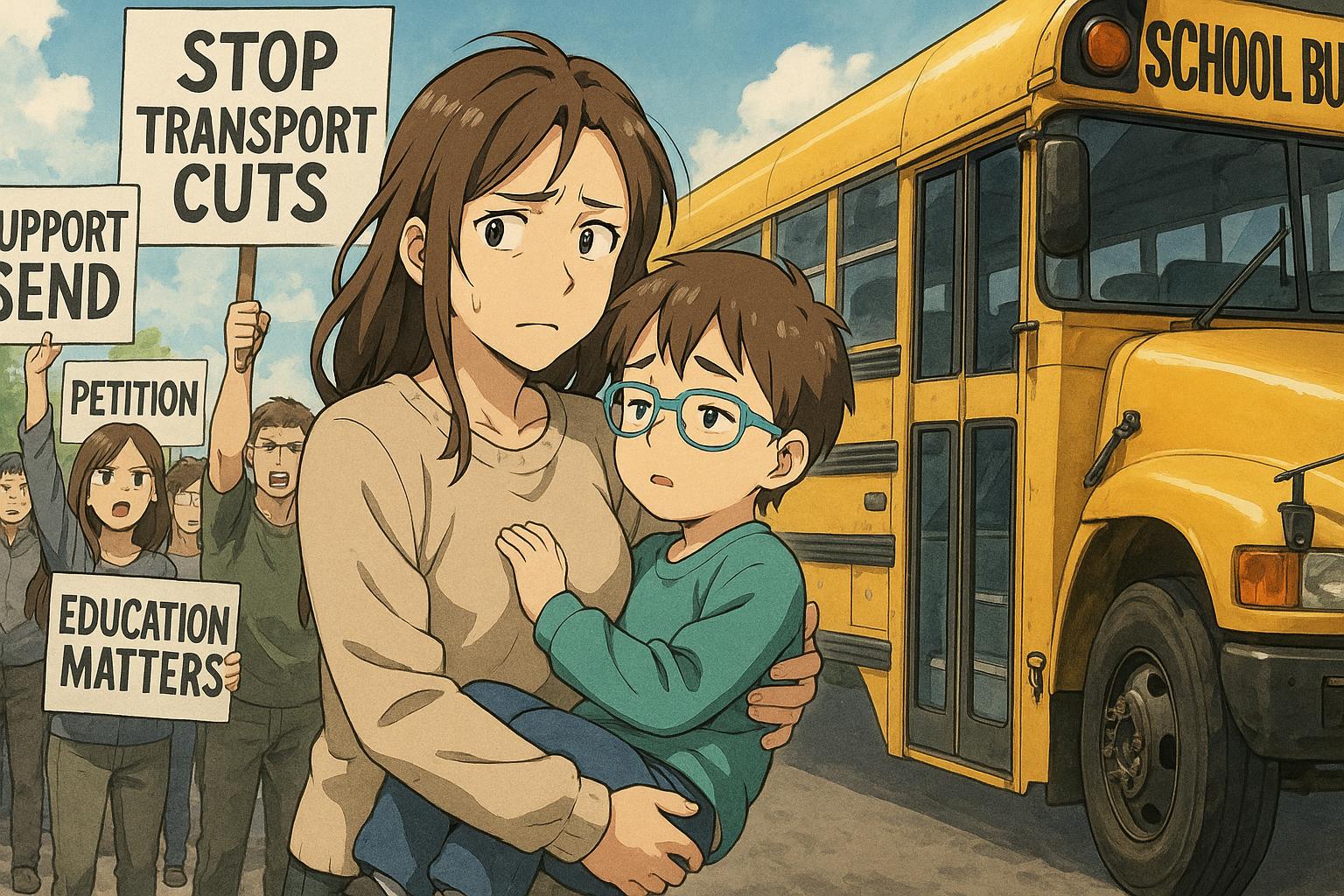
# Leeds parents protest free school transport cuts for SEND students over 16



A growing number of parents in Leeds are voicing serious concerns over the upcoming discontinuation of free school transport for students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) aged over 16. Beginning in September, this policy change, enacted by Leeds City Council, is aimed at reducing expenditure by approximately £800,000. Despite the council's justification for the cuts, families fear that the loss of this critical service may lead to some children abandoning their education altogether.

The decision has raised alarms among parents who depend on the school transport for their children’s daily commute. Many indicate that without this support, they may face enormous challenges, including the prospect of incurring significant transportation costs or altering their work commitments. Lorna, whose son faces challenges related to Down's syndrome, autism, and anxiety, expressed that the policy's impact will likely force her or her partner to reduce their working hours in order to drive their son to school. “It’s not just about transportation; it’s about our livelihood and our child’s future,” she noted sadly.

The council’s decision, which affects students living less than three miles from their education setting, is rooted in budgetary constraints. Under UK law, local authorities must provide free travel to students during compulsory education, but post-16 support is discretionary. Council leaders have cited a need to realign resources in light of growing financial pressures and the estimated £4 million cost of providing transport assistance annually for post-16 SEND students.

In a bid to garner public support against the cuts, parents and attendees at local meetings have organised protests, particularly highlighting the unsustainable nature of the council's current transport provision. Nearly 2,000 signatures have reportedly been collected on a petition urging the Council to reconsider its stance. Many parents argue that losing this transport will disproportionately affect vulnerable children and deepen educational inequalities in the region.

The proposed changes have not only sparked local protests but have also drawn criticism from various advocacy groups and local organisations representing SEND families. These groups argue that the council's efforts to encourage independent travel training may not be a realistic solution for many students with severe disabilities, who may require assistance beyond basic travel proficiency.

Leeds City Council has indicated that while they will continue to offer council-organised transportation in exceptional circumstances, the broader strategy will focus on encouraging parents to make alternative arrangements. The new model aims to prioritise personal transport allowances based on distance rather than a blanket provision of transport, thus shifting the responsibility back to families.

As the anticipated September deadline draws near, the conversation surrounding these cuts reflects broader tensions regarding funding for SEND provisions nationally. Parents fear that the changes in Leeds may serve as a harbinger for similar policies in other regions, as councils grapple with tightening budgets and ever-increasing demands for resources. The debate continues, illustrating the complex balancing act between fiscal responsibility and ensuring equal access to education for all children.

The urgency for a resolution grows as families with SEND students feel increasingly vulnerable to policies that might compromise their children's right to an education. Moving forward, it remains crucial for councils, parents, and advocacy groups to engage in dialogue to seek sustainable solutions that prioritise the needs of the most vulnerable in society.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5ye50d18d8o), [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5ye50d18d8o)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5ye50d18d8o), [[4]](https://www.yorkshireeveningpost.co.uk/education/leeds-parents-up-in-arms-about-unacceptable-school-transport-cuts-for-send-pupils-4901581)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c756g57e5e0o), [[5]](https://news.leeds.gov.uk/news/transport-assistance-for-post-16-learners-with-send-senior-councillors-asked-to-approve-proposed-changes)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.leeds.gov.uk/consultations-and-feedback/post-16-transport-policy-review), [[7]](https://www.leedsparentcarerforum.co.uk/news/post-16-transport-cuts/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5ye50d18d8o> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5ye50d18d8o> - Leeds City Council has decided to discontinue free school bus services for students over 16 with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) from September, aiming to save £800,000. Families express concern, stating that without the bus, some children may drop out of education. Parents like Lorna, whose son has Down's syndrome, autism, and anxiety, fear the policy change will force them to reduce work hours to drive their children to school.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c756g57e5e0o> - Leeds City Council has approved changes to subsidised transport for post-16 SEND students to save money. The council is legally required to provide free travel for compulsory education but not for older students. The changes aim to save about £800,000 in 2026-27, limiting assistance to students living three or more miles from their education setting.
4. <https://www.yorkshireeveningpost.co.uk/education/leeds-parents-up-in-arms-about-unacceptable-school-transport-cuts-for-send-pupils-4901581> - Leeds parents and carers are protesting against proposed cuts to school transport assistance for post-16 learners with SEND. The council plans to eliminate free home-to-school transport from September 2025, citing unsustainability. A petition demanding the reversal of these plans has garnered nearly 2,000 signatures.
5. <https://news.leeds.gov.uk/news/transport-assistance-for-post-16-learners-with-send-senior-councillors-asked-to-approve-proposed-changes> - Leeds City Council is seeking approval for proposed changes to transport assistance for post-16 learners with SEND. The council is not statutorily obliged to provide this service for post-16 learners but has been doing so on a discretionary basis at a cost of around £4m-£4.5m annually. The proposed changes aim to save over £800,000 in 2025/26.
6. <https://www.leeds.gov.uk/consultations-and-feedback/post-16-transport-policy-review> - Leeds City Council is reviewing its transport assistance for post-16 and post-19 students with SEND. The new model prioritises independent travel training and offers personal transport allowances based on distance. Council-organised transport will continue in exceptional circumstances, ensuring support for vulnerable students while addressing financial challenges.
7. <https://www.leedsparentcarerforum.co.uk/news/post-16-transport-cuts/> - Leeds City Council has approved plans to remove home-to-school transport for learners aged 16-19 with SEND from September 2025. Parents and carers express concerns, particularly for journeys under 3 miles, where no support will be provided. The council's objective is for parents and carers to arrange transport themselves, with council-provided transport only in exceptional circumstances.