement of educational needs or an EHC plan should automatically be offered transport as a default, there were a number of constructive suggestions about how improvements to the transport provision could be made. Further investigation into the practicality of these ideas will need to be made.