the special school run
reviewing special educational needs transport in London
The Audit Commission promotes the best use of public money by ensuring the proper stewardship of public finances and by helping those responsible for public services to achieve economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

The Commission was established in 1983 to appoint and regulate the external auditors of local authorities in England and Wales. In 1990 its role was extended to include the NHS. In April 2000, the Commission was given additional responsibility for carrying out best value inspections of certain local government services and functions. Today its remit covers more than 13,000 bodies which between them spend nearly £100 billion of public money annually. The Commission operates independently and derives most of its income from the fees charged to audited bodies.

Auditors are appointed from District Audit and private accountancy firms to monitor public expenditure. Auditors were first appointed in the 1840s to inspect the accounts of authorities administering the Poor Law. Audits ensured that safeguards were in place against fraud and corruption and that local rates were being used for the purposes intended. These founding principles remain as relevant today as they were 150 years ago.

Public funds need to be used wisely as well as in accordance with the law, so today’s auditors have to assess expenditure not just for probity and regularity, but also for value for money. The Commission’s value-for-money studies examine public services objectively, often from the users’ perspective. Its findings and recommendations are communicated through a wide range of publications and events.

For more information on the work of the Commission, please contact: Andrew Foster, Controller, The Audit Commission, 1 Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PN, Tel: 020 7828 1212 Website: www.audit-commission.gov.uk
Reviewing Special Educational Needs
Home-to-School Transport

Transport managers have an important role in reviews of the service, but education departments should also provide strategic direction and play a full part in reviews.

Eligibility, Escorting, Safety and Service Quality

Effective arrangements are essential to ensure that all children with special educational needs can attend school. Children should travel safely, with dignity and in comfort.

Managerial Arrangements

Clear understanding of roles – policymaking, budget management, organising transport and its provision – is important.

Budgets and Costs

Overspend and budgetary control problems are common, increasing the need to analyse costs and proactively to manage expenditure.

Conclusion

Best value offers the opportunity to build on existing good practices to provide even better, safe, high-quality services that use resources effectively.
Contents

Preface 3

Introduction 5
London children with special educational needs 5
Expenditure on home-to-school transport and travel 6
Making good use of resources 8
Best value and special educational needs transport 9
The structure of the report 9

Reviewing Special Educational Needs Home-to-School Transport 10
Carrying out reviews 11
Reviews of special educational needs transport in London 12

Eligibility, Escorting, Safety and Service Quality 14
Eligibility criteria 16
Escorting criteria 16
Safety 16
Service quality 20

Managerial Arrangements 22
The different managerial roles 23
How London boroughs allocate responsibilities 25
Managerial oversight 26
Managerial costs 27

Budgets and Costs 28
Setting and managing budgets 29
Cost pressures 30
Analysing costs 31
Responding to cost pressures 34

Conclusion 39

Appendix 1
The advisory group 41

Appendix 2
Self-assessment checklist 42

Appendix 3
Expenditure and transport cost analyses 51

Appendix 4
The best value inspection of Newham 54

References 56

Index 57

© Audit Commission 2001
First published in March 2001 by the Audit Commission for Local Authorities and the National Health Service in England and Wales, 1 Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PN

Typeset by Eighteeno4 Design, Woodbridge, Suffolk.

Printed in the UK for the Audit Commission by CW Print, Loughton.

ISBN 1 86240 278 7

Photographs
Paul Doyle/Photofusion (p14), David Mansell (cover, pp10, 39, 40), with thanks to the London Borough of Newham, Hilary Shedel (p28), Mo Wilson/Format (p22), Lisa Woollett/Format (p3)
Preface


The report will be of particular interest to those in London who are carrying out best value reviews, those who are responsible for policy on home-to-school transport and those arranging and providing that transport. It will also help authorities that have already carried out best value reviews to achieve the continuous improvement required by best value. It reflects the Commission’s focus on helping authorities to bring about improvement and on bringing together work carried out by its central research unit, auditors and inspection staff.

The report:

- presents comparative information, across the London boroughs, on the quality standards to which authorities work, the ways in which they manage and supervise arrangements, how they set and manage budgets, the numbers of pupils with special educational needs who receive free transport, the methods used to meet their requirements and the costs of provision;

- includes a self-assessment checklist that can be used by authorities wishing to review their SEN transport arrangements; and

- draws attention to good practice, including findings from best value inspections, findings from the inspections of local education authorities (LEAs) carried out jointly by OFSTED and the Audit Commission, and advice recently issued by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) (Ref. 2).

The work that led to this report is part of a wider study by the Audit Commission into assisted travel (ie, home-to-school travel, social services transport and non-emergency patient transport in the National Health Service) that is being carried out across England and Wales. The Commission will report on the wider study later in 2001.

The Commission’s project team – John Gaughan, Tim Franklin and Rajesh Kishan – is managed by Greg Birdseye, an Associate Director in the Commission’s Public Services Research Directorate. An independent consultant, Phil Blake, has also assisted the team. An advisory group, which includes local authority officers, officials from government departments and representatives from voluntary bodies, will continue to meet the project team regularly throughout the wider study. Appendix 1 lists the group’s membership.
The Commission has decided to report early and specifically on London for two reasons. Firstly, it wanted to release material of help to London authorities as quickly as possible. And, secondly, home-to-school transport issues in London differ significantly from those in much of the rest of the country:

- London is a dense urban area with a good public transport network. Expenditure on home-to-school travel is dominated by the cost of transport for children with special educational needs. The rural issues that have such an impact on home-to-school travel in many other parts of the country, and which lead to significant expenditure on free travel for pupils who do not have special educational needs, are largely absent; and

- SEN transport in London has historically had markedly higher unit costs than other major cities. This can partly be attributed to the general tendency for staff and other costs to be higher in London than elsewhere. In addition, SEN transport in London is working in traffic that is more congested than in other conurbations. In inner London, average morning peak-time traffic speeds are 10 to 12 mph (Ref. 3).

This report makes particular use of a questionnaire issued by the Audit Commission in September 2000, which was returned by 27 of the 32 London boroughs. The questionnaire built on an earlier survey and other work in London by District Audit. This report also draws on work by the Commission’s best value inspectors and the inspections of London LEAs carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission. The Commission is grateful to all who completed questionnaires and otherwise helped with this work, but, as always, responsibility for the contents of the report lies with the Commission.

As the DfEE is currently examining travel support arrangements for students aged 16–19, this report focuses particularly on travel by pupils aged under 16. However, pupils aged over 16 who are receiving free travel may make their journeys to school on vehicles that are also, and possibly predominantly, used for free travel by younger pupils and costs cannot readily be separated. Where this occurs, the Audit Commission’s questionnaire analysis also includes such post-16 travel.

---

I The Commission did not ask the Corporation of London to complete the questionnaire; in 2000, there were only two pupils in the City of London with statements of special educational needs. Some of the analyses of questionnaire data in this report are based on fewer than 27 responses, as some respondents did not answer every question.

II The Audit Commission appoints the external auditors of local government and NHS bodies in England and Wales. The Commission’s arm’s-length audit agency, District Audit, carries out approximately 70 per cent of audits. Private firms carry out the rest. District Audit currently audits 22 of the 32 London boroughs.

III Reports by the Audit Commission’s Best Value Inspectorate are available at www.bestvalueinspections.gov.uk

IV These reports are available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspect/index.htm

V Authorities are not obliged to fund travel by pupils and students, at Further Education Colleges in this age band but have discretion to do so. When exercising this discretion, authorities are required to treat students at further education colleges no less favourably than pupils of the same age attending LEA schools.
Introduction

1. A local education authority has a duty to provide or arrange free transport to and from school for a pupil of statutory school age who lives in its area if:
   - the pupil is under eight years of age and the shortest available route to school on foot is over two miles;
   - the pupil has reached his or her eighth birthday and the shortest available route to school on foot is over three miles;
   - the route, whatever its length, is unsafe if travelled on foot, even if the child is accompanied by an adult; or
   - there are exceptional circumstances.

2. Councils have discretion to provide pupils with free transport in other circumstances. For example, some LEAs do so for all primary school pupils whose shortest route is longer than two miles, rather than apply the three-mile test from age eight.

3. Authorities can provide or arrange transport in a number of ways, for example by providing children with passes to use on public transport, by providing buses for use by school children or, if circumstances warrant, by arranging for them to travel in taxis or hired cars.

4. In London, most expenditure on home-to-school transport is on transport for children who have special educational needs. However, many London children with statements of special educational needs attend mainstream schools and do not receive free transport. Boroughs’ expenditure is predominantly on transport for pupils who attend special schools, most of whom travel in minibuses – operated either in-house, by boroughs’ direct service organisations (DSOs), or by contractors, with the former predominating – or in taxis and hired cars.

5. The number of pupils from London boroughs who have statements of special educational needs increased from about 18,000 to over 34,000 between 1991 and 2000 [EXHIBIT 1, overleaf], a rise of almost 90 per cent. However, pupils with special educational needs increasingly attend mainstream schools rather than special schools. For example, in 1999, only 18.7 per cent of London pupils who received a statement of special educational need for the first time were placed in maintained special schools. Consequently, despite the large rise in the number of statements, the number of London children with statements attending special school has changed little during the 1990s; the growth in the number of children with statements has occurred primarily in mainstream schools (Exhibit 1).
6. In the past, pupils at special schools included a significant minority who did not have a statement of special educational need. However, LEA placement criteria for special schools now usually include the need for a statement. As a result, the numbers of pupils from London who attend special schools but who do not have statements has fallen. Over 2,000 London children who did not have statements of special educational needs were attending special schools in 1991; in early 2000, only about 500 of the 12,500 London pupils at special schools were without a statement.\(^1\)

7. London boroughs spend over £50 million a year on home-to-school transport and travel, which, averaged over the whole school population, is equivalent to over £40 a year per child on the education roll. This figure varies from borough to borough, from about £20 to about £80 per child educated, but tends to be higher in inner London [EXHIBIT 2]. Transport to special schools represents over 80 per cent of this expenditure; the remainder is on free transport and travel to mainstream education. However, the proportion of the total expenditure accounted for by transport to special schools varies from borough to borough. Some boroughs report to the DfEE that transport to special schools accounts for all of their expenditure on home-to-school transport and travel; elsewhere it accounts for as little as 60 per cent of the total. The actual spend by individual boroughs on transport to special schools ranges from £0.5 to £2.5 million a year.

---

\(^1\) These include children who were still undergoing assessment and pupils for whom the formal process of making a statement had not been completed.
Exhibit 2
Expenditure on home-to-school transport and travel by London boroughs in 1998/99
This varies from about £80 per pupil to about £20 per pupil on the education roll, but tends to be higher in inner London.

Note: The analysis is per pupil educated – not per pupil receiving free travel.
Source: Audit Commission analysis of DfEE data

8. In London, therefore, special school transport costs predominate, even though only about 1 per cent of pupils attend such schools. This is because:

- Throughout the country, including London, pupils at special schools are particularly likely to qualify for free transport. This may be:
  - solely on distance grounds. Since only a small proportion of children need to attend special schools, such schools are relatively widely spaced. As an inevitable result, many of their pupils have to travel some distance to get to school; or
  - because, although they travel below the qualifying distance, the special educational needs that make attendance at a special school appropriate may also mean that pupils require transport to the school;

- Relatively few children attending mainstream schools qualify for free transport in London. The reasons are that:
  - in dense urban areas children usually live close to mainstream schools. Relatively few pupils at mainstream schools thus meet the statutory distance criteria; and
  - pupils with special educational needs who attend mainstream schools but who do not meet the distance criteria are not automatically entitled to free transport. They qualify only if other criteria apply – for example, if they could not safely make the journey on foot, while escorted by an adult, or if making the journey without free transport would impair their ability to benefit fully from their education (for example, because of stress associated with the journey);
It is more costly, on average, to provide free transport for a pupil attending a special school than for one attending a mainstream school. This is because:

- pupils attending special schools tend to travel greater distances and may need a door-to-door service. Some may also need to travel in specialist vehicles, for example, children who use wheelchairs. Pupils attending special schools also often require escorting while they travel. It typically costs about £4,000 per pupil per year to provide a London child with free travel to a special school; and

- London has a good public transport network. Boroughs can provide comparatively low-cost public transport passes to most pupils who attend mainstream schools and who are entitled to free travel.

For these reasons, this report concentrates on the provision of dedicated SEN transport that is used predominantly to take children to and from special schools.

9. Expenditure on home-to-school transport is normally met centrally by LEAs. Its cost has come under increasing scrutiny, as the Government has encouraged LEAs to devolve education budgets to schools. The Government has recently suggested that it might assess and separately identify the resources that should be devoted to schools on the one hand and those required by LEAs on the other, with the latter including support for school transport (Ref. 4). But, whatever changes are made, it remains essential that all home-to-school transport, including transport for pupils with special educational needs, uses resources well. This is because:

- effective transport arrangements are essential to ensure that children with special educational needs can attend school;

- pupils must travel safely but should also do so with dignity and in comfort. Good-quality service will ensure they arrive at school on time, without having been tired or distressed by the journey, and can thus receive the maximum benefit from their education; and

- any inefficiency wastes resources that could be used to fund teaching posts or otherwise provide frontline education.

Only two respondents to the Commission’s questionnaire reported that they had delegated any of their home-to-school travel budgets to schools.
10. The best value regime reinforces the need to use resources effectively. The Government has placed local authorities under a duty to deliver services to clear standards – of cost and quality – by the most economic, efficient and effective means available. Councils are required to demonstrate to local people that they are achieving continuous improvement in all of their services. The Government has decided that each council should be scrutinised by an independent inspectorate. Existing inspectorates will carry out some of this work; for example, the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) is the best value inspectorate for education, including the education of children with special educational needs. The Audit Commission’s new Best Value Inspectorate will perform other inspections, including those following best value reviews of overall transport arrangements. The Commission has described how it carries out best value inspections in its publication *Seeing is Believing* (Ref. 5).

11. The rest of this report discusses:

- how to apply best value principles to reviewing SEN home-to-school transport. It also summarises findings from the first best value inspection of transport services in London (Chapter 1);
- the criteria on eligibility, escorting criteria, safety arrangements and service standards in London boroughs (Chapter 2);
- managerial arrangements for SEN transport in London (Chapter 3); and
- budget setting and control and costs (Chapter 4).

The report also contains a number of tools that can be used to help with best value or other reviews of a borough’s SEN transport arrangements.
Reviewing Special Educational Needs Home-to-School Transport

Authorities must show that they have applied the ‘4Cs’ of best value – challenging why and how a service is being provided; comparing their performance with that of others; consulting with users and other stakeholders; and embracing fair competition. Transport managers have an important role in reviews but education departments should also provide strategic direction and play a full part.
12. Under the best value performance management framework, authorities are required to publish annual best value performance plans and review all of their services over a five-year cycle. They must show that they have applied the ‘4Cs’ of best value to every review:

- **challenging** why and how a service is being provided;
- **comparing** their performance with that of others (including organisations in the private and voluntary sectors);
- **consulting** with users (in this case, children, where practicable), other key stakeholders (especially, in this case, parents, carers and schools) as well as local taxpayers and the wider business community; and
- **embracing fair competition** as a means of securing efficient and effective services.

13. The self-assessment checklist in Appendix 2 can be used during a review to examine service quality and managerial arrangements. As well as addressing best value issues in SEN transport, the checklist draws on material used by the Commission when working with OFSTED to inspect LEAs. The comparisons of service quality in Chapter 2 of this report and the expenditure and cost analyses in Chapter 4 and Appendix 3 can also help with the ‘compare’ element of best value.

14. London boroughs’ education departments typically delegate much of the day-to-day responsibility for SEN transport to colleagues elsewhere in their councils, for example, to transport managers in technical services or environmental services departments. This can be a sensible way to work and these transport managers have an important role to play in best value reviews of the service. But boroughs are providing the transport to meet their duties as LEAs and the children using it are being carried for the LEA. Education departments should thus set quality standards and satisfy themselves that these are being met. They also need to ensure that issues such as vehicle safety and the vetting and training of drivers and escorts are being dealt with effectively.

15. Furthermore, the way in which the SEN transport service develops – for example, its cost and the types of vehicle it needs to use – will be strongly influenced by broader policy on special educational needs. For example, approaches to inclusion (the education of children with special educational needs at mainstream schools), to school placements and to developing a child’s independence, as he or she approaches adult life, can have profound effects on the service. Approaches to developing independence should take into account that public transport is becoming increasingly accessible to people with disabilities, in response to the Disability Discrimination Act. Education departments should therefore provide proactive strategic direction and play a full part in best value reviews of the SEN transport service.
16. Vehicle replacement may feature in best value reviews – some boroughs have ageing fleets that will soon require replacement to ensure safety, reduce maintenance costs and improve comfort and service quality. The specifications for, and choices of, new vehicles should take full account of the views of children and their parents or carers. But it is also essential that education departments play a full role, to ensure that choices meet the needs of today’s and tomorrow’s SEN policy framework rather than yesterday’s.

17. Eight of the boroughs that returned the Commission’s questionnaire had reviewed SEN transport before the statutory start date for best value in April 2000. A further ten have been covering the subject in 2000/01. Where boroughs had decided what to review, or have already completed reviews, the coverage varies. Few are taking a comprehensive view of the entire topic but most authorities have examined, or will examine, quality standards [EXHIBIT 3].

18. The Audit Commission published its first best value inspection report on transport, on Newham Borough Council, in September 2000 (Ref. 6). Appendix 4 outlines how the Commission carried out the inspection. The inspectors identified a number of good practice points [CASE STUDY 1]. They concluded that Newham’s service was good and merited two stars (on a scale from no stars for a poor service to three stars for an excellent one) and that it was likely to improve. By March 2001, two other transport-related inspections were well advanced in London, at Tower Hamlets and Hounslow.

---

**EXHIBIT 3**

**The topics examined by London boroughs in best value reviews of SEN transport**

Coverage varies but most authorities have examined, or will examine, quality standards.

Note: Percentages are based on responses from 20 authorities. 2 of the 27 boroughs that returned the Commission’s questionnaire did not provide data; 5 had yet to decide what the review would include.

*Source: Audit Commission survey*
CASE STUDY 1

The London Borough of Newham

Newham’s in-house passenger transport service, a part of the authority’s Environment Department, takes over 550 children, who have special educational needs, to school. These council-operated vehicles are crewed by a driver and an escort. Another 60 children are taken to school in taxis; they too are escorted. The service also carries 300 social services’ clients each day. In all, it has a fleet of 76 vehicles.

The authority began a best value review of the service in 1997 and evaluated bids, following a market test for provision of the service, in 1999. After evaluation, the council was of the opinion that the in-house team was best placed to deliver the improved service requirements set out in the specification. However, neither of the bids received – from the DSO and from an outside supplier – was within the Council’s existing budget for the service, £2.9 million per annum. The Council thus evaluated a range of service levels and costs. It selected an option combining reductions in the cost of some items in the original tender with some additional expenditure (£210,000), from its investment strategy, to pay for improvements in service. This gave a budget for 2000/01 of £3.1 million.

The service improvements, identified following consultation with users, included:

- leasing a new fleet of vehicles to improve reliability, safety and passenger comfort;
- reducing journey times through better route planning;
- placing mobile phones on each bus, to improve communication with users, parents and schools;
- establishing a helpdesk/hotline for customers;
- setting new standards for journey times; and
- improving staff training.

Users were particularly pleased that they had been consulted about the new buses before they were leased and felt that modifications that they had suggested had been taken on board. One example was users identifying a design fault in a vehicle tail-lift for wheelchairs that allowed the council to specify rectification before fleet renewal started.

Safety is a crucial issue for users, parents and carers and the authority. In Newham:

- all drivers and escorts, including agency drivers, undergo police checks;
- drivers must pass the council driving test; agency drivers have to pass a shortened version of the test;
- the taxi firms that supply part of the service must also arrange police checks on their drivers;
- there is a forward training plan for all drivers and escorts – staff acknowledged to inspectors that training had improved in the past year and that the service was actively responding to requests for additional training from staff. Examples include training in sign language and dealing with challenging behaviour;
- the authority carries out regular checks on the driving licences of Newham staff, agency drivers and taxi drivers;
- buses are fully equipped with the appropriate wheelchair clamps and restraints to ensure the safety of passengers and with a first aid kit and fire extinguisher;
- buses do not move off until seatbelts have been fully fastened; and
- drivers and escorts have official identification.

Source: Audit Commission (Ref. 6)
Eligibility, Escorting, Safety and Service Quality

Effective arrangements are essential to ensure that all children with special educational needs can attend school. Children should travel safely, with dignity and in comfort. Good-quality service will ensure that they arrive at school on time, without having been tired or distressed by the journey.
19. It is important to have clear written criteria for providing free transport, and for identifying when escorts will be provided. Arrangements to ensure safety and service quality are also important. Consultation is essential. The London Borough of Enfield has been preparing a formal statement of its policies, and supporting guidance on the roles of different council units in identifying need and in arranging SEN transport, and on the roles of drivers, escorts, parents and others [CASE STUDY 2].

CASE STUDY 2

The London Borough of Enfield – policy and guidance

Enfield has been preparing a policy document that includes formal statements on a number of key areas:

- The principles the authority will apply when providing transport. Under these: 
  wherever possible, children and young people with special educational needs will be treated in the same way as those without such needs ...
  Wherever possible, a child, young person or young adult with special educational needs will also be encouraged to travel on public transport, especially when this is considered to be a factor in developing their independence, life and social skills.
- Criteria for providing transport. These include the statutory distance tests. The authority may also provide transport in other circumstances including: 
  where the route to the special educational provision is considered to be hazardous, bearing in mind the special educational needs of the child or young person ... when supportive medical evidence 
  indicates that the child or young person would be unable to attend educational provision without transport arrangements being made by the LEA.
- The criteria cover personal circumstances that prevent the parent from getting the child to its educational provision (including the need to take other children to other schools). Families receiving income support, family credit or income-based jobseeker’s allowance are also eligible for support. However, the LEA will not arrange transport: 
  where the preferences of the parents or young adult results in a child, young person or young adult attending educational provision other than the nearest available and suitable provision to their home as determined by the LEA.
- The factors to consider when determining the mode of transport to use. These include the nature of the child or young person’s special educational needs; their age; their medical needs; the viability of using contracted services; public transport or (for a young adult) the person’s own transport; the need for specialist transport and/or escorts and the efficient use of resources
- Escorting policy: 
  An escort will usually accompany all children and young persons under 16 transported by the LEA. 
  Decisions about the need for an escort will be based on the child’s needs, parental preference, child protection procedures and the safety of council staff.

Draft Guidance Notes detail what is expected from the authority’s SEN Service, Pupil and Student Support Service and Transport Unit, as well as what is expected from drivers, escorts, parents and carers, children and educational placements. An Appendix covers procedures that drivers and escorts are to follow when a parent or known carer is not at the setdown point at the agreed time when a child or young person is brought home.

Source: Audit Commission, drawing on Enfield’s draft ‘Policy and Guidance’ (Ref. 7)
Eligibility criteria

20. Criteria on eligibility differ between boroughs. While children with severe learning difficulties are normally eligible for free transport whatever their age, some boroughs do not normally provide free travel to all those with other difficulties, particularly to older children with emotional and behavioural difficulties [EXHIBIT 4].

Escorting criteria

21. Escorting arrangements on minibuses and taxis and hired cars should take account of children’s individual problems and needs. Those on minibuses should also take account of the total number of children carried on the vehicle.

22. There are, however, variations between boroughs in how their escorting arrangements respond to different types of disability and need. All respondents reported that they usually ensure that a child travels with an escort if he or she is under 11 and has physical disabilities or emotional and behavioural problems. However, a few do not normally provide escorts for children in this age group who have other sorts of difficulty. Older children are less likely automatically to be escorted [EXHIBIT 5]. One borough commented that, although children up to age 14 normally receive escorts for some types of disability, it is the LEA’s policy to develop independence for students.

Safety

23. Safety during journeys is paramount, hence the importance of ensuring that, wherever necessary, children are accompanied by suitably trained escorts who are aware of, and know how to respond to, individual children’s problems or difficulties. Escorts, and drivers, can sometimes be unhappy with what they see as a lack of training and information. Other types of training are essential, for example, in procedures for using wheelchair lifts; a simple error, such as failing to lock a wheelchair’s brakes before raising or lowering it in the lift, could have disastrous consequences for a child.
EXHIBIT 4
How eligibility for free transport varies with age and type of special educational need

Children and young people with severe learning difficulties are normally eligible for free transport whatever their age.

Note: Percentages are based on responses from 25 authorities. 2 respondents did not provide the relevant information.
Source: Audit Commission survey

EXHIBIT 5
Provision of escorts according to age and type of special educational need

Older children are less likely to be escorted.

Note: The LEA referred to in paragraph 22 has been treated as not normally providing escorts for students aged 11-16.
Source: Audit Commission survey
24. The training given to escorts in London, and thus the extent to which they have been equipped to respond to problems and to meet children’s needs, varies [EXHIBIT 6]. Only a minority of boroughs report that they train all newly recruited escorts in first aid, manual handling and in how to meet the needs of particular types of disability before the escorts assume duties with children who have such disabilities. Training in how to respond to emergencies is also variable. For example, only a minority of boroughs reported that they trained newly recruited escorts in how to respond to fire on a vehicle. Drivers should also receive suitable training. One option is the MiDAS minibus drivers’ training scheme.¹

25. Most authorities do ensure that escorts and drivers are made aware of the requirements and needs of each individual pupil before that child’s first journey; but a minority of boroughs report that they do not do this.

26. Police checks on drivers, escorts and other staff who come into contact with children are also important. They should cover taxi drivers and hired car drivers, and escorts on taxis and hired cars, not just drivers and escorts on minibuses. Stand-in drivers and escorts and agency staff should also be vetted. Checks can, however, take a long time to perform, creating pressures to allow new employees to begin work before they have been completed. The 22 boroughs that provided data to the Commission reported that, on average, checks took about seven weeks; there was, however, great variation between boroughs, from 10 days to 12 weeks. This may change. The new Criminal Records Bureau, an executive agency of the Home Office, is due to become operational later this year. Local authorities and other employers will deal directly with the Bureau when vetting employees rather than asking individual police forces to carry out checks. Authorities should also check driving licences.

27. Identification cards, bearing photographs, and staff uniforms can help reassure parents, carers and schools that children are being collected by people from the SEN transport service.

28. A high turnover among escorts and drivers brings recruitment and training costs. The need to continue to provide a service when permanent posts are vacant can create a reliance on agency staff and pressures to use them even when they have not been fully trained or vetted. The boroughs that provided data in response to the Commission’s questionnaire reported that turnover among in-house escorts was just under 10 per cent per annum. Turnover can be higher for part-time staff than with full-time employees.

¹ The MiDAS minibus driver awareness scheme is organised by the Community Transport Association. Details can be found at www.communitytransport.com/midas.htm
29. To aid retention, escorts and drivers, including part-time staff, should be paid whenever they attend managerial briefings as well as for attending formal training. These events should be at times that part-time staff find convenient to attend. In organising escorting, boroughs should consider whether escorts are to join vehicles at depots in the morning, and return in them to depots in the evening, or be picked up and dropped off by vehicles en route from and to depots. The latter may help to reduce the time and cost to escorts of travelling to work, and thus aid retention, but this advantage needs to be set against the extent to which the approach may distort network planning and reduce vehicle utilisation.

30. The vehicles themselves and associated equipment – including seatbelts, wheelchair lifts and wheelchair restraints – must also be safe. As well as having comprehensive fault-recording procedures, and daily safety checks before vehicles leave the depot, one borough insists that its minibuses must have no known faults when brought in for routine servicing. This ensures that drivers do not store up faults for rectification during a service but instead have them dealt with immediately. Checks and controls should cover contractors’ vehicles and equipment, including taxis and hired cars, as well as in-house operations – for example, boroughs can include in their contracts the right to carry out unannounced on-the-spot sample checks on vehicles and equipment.

EXHIBIT 6
The training given to escorts
The training given to escorts varies considerably.

Note: Based on data from 26 boroughs, as one respondent did not answer the relevant question. Two boroughs that did not train escorts before they started work report giving training later.
Source: Audit Commission survey
Service quality

31. Service quality has many aspects. As well as being safe, a quality service is reliable and avoids over-long journey times. Service quality also covers softer issues such as comfort. Users may find journeys uncomfortable if drivers do not show consideration for passengers and other road users. Repeatedly accelerating and braking sharply, or taking corners at speed and lack of care when going over road humps can be unpleasant. Passengers can feel uncomfortably cold if all the doors on a vehicle are left open for long periods in winter, for example, while wheelchairs are loaded or unloaded.

32. Children and their parents may place particular value on the attitude and friendliness of drivers and escorts. A pupil that does not use English as a first language may prefer to be escorted by someone who speaks the language that he or she uses at home; sensitivity to religious and cultural needs can also be important. Responding to these needs and concerns may be easier if escorts reflect the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the children using the service. Recruitment practices that successfully address diversity will help; but changes to job specifications may sometimes be needed, to ensure that escorts include people with necessary linguistic or other skills.

33. Children who use sign language may similarly value travelling with escorts who know some signing. The image projected by the service can also be important – some children may prefer not to travel in vehicles labelled as ‘ambulances’ or that have an institutional appearance. Systematic and regular consultation with users and their parents or carers is a key way of gaining insight into such concerns. Such consultation needs to take account of the linguistic diversity of the borough’s area – for example, it may not be appropriate to assume that all those being surveyed can speak or read English.

34. Approaches to service quality vary markedly in London. For example, some boroughs have no formal policy on maximum permitted journey times or punctuality [EXHIBIT 7]. Only about one-half of education departments surveyed have been systematically collecting schools’ and parents’ views on quality of service, although authorities also report that this is changing, in response to best value. Complaints procedures are an important way of identifying service failures. Yet only about one-quarter of boroughs surveyed ensure that parents receive details of their complaints procedure before a child makes his or her first journey.

35. Long journey times may be unavoidable if the only, or most suitable, placement is some distance from the child’s home. As a result, more London authorities have formal standards on in-borough journey times than on out-of-borough ones. In addition, some boroughs’ standards permit longer travel times for out-of-borough journeys than for in-borough ones. Only one authority reported that its policies were age related, with children over eight years of age being allowed to make longer journeys. The standards set for maximum travel times range from as little as 45 minutes, for in-borough journeys in some authorities, to the 2 hours used by some other authorities for out-of-borough journeys.
36. The time taken for passengers to get on and off vehicles when they are picked up in the morning and set down in the evening can have a particular impact on journey times. When passengers travel in wheelchairs, the need to secure a chair before the vehicle drives off can further add to the overall journey time. Ensuring that staff know, in advance, the types of wheelchair used by their passengers, have the most appropriate equipment for securing chairs and are well trained in its use not only, therefore, addresses safety needs but may also help to speed journeys.

37. Service quality involves achieving or exceeding targets or standards, not just setting them. Disturbingly, only four of the boroughs that completed the Commission’s questionnaire could provide information on the number of pupils whose journeys exceeded the authority’s maximum permitted time. Most boroughs that have set standards for maximum journey times do not, therefore, know how they are performing against the standards. Monitoring of the number of school days lost because transport did not turn up was better – over half of respondents provided data, with most of these reporting that no days had been lost. Out of 27 respondents, however, 11 (40 per cent) said that data was not available.

EXHIBIT 7
Service quality
Some boroughs do not have any formal policy on maximum permitted journey times or punctuality.

Note: Percentages are based on the number of boroughs that provided data in response to each of the questions included in this analysis. This number varied between 25 and 27, as some respondents did not answer all the questions.

Source: Audit Commission survey
Managerial Arrangements

Clear understanding of roles – policymaking, budget management, organising transport and its provision – is important. The SEN manager should act as the budgetholder for SEN transport.
38. Elected members, supported by senior officers, set the overall budget and framework within which a borough educates children who have special educational needs. Policies on inclusion, placement criteria and policies on developing independence as a child approaches adult life will all impact on the demand for, and nature of, SEN transport. Members can, and should, also set or agree standards for the transport service.

39. The transport requirement of an individual child with special educational needs should be considered as part of the initial decision about which school the child should attend. It should also be re-examined regularly, at the annual review meeting about the statement. In making a placement decision, the SEN manager should consider the full costs of each potential placement, including the transport costs which, in some individual instances, can be higher than the costs of the child’s education. Doing so can help to explain the options and decisions to parents and, if necessary, to a special educational needs tribunal. The SEN manager should therefore act as the budgetholder for SEN transport. OFSTED and the Audit Commission have favoured this approach during their inspections of LEAs:

The SEN transport budget is, rightly, held by SEN managers, thus ensuring that placement and transport costs are considered together. (Ref. 8)

40. The Commission’s 1991 report, Home-to-School Transport: A System at the Cross Roads (Ref. 1), distinguished between these policymaking and budgetholding roles, but also identified two further roles, transport organisation and transport provision [EXHIBIT 8, overleaf]. It also identified feedback between these different roles as essential.

41. Transport organisation is a complex technical task. The organiser acts as the budgetholder’s agent. He or she receives transport requirements – service standards and details of children and the addresses and schools between which they must travel. The organiser then plans, arranges and manages the necessary transport. The transport itself may be provided by a DSO, by contractors (including, in some instances, taxi or private car-hire operators) or by a mixture of external and in-house provision. In some cases, a DSO may pass part of the work on to taxi or private car-hire operators or other external providers. Arrangements need to be flexible, for example to respond to day-to-day changes in the numbers of children requiring transport, in children’s home addresses and in the schools that they attend.

42. The organiser may also be arranging transport for other departments or units within the borough, for example, transport for social services’ clients. This can allow the authority to make the best use of this important expertise. It can also allow boroughs to exploit economies of scale and to integrate their arrangements for meeting the needs of different clients, when letting transport contracts or using a DSO – for example, by allowing vehicle pooling between social services and SEN transport work.
43. The organiser will need to work very closely with the borough’s DSO when, as is common in London, the service is provided in-house. But the organiser is acting as an agent for the education department. Feedback to the budgetholder is essential to help to manage the current year’s expenditure, to set future years’ budgets and to reveal whether service standards are being met. In turn, feedback from the budgetholder to the policy makers is essential to help them to monitor expenditure, set budgets, know whether standards are being met and monitor and review the effectiveness, costs and impact of the framework that they have set.

EXHIBIT 8
Providing home-to-school transport
There are four key roles; feedback is essential.

Source: Audit Commission
44. All of the London boroughs that provided data to the Commission said that decisions about whether particular children are to receive free SEN transport are always made within the education department. However, the SEN manager does not always control the budget for SEN transport. For example, he or she controls the budget for in-house provision in less than two-thirds of boroughs [EXHIBIT 9]. In some boroughs, SEN managers are not, therefore, able to consider placement and transport costs together in the way that the DfEE (Ref. 2) and OFSTED and the Audit Commission have recommended (Ref. 8).

45. Decisions as to whether to provide escorts are almost invariably made within the education department; only one authority reported that the decision lay with the school and only one said that it was made elsewhere in the council, by another unit acting as the education department’s agent. None of the boroughs reported that they allowed DSOs or transport contractors to decide whether a child required an escort.

46. As the provision of SEN transport in London is largely done in-house, most escorts are employed directly by the borough for which they work, with only a minority provided by external contractors. The 18 boroughs that provided a breakdown of escort numbers to the Commission used 1,500 escorts. Over three-quarters of these were directly employed by the authority [EXHIBIT 10, overleaf]. Comparatively little use was made of parents or volunteers as escorts.

**EXHIBIT 9**

**Control of the SEN transport budget**

The special educational needs manager controls the transport budget for in-house provision in less than two-thirds of boroughs.

Note: 25 respondents answered the relevant questions; 4 of those had no in-house DSO and were excluded when calculating percentages. Percentages total to 101 due to rounding.

*Source: Audit Commission survey*
Who employs escorts
Over three-quarters are directly employed by the authority.

Note: Based on data from the 18 boroughs that answered the relevant question. Because of rounding, percentages total to over 100.
Source: Audit Commission survey

47. The choice of travel method (minibus, taxi, etc) normally lies with the education department (63 per cent of the boroughs that provided data), although in some cases decisions are made elsewhere in the authority (15 per cent) or by a DSO (22 per cent). Where minibuses are used, the allocation of children to particular vehicles and routes is normally left to the transport provider (DSO or contractor) though about one-fifth of councils that provided data report that decisions are made within the education department or by another council unit acting for it.

48. Most boroughs reported that, at present, they deal directly with the police on security checks for drivers and escorts. Contact is often made by a DSO, which is employing the drivers and escorts or sub-contracting work to outside suppliers, including taxi and hire car operators, rather than by the education department. However, a minority of boroughs allow others, such as contractors, to arrange this vetting. Where contractors arrange checks, authorities report that they normally monitor the contractor and verify that the checks have been performed.

Managerial oversight
49. The responses to the Commission’s questionnaire suggest that the splitting of responsibilities between the policymakers, the SEN manager, the transport organiser and the transport provider has not always been combined with the strong feedback to the SEN budgetholder and to policymakers, recommended by the Commission in 1991 (Ref. 1). Questionnaires were frequently split into parts and distributed across a council. Many boroughs have found it difficult to bring together all the cost, usage and service-level data sought by the Commission. In some boroughs, it is unlikely, therefore, that anyone has comprehensive oversight of the service.
EXHIBIT 11

Who arranges police security checks on drivers and escorts

Most councils deal directly with the police on such checks.

---

### Managerial costs

50. The 13 boroughs that provided the relevant data to the Commission reported managerial costs that ranged from about 1 per cent to 5 per cent of total expenditure on home-to-school transport. As many day-to-day managerial functions are carried out by councils’ technical services or environmental services department on behalf of education departments, the total managerial cost, which also includes expenditure incurred by education departments, can be difficult to identify and compare in a consistent way. More work is needed by boroughs to equip them all with consistent and comparable data on managerial costs for benchmarking purposes.
Budgets and Costs

Overspend and budget control problems are common. The challenge of remaining within budget is intensified by cost pressures affecting home-to-school transport. This increases the need to analyse costs and proactively to manage expenditure.
51. Overspend and budgetary control problems in SEN transport are common in London. The challenge of setting budgets, and then remaining within them, is intensified by cost pressures affecting home-to-school transport in general and SEN transport in particular. These increase the need to analyse costs and proactively to manage expenditure.

52. Most boroughs that provided the relevant data to the Commission overspent against budget in 1998/99, in several instances by over 10 per cent. Most respondents also reported that their SEN transport budgets increased between 1998/99 and 1999/2000. Reasons given included changes to reflect the actual demand pattern and cost, in the previous year, and improvements to service and vehicle quality. However, most also stated that they had budget overspend or control problems in 1999/2000. Reported reasons vary from difficulties in predicting the numbers of pupils receiving free transport, and the numbers travelling out-of-borough, to the impact of contract renegotiations. One officer commented that:

The home-to-school transport budget has been overspent every year since 1994/95. Changes in the duties of the LEA have resulted in a more expensive service, but budgets have not been increased in line with this.

53. Overspend pressures are particularly likely if budgets are set by broad-brush, top-down adjustments to the last year’s budget (for example, increases for a general inflation allowance). A preferable approach is to forecast demand, taking into account pupil numbers and demographics and any expected changes in the criteria for making statements or for placement. Also considered is the possible impact of other factors, such as any changes to school organisation, and cost pressures, such as likely inflation in transport costs or tender prices. The impact of any improvements to service quality is also examined. Even if such a bottom-up approach produces figures that are incompatible with overall budgetary constraints, potential problems will be identified earlier, allowing a better managed response, for example, a considered review before year start of options for reducing costs.

54. In practice, just over 50 per cent of London boroughs that provided data report that they set their SEN transport budgets by a simple top-down percentage adjustment to the previous year’s figure. Only 20 per cent report that they take a wholly bottom-up approach. The remaining 30 per cent of boroughs use a mix of top-down adjustment and bottom-up calculations based on projected passenger numbers and costs or projected contract prices. For example, one borough summarised its approach as:

Last year’s budget and a percentage for inflation, but in addition an analysis for trends in placements, prediction of growth for increased numbers of statements, or an increase in costs for new tendering of contracts are all taken into account.
55. Expenditure on home-to-school transport by London boroughs rose in real terms in the late 1990s. Variations in pupil numbers do not account for this increase – the number of London children attending special schools increased by only about 2 per cent in the same period;¹ and changes in boroughs’ expenditure on transport to special schools are poorly correlated with changes in the numbers of pupils attending those schools.

56. Such increases in costs are not unique to the capital. Tender prices for both mainstream and SEN home-to-school transport, and for publicly supported bus routes,² have increased at above inflation rates across the country in recent years.³ There is no evidence to suggest that anti-competitive practices by contractors have contributed to the general rise in prices, although the Office of Fair Trading has successfully acted against two illegal anti-competitive price fixing arrangements between contractors bidding for home-to-school work, in Hull and in Staffordshire.⁴

57. The House of Commons Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs expressed concerns about these increases in 1999 (Ref. 10). In its response to the Select Committee (Ref. 11), the Government identified a number of factors contributing to the increases. Many of these will also affect in-house transport operations – the dominant type of SEN provision in London – and transport managers in London boroughs have offered similar explanations to the Commission for cost rises in the capital.

58. Factors that may be contributing to rises in cost in London include:

- increases in transport costs, especially driver costs. As unemployment levels have eased many transport providers have had to increase wages to retain or recruit drivers. Even so, driver recruitment remains a problem, especially in the southern part of England;

- changes to vehicle specifications, as a result of changing seat belt requirements and regulations on how to secure wheelchairs within vehicles. The latter has also tended to reduce the number of wheelchairs carried by each vehicle. Health and safety requirements are also requiring a greater focus on driver training; and

---

¹ The number of London children at special schools fell from 13,200 in 1991 to 12,200 in 1996 and then rose to 12,500 in 2000.
² Outside London, public bus services are only lightly regulated and operated commercially. However, local transport authorities can let contracts for supported (ie, subsidised) bus services that are socially necessary but that are not being provided by the market.
³ For example, the Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers reported in November 2000 that re-tendered school bus contract prices (ie, prices on routes covered by existing contracts that were expiring) were 11.1 per cent higher than the contracts that they replaced, and that authorities would need a 7.4 per cent increase in budget from April 2001 to retain existing levels of school bus services (Ref. 9).
moves towards smaller vehicles because traffic-calming measures are making it difficult for larger vehicles to collect children from, and deliver them to, addresses in side streets.

**Analysing costs**

59. The expenditure ‘tree’ [EXHIBIT 12], and the supporting graphs and analyses in Appendix 3, will help boroughs to identify whether their:
- expenditure on SEN transport is unusually high or low;
- expenditure is influenced by unusual numbers or proportions of pupils with statements of special educational needs, or attending special schools; and whether
- expenditure is affected by high or low average unit costs (costs per annum per pupil receiving free travel to a special school).

**EXHIBIT 12**

**Expenditure on SEN transport**

This analysis can help boroughs to understand differences in expenditure.

*Source: Audit Commission*
60. The SEN transport cost ‘tree’ [EXHIBIT 13], supporting graphs and analyses for which also appear at Appendix 3, extends this approach to examine in more detail the breakdown of SEN transport costs. They show differences in the mix of transport provision used to meet needs (for example, the mix of DSO minibuses, contractors’ minibuses and taxi or hired car) and differences between boroughs in escort costs as a proportion of total costs. They also show differences in the unit costs associated with different types of provision (for example, in the average cost per year per pupil carried by DSO minibuses).

EXHIBIT 13

**Analysing the cost of SEN transport**

This tree can help boroughs to identify factors contributing to cost variations.

Source: Audit Commission
61. Results need to be interpreted in the light of local circumstances. For example, a borough’s social services department may be looking after some children who have special educational needs, either in the longer term or because the authority is providing short-term respite care. In some instances, social services budgets may bear the cost of taking such children to and from school; in others the cost may fall on the SEN transport budget. Ten of the 24 boroughs that provided the relevant data to the Commission reported that their figures included children collected from respite care; the data for the other 14 did not include such children.

62. In addition, the costs of SEN transport are influenced by factors that are outside the control of those responsible for arranging, managing and providing the transport. These include:

- the nature of the disabilities or behavioural problems of the children receiving free transport. Some SEN transport managers argue that SEN transport has increasingly to cater for children with severe medical problems. They suggest that this is because improvements in medical science mean that children born with very severe disabilities increasingly live to school age. Such children can have high transport costs, for example, if they need to be accompanied by medical equipment when they travel or if they require care while travelling;

- the locations of special schools. This may mean that some journeys will be out-of-borough and may even involve trips to schools outside of London. Typically about one-quarter of trips are out-of-borough, but it is higher in some authorities. For example, there are no special schools within the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and all trips are out-of-borough; and

- local traffic congestion and other local factors. For example, the Thames passes through the London Borough of Richmond, splitting the authority’s area in two. Only two bridges cross the river in the borough, creating particular traffic bottlenecks.

63. Furthermore, some variations may reflect different accounting procedures rather than differences in operational practice. Many of the boroughs that returned the Commission’s questionnaire were unable to provide cost or usage data in the format requested by the Commission. Considerably more work is needed by boroughs to equip them all with consistent and comparable financial and usage data for benchmarking purposes. Boroughs should bear this in mind when using the analyses in Appendix 3.

64. The comparisons should, therefore, serve as the starting point for a more detailed appraisal of expenditure and costs, including more process benchmarking and more detailed cost comparisons with other councils. Local benchmarking clubs, such as LAPTOP, thus have an important role to play. In exploring the reasons for variations, councils should challenge the explanations offered for differences, in line with best value, rather than accept them unquestioningly.

---

1 LAPTOP – the London Authorities Passengers Transport Operational Panel – is a benchmarking club of local authority transport managers from across London.
Responding to cost pressures

65. Authorities have several possible responses to factors that tend to increase costs [BOX A] that they can consider during best value reviews. Since transport costs to special schools will always be relatively high, per pupil carried, such costs should always be considered explicitly when the location and organisation of special schools are reviewed.

BOX A

Ways of responding to cost pressures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTORS INFLUENCING COST</th>
<th>POSSIBLE RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Total numbers of pupils, of pupils with special educational needs and of pupils with severe needs. | • Have clear policies on entitlement to SEN transport.  
• Assess individual pupils to identify whether transport is required and, if it is, the appropriate provision (for example, use of public or dedicated transport; pick-up points; escorting requirements). Do not automatically provide free transport to all pupils with special educational needs  
• Transport requirements are considered at the annual meeting to review each child's statement of special educational need. |
| Location of pupils/schools etc | • Consider transport costs when planning new schools or to extend or close existing ones.  
• Regularly review transport arrangements to rationalise provision (routes; use of taxis and hired cars) as requirements alter. |
| Pupils may be placed at distant, out-of-borough schools, because of a lack of nearer suitable places, parental preference etc. | • Assess transport costs prior to placement, considering possible trade-offs between transport and education costs.  
• Provide transport only to the nearest suitable school.  
• Publicise policy on placements and on the provision of free transport.  
• Have conflict resolution mechanisms, when parents disagree with placement decisions. |
| Impact of policies on inclusion, day placements and respite care. | • Have clear policy and agreement on the roles of the education department, the social services department and health bodies in providing transport/meeting transport costs. |
| Traffic congestion reduces vehicle speed, and thus utilisation, or lengthens journey times. | • Consider staggering school start/finish times; consult schools, parents and carers about this option.  
• Use collective rather than individual (door step) pick-up points, where appropriate. |
| High in-house costs. | • Minimise vehicle down times by also using them for other school work (for example, trips to sports facilities during the school day; after-school activities).  
• Pool vehicles with social services.  
• Use vehicles for social services work, during the school day.  
• Use drivers for other work during the middle of the day.  
• Avoid paying escorts for when they are not working, but retain competitive remuneration that holds down staff turnover.  
• Review where vehicles are kept overnight. Garaging some securely in satellite depots, close to pick-up and drop-off points or drivers' homes, may improve utilisation. |

cont./
Pick-up and drop-off arrangements will impact upon cost; a completely door-to-door service is likely to cost more than one that uses other pick-up and drop-off points. Twelve of the 25 boroughs that provided data to the Commission reported that they collected all pupils from home. Another 5 boroughs said that they picked up 90 per cent or more of pupils from home. The other eight collected fewer children from home, with one reporting that only 50 per cent were picked up at home. Parents and children may, however, regard home pick-up as a higher quality service.

Route planning can also impact on cost. Geographical information systems and other IT tools may help. A critical choice can be whether to link minibus routes exclusively to schools, so that a particular route serves only one school, or to allow a vehicle to deliver to and collect from.

---

**BOX A (cont.)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTORS INFLUENCING COST</th>
<th>POSSIBLE RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Rising contract prices or lack of interest from potential contractors. | • Exercise contract length flexibility – for example, open ended, rather than fixed-term, contracts may attract more bids and keener prices.  
• Use standard tender terms/contract requirements (ie, the same terms and requirements as neighbouring authorities) as this may reduce bidders’ tender preparation costs.  
• Joint tendering (for example, with social services) may also reduce bidders’ tender preparation costs and offer them economies of scale in providing services.  
• Examine the use of alternative providers (for example, from the voluntary sector).  
• Retain some in-house capacity, to provide a fall-back, if tender prices rise excessively or if there are no bids, and to offer a yardstick against which to judge external prices. |
| Improving vehicle standards (for example, seat belt requirements). | • Fully meet all of the legal requirements but identify the reasons for, and then cost and prioritise, other improvements. |
| Increasing parental expectations about service quality. | • Consult with parents and schools to identify concerns and priorities.  
• Cost possible improvements to services, identifying alternative uses for the money and then consult parents and schools further about priorities.  
• Effective publicity about policy and standards.  
• Effective liaison with schools and parents.  
• Effective complaints procedures, which speedily identify and resolve individual problems. |
| Increasing escorting costs as health and safety standards improve. | • Have clear criteria on when escorts will and will not be provided.  
• Apply these pupil by pupil in the light of the child’s needs.  
• Regularly review individual pupil’s requirements.  
• Have a clear policy and agreement on the role of social services departments and health bodies in providing escorts for pupils with day placements or who are receiving respite care.  
• Encourage escort retention to minimise recruitment and training costs. |

*Source: Audit Commission*
more than one school. Seven of the 26 boroughs that provided data to the Commission said that every minibus route served a single school; another 18 said that some routes served only one school but that others served two or more; and one borough reported that none of its routes served a single school. Routing arrangements will, however, impact on journey times; efficiency and cost considerations will need to be balanced against service-quality issues.

68. Route planning and scheduling is linked to the choice between minibus and taxi or hired car. The use of taxis and hired cars should be reviewed regularly. Journeys by taxi or hired car are normally markedly more expensive than those by minibus – typically about £5,000 to £6,000 per pupil per year compared with about £3,000 per pupil per year for DSO minibuses. Some children’s journeys may be so unusual that they are difficult to accommodate economically on a minibus route – it may be more cost effective to use a taxi or hired car and may also mean that other children spend less time on their bus. In addition, the numbers of children to be carried, and the places they travel between, change during the year, sometimes at short notice – for example, when existing passengers change address or school and when pupils enter or leave the LEA’s area. The use of taxis and hired cars, to respond to such short-term changes and needs, means that councils are not continuously changing the minibus-based SEN transport network. Stable minibus arrangements are desirable, given the importance that many children and parents can place on travelling with a familiar escort and driver.

69. Taxis and hired cars thus have an important role to play in meeting needs but their long-term, large-scale use should be reviewed regularly and challenged under best value. Given the difference between minibus and taxi/hired car costs, choices about the mix of transport provision can have an important impact on expenditure. As Appendix 3 shows, the percentage of those transported who are carried by taxi/hired car varies dramatically between boroughs, from over 40 per cent to as low as 6 per cent. Could widespread taxi or hired car use be replaced by greater use of minibuses without significantly damaging the quality of care? Could many individually legitimate but short-term taxi-based responses to changing needs be replaced by a planned, longer-term minibus-based solution?

70. Where taxis and hired cars are used, it is important that the authority makes accountable and effective use of its purchasing power. Continued large-scale spot hire is unlikely to be cost effective. The co-ordination of purchasing across departments may also help to obtain better prices.
71. The success of authorities’ tender and contract management strategies for procuring minibus-based transport will also influence costs. Where in-house minibus services are used, the extent to which the authority can use SEN transport vehicles and their drivers during the middle of the day will impact on SEN transport costs. All the respondents to the Commission’s survey said that children going to or from special schools do not travel with other client groups, such as adult social services’ clients. But some councils have used their SEN transport vehicles in the middle of the day for school visits and trips, for social services work and even to carry meals-on-wheels. Even if these approaches are not possible, costs may be reduced by pooling with social services, to reduce the number of spare vehicles held, by sharing reserve drivers and by using joint vehicle leasing or maintenance contracts. Some London boroughs are now using their minibuses for community transport and even to carry patients making non-emergency trips to and from hospital (for example, to out-patients’ appointments). Work by District Audit has revealed the extent to which employing vehicles for a wide range of purposes improves their utilisation [EXHIBIT 14].

EXHIBIT 14

Minibus utilisation in two boroughs

Borough B gets higher use from its vehicles as it employs them for a wide range of purposes.

Notes:
- Vehicles in use include ones being serviced.
- Source: District Audit
72. It will often, therefore, be sensible, as in Newham and other
boroughs, to carry out a best value review of SEN transport in
conjunction with one of social services’ transport and other transport
services. This is particularly the case if increasing overall vehicle and
driver utilisation also requires some changes to social services’ or other
transport arrangements. For example, altering day-centre hours might
mean that social services’ clients can be picked up after vehicles have
finished delivering children to school, thus improving vehicle utilisation.
However, changing day-centre times may have a significant impact on
the lives of clients and their carers. Transport arrangements should not
dictate the pattern of care and any such change should only be made
after comprehensive consultation with social services’ clients and other
stakeholders. It may be sensible, where transport services are provided
in-house, also to include vehicle maintenance and other depot functions
in a review. Alternatively, depot functions can be reviewed after SEN
transport and other transport services have been examined. Examining
depot functions before reviewing transport services may be inadvisable;
the safety, service-quality and other requirements of transport services are
key inputs to any review of maintenance and other depot functions.

73. Escorting costs can be minimised by paying escorts only for the hours
actually worked, and thus not in school holidays or the middle of the day,
although these approaches need to be balanced against the need to attract
and retain enough escorts of the right quality.
Conclusion

London boroughs have already done much to provide good SEN transport services. Best value offers the opportunity to build on existing good practices to provide even better, safe, high-quality services that use resources effectively.
74. London boroughs have already done much to provide good SEN transport services. Best value offers the opportunity to improve these still further. Reviews need to involve parents and carers, children and schools. Special educational needs transport is provided to meet duties placed on LEAs. LEAs are responsible for children using that transport. It is therefore important that those dealing with SEN policy and services in education departments work with their authorities’ transport managers during reviews, that they provide proactive strategic direction to the service and that they seek, receive and, where necessary, act upon, information about how the service is performing. This strategic direction should include realistic budget setting and monitoring, and attention to safety and to service quality – for example, reliability, journey times and comfort – as well as to costs and efficiency.

75. The self-assessment checklist at Appendix 2, together with the expenditure and cost comparisons in Appendix 3, should help each borough critically to review its SEN transport provision. The aim should be to build on existing good practices to provide even better, safe, high-quality services that use resources effectively.
Appendix 1

The advisory group

Lindsey Barker  Department for Education and Employment
Martin Camillin  Department for Education and Employment
Alan Carter  Surrey Ambulance Service
Neil Comport  Department for Education and Employment
Tim Davies  Devon County Council
Ann Frye  Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
Glenys Lawrence  Wandsworth Borough Council
Stephen Lowe  Age Concern
Terry McCrady  NEXUS (Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Executive)
Brian McGinnis  MENCAP
Pam Marsh  Department of Health
Jenny Meadows  Community Transport Association
Paul Topham  East Sussex County Council

The group advises on all aspects of the Commission’s assisted travel study, not just the SEN work in London. The Commission may add to the group, as the main study proceeds.
Appendix 2

Self-assessment checklist

1. Current arrangements

1.1 Managing the service
Do current arrangements clearly identify who:

- decides which school a child with special educational needs is to attend?
- holds the SEN transport budget?
- decides whether a child is eligible for free transport?
- decides whether a pupil is to be escorted?
- arranges transport?
- assigns children to particular vehicles/routes?
- provides transport?
- provides escorts?

Is the person responsible for the placement decision also responsible for the budget for SEN transport?

1.2 Eligibility
Are there clearly defined criteria on eligibility for free transport, which:

- cover all circumstances in which pupils receive free transport?
- have been set following consultation with parents/carers and schools?
- do not create cultural barriers to access?
- parents/carers and schools understand?
- are reviewed in response to changes in local needs and provision?
- are also reviewed when national policy changes?
- have been agreed by elected members?
- comply with s 509 of the Education Act 1996 (for example, treat students at further education colleges no less favourably than LEA students of the same age)?

Is eligibility for free transport:

- decided as part of the statutory assessment process?
- re-examined regularly as part of the annual review of the statement of special educational need?

Do parents/carers receive details of how the authority will decide whether their child is eligible for free transport in good time?

Do decisions about eligibility comply with the SEN Code of Practice?

Do decisions about pupil placement take account of transport costs?
Are arrangements for dealing with appeals and complaints about decisions on whether to provide free transport:

- clear and formally set out?
- understood by parents/carers and schools?
- agreed by elected members?

1.3 Allocating pupils to transport

Does transport allocation take account of the individual pupil's disabilities and needs?

Does transport allocation (for example, placing a pupil on a particular vehicle/route) take account of both current and likely future vehicle occupancy?

Are allocations to transport reviewed regularly in order more efficiently to match pupils with vehicles (within the constraints of service standards and the need to ensure pupils' health and safety)?

Do such reviews take account of the potentially disturbing effects of changes to transport arrangements, including changes to drivers or escorts, on pupils with some types of special educational need?

1.4 Escorts

Are the criteria for the provision of escorts clear?

Do these criteria cover the entire range of special educational needs?

Do parents/carers and schools understand them?

Are decisions on whether to provide an escort based on the individual pupil's health and safety requirements?

Do decisions about escorting on minibuses also take account of the total number of children being carried on the vehicle?

Are all escorts, including agency staff:

- trained appropriately before they begin their duties?
- security checked with police before they begin their duties?
- given written guidance on their duties?
- informed of the disabilities and needs of each pupil before they first accompany that pupil?

Are there regular checks to ensure that all escorts provided by contractors have been trained and security vetted and have been given written guidance on their duties?

Do escorts have appropriate identification?
### 1.5 Drivers

Are all drivers:

- trained appropriately before they start SEN work?  
- security checked with police before they first carry pupils?  
- given written guidance on their duties?  
- informed of the disabilities and needs of each pupil before they first carry that pupil?  

Are there regular checks to ensure that all contractors’ drivers and all taxi and hired car drivers have been trained and security vetted and have been given written guidance on their duties?  

Do these checks cover emergency and stand-in taxi and hired car drivers and contractors’ emergency and stand-in drivers?  

Are driving licences checked regularly?  

Do drivers have appropriate identification?  

### 1.6 Vehicle, equipment and health and safety arrangements

Are all vehicles well maintained, safe and insured?  

Is other equipment also well maintained and safe?  

Are vehicles and equipment regularly checked for safety?  

Do these checks cover contractors’ vehicles and equipment, including taxis and hired cars, and spares/stand-in vehicles used by contractors and taxi and hired car operators?  

Is equipment, required when transporting pupils, available when needed, so that pupils’ starts at school are not delayed, waiting for equipment?  

Are there checks to ensure that drivers and escorts follow health and safety and other procedures?  

### 1.7 The journey

Do pick-up points reflect pupils’ capabilities to travel to them safely?  

Within these constraints, do pick-up arrangements seek to encourage independence?  

Are communication arrangements between parents/carers, service providers, schools and the council clear and effective?  

Do these arrangements deal satisfactorily with communication with parents who do not speak English or who are not fluent in the language?  

Do these allow parents to notify the SEN transport service (either directly, via the school or via the education department) when they know in advance that a child will not be attending school (for example, because of sickness or a hospital appointment)?
Are the procedures to follow when children are not waiting at pick-up points in the morning:

- clear?

- understood by drivers/escorts, parents/carers, schools and by staff in depots or the education department who may be contacted by parents/carers or schools?

Do drivers and escorts know which children they are to pick up each morning and evening?

Are there clear procedures for recording the numbers and identities of the children picked up each morning?

Are there clear procedures for recording the numbers and identities of the children delivered to school?

Are there clear procedures for recording and notifying schools of children who were not picked up (for example, who were not at the pick-up point)?

Are there clear procedures for recording the numbers and identities of the children picked up at the end of the school day?

Are there clear procedures for recording the numbers and identities of the children delivered home to parents/carers at the end of the school day?

Are procedures to follow when parents/carers are not waiting at drop-off points:

- clear?

- understood by drivers/escorts, parents/carers and others involved (for example, staff at any social services centre or other safe place at which a child may be left for collection)?

Do all of these procedures work well?

Are they all followed without exception?

Are travel times reasonable (journeys do not over-tire pupils or exacerbate medical or behavioural difficulties and do not impact adversely on their performance at school)?

Do pupils travel in comfort (for example, conditions do not over-tire them or exacerbate medical or behavioural difficulties and do not impact adversely on their performance at school)?

Are pupils picked up on time?

Do they reach school on time?

Do they return home on time?

### 1.8 Performance management

Does a single officer in the education department have overall managerial responsibility for the service, covering policy on eligibility, decisions in individual cases, expenditure and quality of service issues (even if day-to-day operational responsibilities are dealt with by other officers)?
At member level, does a single cabinet member/portfolio holder or committee similarly have responsibility for all aspects of the service?

Is there effective, on-going quality assurance of decisions on entitlement?

Are there formal standards for customer care, covering:

- pick-up times?
- journey times?
- delivery to school?
- delivery home?
- comfort during the journey?

Have these been set following consultation with children; parents; carers; and schools?

Is performance against these standards monitored regularly and reported to the budgetholder and to members?

Do surveys of children’s; parents’; carers’; and schools’ satisfaction form part of this performance monitoring?

Is there a formal complaints system?

Are parents, carers and schools aware of how to complain?

Are complaints monitored by the budgetholder (ie, they are not dealt with solely by the transport provider) and reported upon to members?

Is there a set of local cost-based performance indicators?

Is performance against these indicators monitored regularly by the budgetholder and reported to members?

Do performance measurement and complaints monitoring inform continuous service improvement?

1.9  Budget setting and control

Is the budget for SEN transport generated using reliable assumptions about:

- the impact of any known changes to policy?
- projected pupil numbers?
- inclusion and the proportions of pupils with special educational needs likely to be educated at mainstream and at special schools?
- expected transfer from primary to secondary education?
- transport requirements and arrangements, including any changes to service-quality requirements?
- any changes to school organisation?
- tender prices and other costs?
Is the transport budget profiled to take account of seasonal variations in expenditure? □

Is outturn regularly and frequently monitored against the budget profile by the budgetholder? □

Are possible overspends identified, and acted upon, during the year, as they develop? □

Do members responsible for the scrutiny of home-to-school transport and SEN strategy:

- know the costs and unit costs of each type of SEN transport (for example, in-house minibuses; contractors’ minibuses; taxis, etc)? □

- know the split between different types of transport used (ie, the per cent of pupils carried by each type of transport)? □

- review cost data, benchmarked against other authorities, at least annually? □

- know how competitive costs are, compared to alternative suppliers? □

1.10 Overall

Does the authority follow the DfEE’s guidance (Ref. 2)? □

2. Reviewing the service

(Answers to Part 1 of the checklist will help inform answers to Part 2)

2.1 Challenging current approaches

Do we need to change our policies on eligibility?

- What are our statutory obligations?

- How far do we want to exercise our discretion, beyond the statutory obligations?

- Are we automatically assuming that children with statements of special educational needs, who attend special schools, should receive free transport?

- Are we doing enough, without compromising their safety, to equip children with special educational needs for adult life and to make journeys safely as pedestrians and to be able successfully to use public transport?

Are we paying enough attention to equalities issues?

- Are there any language issues or cultural sensitivities to which we need to respond?

- Do we need to make any changes to our arrangements in order to respond to the educational and related transport needs of children who are asylum seekers or refugees?
Do we need to alter arrangements in response to changes in demand?

- Is the number of children with special educational needs likely to continue to increase?
- Is the number or proportion of them being taught in mainstream schools likely to increase?
- How are numbers at special schools likely to change?
- Are the needs of children receiving SEN transport likely to change (for example, are the numbers or proportions of pupils with different types of disability likely to alter)?
- What impact will the Disability Discrimination Act have on the service, as public transport increasingly becomes accessible to people with disabilities?
- Are we likely to change the number or location of the special schools, pupil referral units etc that we use?
- What implications do changes have for expenditure on SEN transport and for how we organise the service?

Do we need to change how we meet need?

- What mix of provision – minibuses; taxi etc – are we using?
- What criteria have led us to select this mix?
- Are the criteria still appropriate?
- Is the mix still appropriate?

Are our escorting arrangements good enough?

- Are drivers (in-house drivers, contractors’ drivers, taxi and hired car drivers, including stand-in and replacement drivers) sufficiently trained and vetted properly?
- Are escorts (in-house staff, agency staff, escorts provided by contractors, including stand-in and replacement escorts) sufficiently trained and vetted properly?

Do we need to do more to ensure that vehicles and equipment are safe?

Do we need to improve service-quality, including reliability and comfort?

Do we communicate effectively with parents and schools?

Do we need to improve how we set budgets?

Do we need to improve how we monitor and manage the service?

Do we need to improve the cost effectiveness of the service?
2.2 Comparisons

How do other authorities approach SEN transport?

How do our:

- policies;
- arrangements for deciding on, and reviewing, eligibility;
- service delivery – including the mix of methods (minibus; taxi, etc);
- escorting criteria;
- training and vetting of escorts and drivers;
- arrangements for ensuring passengers’ safety;
- service standards, including standards for safety, comfort and reliability;
- arrangements for consulting users/parents/carers/schools;
- budget setting;
- management and performance monitoring; and
- costs and performance;

compare with those of other authorities?

How do our quality standards, costs and performance compare with those of other transport operations (for example, social services transport, Dial-a-Ride, NHS patient transport)?

Do we need to do more work, with other authorities, to develop consistent and comparable measures of cost and performance?

2.3 Consultation

What do:

- children;
- parents and carers;
- schools;
- drivers and escorts;
- contractors, including taxi and hired car providers;

think about:

- our policies;
- our service standards;
- our quality of service, including safety, comfort and reliability;
- what we do well; and
- what we need to improve?
Have we consulted with a cross section of users and potential users of the service, in ways that seek to overcome language or cultural barriers that might prevent people from offering their views?

Has this consultation revealed any linguistic, cultural or religious barriers to access to the service?

How can we further involve users and their parents or carers, schools, staff and contractors in planning and implementing improvements to the service?

### 2.4 Embracing fair competition

Do comparisons of cost, service standards and performance suggest that these are in line with those of other boroughs?

How much of the service have we exposed to competition and how recently?

Is there a potentially increased role for the voluntary sector?

Would we obtain a better service, or reduce costs with no loss of service quality, if more of the service were to be put to competition or to be provided by external suppliers?

Do we need to change our contract tender strategy to ensure a greater number of, or more competitive, bids?

- Could we alter contract periods or move away from fixed term periods?

- Could we package work differently, either offering smaller packages (such as individual routes or small groups of routes, to encourage bids from smaller suppliers and entry into the market) or larger packages (for example, in conjunction with social services or other work, to offer suppliers opportunities for economies of scale)?

Are there more opportunities to use vehicles and drivers for other work in the middle of the day and during school holidays?

Could we make savings, without compromising service quality, or improve quality without increasing cost, if we integrated client-side SEN transport functions (for example, arranging and managing transport provision) or provision of SEN transport with other transport activities (for example, social services transport)?

Do we thus need to cover other transport services, such as social services transport, in the same review as SEN transport?

How much, in total, is council-funded work worth to the local taxi/private hire market?

Do we use taxis and hired cars for other work (for example, travel by officers and members, to carry social services’ clients)?

Are we also funding a Taxicard scheme?

Are we fully exploiting our purchasing power in the taxi and hired car market to obtain keener prices?

*Source: Audit Commission*
Appendix 3

The charts below relate to exhibits 12 and 13. Data is for 1998/99. The DfEE data is for pupils aged under 16.

The Commission’s questionnaire data is based on SEN transport usage and costs. It thus includes some pupils and FE college students aged over 16 who are using SEN transport and some pupils using SEN transport but who are not attending special school. The Commission’s questionnaire captured information about daily travel. The analyses at exhibits G to L thus exclude pupils with special educational needs who attend residential schools.

A brief statistical summary of the data appears on each exhibit, with the exception of exhibit H where, because of space constraints on the exhibit, the statistics are given immediately after the exhibit, in Table 1.
TABLE 1

How pupils using SEN transport travel: Summary statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In-house minibus (%)</th>
<th>Contractor's minibus (%)</th>
<th>Taxi/car hire (%)</th>
<th>Other (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>89.2</td>
<td>89.0</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of boroughs</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 3 • EXPENDITURE AND TRANSPORT COST ANALYSES

Graphs A to E – Source: Audit Commission analysis of DfEE data
Graph F – Source: Audit Commission using DfEE data on expenditure and Audit Commission questionnaire data on numbers carried
Graphs G to L – Source: Audit Commission questionnaire

Graph I: Average annual cost per pupil using SEN transport on minibuses operated by a DSO

- £000s
- London boroughs
  - Maximum: £7,310
  - Median: £3,210
  - Mean: £3,660
  - Minimum: £960
  - No of boroughs: 11

Note: Excludes escorting costs. Excludes boroughs with no DSO provision.

Graph J: Average annual cost per pupil using SEN transport who travel on minibuses operated by contractors

- £000s
- London boroughs
  - Maximum: £5,750
  - Median: £2,570
  - Mean: £2,600
  - Minimum: £510
  - No of boroughs: 6

Note: Excludes escorting costs.

Graph K: Average annual cost per pupil using SEN transport who travel by taxi/hired car

- £000s
- London boroughs
  - Maximum: £13,000
  - Median: £5,680
  - Mean: £6,880
  - Minimum: £3,060
  - No of boroughs: 11

Note: Excludes escorting costs.

Graph L: Percentage of pupils using SEN transport who travel out of borough

- %
- London boroughs
  - Maximum: 100%
  - Median: 22.5%
  - Mean: 27.3%
  - Minimum: 6.1%
  - No of boroughs: 21
Appendix 4

The general approach to inspection (Ref. 5)

At the end of each inspection, the inspectors have to make two judgements:

1. How good are the services that they have inspected? (rated from 3 stars ‘excellent’ to no stars ‘poor’); and
2. Will they improve in the way that best value requires? (rated on a scale that runs from ‘yes’, to ‘probably’, to ‘unlikely’, to ‘no’).

The Commission has also produced a model for the inspection process, showing what inspectors and the authority should be doing at each stage of the inspection [EXHIBIT 15].

What did the inspectors do at Newham? (Ref. 6)

At Newham, the inspection team carried out a number of different sorts of activities to enable it to reach its judgements. Before going on site it examined a range of documents including the best value review and supporting documents, the tender documents and service specification, budgets and trading accounts, and other related information that helped it to understand the service.

When it went on site it carried out a number of different checks building on the work described above in order to get a fuller picture of how good the Newham passenger transport service was. These on-site ‘reality checks’ were designed to gather evidence about what it is like to use the service and to see how well it works on the ground. The inspection team also followed up on issues relating to the management of the review and the improvements flowing from it. Its reality checks included:

- travelling on a number of different bus routes with service users;
- visually checking 20 per cent of the fleet and a number of taxis;
- talking with service users and their carers;
- speaking with staff at schools and social services day centres;
- interviewing staff and managers in the passenger transport service; and
- examining additional information as it came to the team’s attention.
The stages of inspection

This shows what inspectors and the authority should be doing at each stage of the inspection.

**Prepare: 4 weeks before the inspection**
- Inspection Service
  - Review BVR (best value review) documents and other information in order to understand the context for the best value inspection.
  - Request any additional documents needed.
  - Begin to answer the key questions.
  - Identify what further information or evidence is needed. Select and tailor reality checks to provide the evidence needed.
  - Have pre-inspection meeting with the authority to share inspection focus and planned activity.
  - Request any additional information needed.

**Authority**
- Provide additional relevant information to help inspection team begin to answer the key inspection questions.
- Question the focus and planned activity of inspection.
  - After pre-inspection meeting, arrange the interviews and meetings with stakeholders and schedule interim challenge report session.
  - Brief staff and members on inspection.

**Inspect: 1 to 4 weeks on site**
- **Carry out reality checks**
- **Present interim challenge**

**Publish report: 1 to 2 weeks afterwards**
- **Publish final report**
- **Carry out follow-up inspection**

**Source:** Audit Commission
References


8. OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission, *Inspection of London Borough of Waltham Forest Local Education Authority*, OFSTED, 1999.


Index References are to paragraph numbers, Boxes and Case Studies and Appendices (page numbers)

A

Accounting procedures 63
Agency staff 26, 28
Anti-competitive price fixing arrangements 56
Audit Commission approach to SEN transport budget 39, 44, 49
best value inspection report on Newham Borough Council 18
Best Value Inspectorate 10
questionnaire 17, 28, 37, 49, 63

B

Behavioural problems 20, 22, 62
Benchmarking 50, 63, 64
Best value reviews 10, 11, 12-18, 65
application of ‘4Cs’ 12
in conjunction with other transport reviews 72
cost factors 65
depot functions 72
eligibility criteria 11
escorting criteria 11
good practice 18
hired cars 69
independent inspectorates 10
involvement of parents and children 74
London Borough of Newham Case Study 1 (p13);
Appendix 4 (pp54–5)
publication of performance plans 12
role of LEAs 15
self-assessment checklist 13, 75;
Appendix 2 (pp42–50)
service quality comparisons 13
social services transport 72
taxi 69
vehicle replacement 16
Budget control 44, 51–4
bottom-up approach 53, 54
overspend 51–4
top-down adjustments 53, 54
Budget setting 11, 38, 43, 51–4, 74

C

Children who have disabilities 15, 22, 24, 62
Competition in service provision 12
Complaints procedure 34
Consultation 12, 19, 33, 72
Contract management 71;
Box A (pp33–4)
Cost analysis 59-64;
Appendix 3 (pp51–3)
Cost pressures 51, 55-8, 65-73;
Box A (pp34–5)
departmental purchasing policies 70
depot functions 72
hired cars 60, 68, 69, 70
minibuses 69, 70
pick-up and drop-off arrangements 66
response to 65-73; Box A (pp34–5)
route planning 67-8;
Case Study 1 (p13)
taxi 60, 68, 69, 70
vehicle maintenance 72
Costs
drivers 58
hired cars 60, 68, 69, 70
maintenance 16, 71
managerial 50
minibuses 60, 68, 69
placement criteria 39
taxi 60, 68, 69, 70
see also Cost analysis; Cost pressures; Expenditure on home-school SEN transport
Criminal Records Bureau 26

D

Day-centre hours 72
Direct service organisations (DSOs) 4, 41–3, 45, 47, 48
minibuses 60, 68
Disability Discrimination Act 15
District Audit 71
Door-to-door service 8, 66

E

Drivers
attitude and friendliness 32, 68
costs 58
police checks 26, 48
recruitment 28, 58
retention 29
roles 19
training 14, 23, 24, 25, 29, 58
turnover 28
vetting 14, 26
Driving licences 26

Emergency procedures 24
Emotional difficulties 20, 22
Enfield, London Borough 19;
Case Study 2 (p15)
Escorting arrangements 21;
Case Study 2 (p15)
hired cars 21
minibuses 21
taxi 21

Escorts
attitude and friendliness 32, 68
costs 60, 73;
Box A (pp34–5)
criteria for provision 19, 21–2, 45;
Case Study 2 (p15)
decisions on provision 45
employers 46
knowledge of signing numbers 46
police checks 26, 48
recruitment 28, 73
retention 29, 73
sensitivity to children’s religious and cultural needs 32
training 14, 23, 24, 29
turnover 28
use of parents or volunteers as 46
vetting 14, 26
Expenditure on home-school SEN transport 4, 7-9, 55, 59-64;
Appendix 3 (pp51–3)
accounting procedures 63
benchmarking 50, 63, 64
monitoring 43, 74
proportion spent on special schools 7-8, 59
Fire on vehicles 24
First aid 24
Free transport 2
criteria for provision 19, 20
LEAs’ discretion to provide 2, 74
LEAs’ duty to provide qualifying distance 1, 2, 8
to special schools 8
unit costs 59-61

Good practice 18, 75

Health and safety requirements 58
Hired car drivers, police checks 26
Hired cars 3, 4, 21, 41
best value reviews costs 60, 68, 69, 70
escorting arrangements safety 21
Home Office 26
Home-to-School Transport: A System at the Cross Roads (Audit Commission) 40
Hounslow 18
House of Commons Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs 57
Hull 56

Identification cards 27
Inclusion (SEN children in mainstream schools) 15, 38
Independence of children 15, 22, 38
Journey times 34–7

Kensington and Chelsea, Royal Borough 62
Linguistic diversity 32, 33
Local education authorities (LEAs) 1
delegation of responsibilities devolution of education budgets 9
discretion to provide free transport 2
duty to provide free transport role in best value reviews 1, 74
London Authorities Passengers Transport Operational Panel (LAPTOP) 64

Mainstream schools, children attending 4, 5, 8, 15
Maintenance costs 16, 71
Managerial arrangements 11, 38-43
Managerial costs 50
Managerial oversight 49
Minibus driver awareness scheme (MiDAS) 24
Minibuses 4, 21
allocation of children to vehicles and routes costs 47
DSO operated 60, 68, 69
escorting arrangements 21
in-house services 71
police checks on drivers and escorts 26
route planning 67, 68
servicing 30
tender and contract management strategies 71

Newham, London Borough 18, 72;
Case Study 1 (p13);
Appendix 4 (pp 54-5)
Numbers of pupils who have special educational needs 5, 54

Office of Fair Trading 56
Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) 10, 13, 39, 44
Out-of-borough journeys 35, 62

Parents 16, 19, 32, 34, 39, 46
Pick-up and drop-off arrangements 66
Placement criteria 6, 38, 53
costs 39, 54
Public transport 8;
Case Study 2 (p15)
passes for use on 3
Punctuality 34

Qualifying distance for free transport 1, 2, 8

Resources, use of 9, 10
Respite care 61
Richmond, London Borough 62
Route planning 67–8;
Case Study 1 (p13)

Safety arrangements 8, 11, 19, 23–30, 72
responsibilities of LEAs 74
wheelchairs 36, 58
Seatbelts 30, 58;
Case Study 1 (p13)

Seeing is Believing (Audit Commission) 10
Service quality 9, 16, 18, 31-7
alighting and dismounting times 36
for best value comparisons 13, 72
comfort of journeys 31
complaints procedure 34
improvements to 53
in-borough journey times 35
journey times 34–7, 74; Case Study 1 (p13)
monitoring of school days lost 37
out-of-borough journey times 35, 62
punctuality 34
standards 11, 37
Severe learning difficulties 20
Shortest available route 1, 2
Sign language 33
Social services 61, 71
best value reviews 72
transport 42, 71; Case Study 1 (p13)
Special educational needs tribunal 39
Special schools 5, 6
locations as cost factor 62, 65
placement criteria 6, 38, 53
pupils qualifying for free transport 8
pupils without statement of special educational need 6
Specialist vehicles 8
Spot hire 70
Staff uniforms 27
Staffordshire 56
Statements of special educational needs (SEN) 4, 5, 39
annual reviews 39
criteria for making 53
Stress of journeys 8, 9
Transport organiser 40-3, 49
Transport provision 40, 47
allocation of responsibilities by boroughs 44-8
criteria for Case Study 2 (p15)
differences in mix 60, 69
duties of LEAs 1, 74
Travel methods decisions 47

Vehicle maintenance 72
costs 16, 71
Vehicle pooling 42, 71, 72
Vehicle replacement 16
Vehicle safety 14, 30;
Box A (pp34-5)
fault recording 30
hired cars 30
sample checks 30
taxi 30
Vehicle specifications 58
Volunteers 46

Wheelchair lifts 23, 30;
Case Study 1 (p13)
training for use 23
Wheelchair restraints 30;
Case Study 1 (p13)
Wheelchairs 8, 31
securing 36, 58;
Case Study 1 (p13)

Taxi drivers, police checks 26
Taxis 3, 4, 21, 41;
Case Study 1 (p13)
best value reviews 69
costs 60, 68, 69
escorting arrangements 21
safety 30
Tendering strategies 71;
Box A (pp34–5)
Tower Hamlets 18
Traffic bottlenecks 62;
Box A (pp34–5)
Traffic-calming measures 58
Transport managers 14, 74

INDEX

V

Vehicle maintenance 72
costs 16, 71
Vehicle pooling 42, 71, 72
Vehicle replacement 16
Vehicle safety 14, 30;
Box A (pp34-5)
fault recording 30
hired cars 30
sample checks 30
taxi 30
Vehicle specifications 58
Volunteers 46

Wheelchair lifts 23, 30;
Case Study 1 (p13)
training for use 23
Wheelchair restraints 30;
Case Study 1 (p13)
Wheelchairs 8, 31
securing 36, 58;
Case Study 1 (p13)
The Audit Commission has produced a number of reports covering related issues.

**Seeing is Believing**

*How the Audit Commission will carry out best value inspections in England*

Under best value, the Audit Commission has a new duty to inspect local services. *Seeing is Believing* sets out the values and aspirations of the Commission’s inspection service, and explains how inspection will work locally. The publication draws on extensive consultation, the experience of inspection field trials across England and Wales, and a review of existing inspection theory and practice.

*Free Report, 2000, Available from the Communications Department on 020 7396 1494*

**A Step in the Right Direction**

*Lessons from Best Value Performance Plans*

Best value performance plans assess performance, set targets and outline a programme of best value reviews. These represent the first universal evidence of the impact of the best value approach and show promising beginnings. *A Step in the Right Direction* examines this evidence closely with the aim of helping authorities to build on the success of the first year of performance planning. It considers best value authorities’ priorities for change, analyses audit opinions and recommendations, and reviews findings of two independent surveys of authorities’ views on best value performance planning.

*National Report, 2000, 1862402523, £20*

**Special Educational Needs titles**

It is estimated that 20 per cent of pupils will have a special educational need at some time during their life. The Audit Commission has produced a series of three publications looking at the provision of education for pupils with special needs. *Getting in on the Act* examines strategies used by LEAs and schools, as well as the quality of provision in the classroom, to highlight a range of relevant issues and recommendations for those working in this area. Following on from the report, *Getting the Act Together* is a management handbook designed to help managers involved in co-ordinating special educational needs to establish systems and review procedures. *Getting in on the Act* has also been updated to review the progress made by local authorities since the report in improving their support for children with special educational needs.

*Getting in on the Act: Provision for pupils with special educational needs, National Report, 1992, 0118860887, £8.50*

*Getting the Act Together: Provision for pupils with special educational needs, Management Handbook, 1992, 0118860925, £9*

*Getting in on the Act: A review of progress on special educational needs, Update, 1998, 1862401217, £5*

---

For a full catalogue of Audit Commission publications, please contact the Communications Department, Audit Commission, 1 Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PN, Telephone 020 7828 1212.

To order Audit Commission publications, please telephone 0800 502030.
Local education authorities have a duty to provide or arrange free transport to and from school for some school children and discretion to provide it for others. London boroughs spend over £50 million a year on this, predominantly to fund transport to special schools for children who have special educational needs (SEN).

Effective arrangements are essential to ensure that children with special educational needs can attend school. Pupils must travel safely but should also do so with dignity and in comfort. Good-quality service will ensure that they arrive at school on time without having been tired or distressed by the journey, and can thus receive the maximum benefit from their education. The service needs to be efficient as any waste is misusing resources that could be used to fund teaching posts or otherwise provide frontline education.

The best value regime reinforces the need to use resources effectively. The Government has placed local authorities under a duty to deliver services to clear standards of cost and quality by the most economic, efficient and effective means.

This report will be of particular interest to those in London carrying out best value reviews; those who are responsible for policy on home-to-school transport; SEN managers; and those managing, arranging and providing SEN transport. It discusses how to apply best value principles to reviewing special educational needs transport in London, provides comparative information on arrangements and costs across London, to help with reviews, and includes a self-assessment checklist.