

# How is transport assistance provided for students with special needs?

This fact sheet outlines daily school transport policy for students with special educational needs. The information provided is correct as at June 2010.

## Overview

Special education school transport assistance (SESTA) is intended to help caregivers with students who, because of their special needs, do not have ready access to education at their nearest school or the nearest school that is able to meet their special education needs.

## Shared Responsibility?

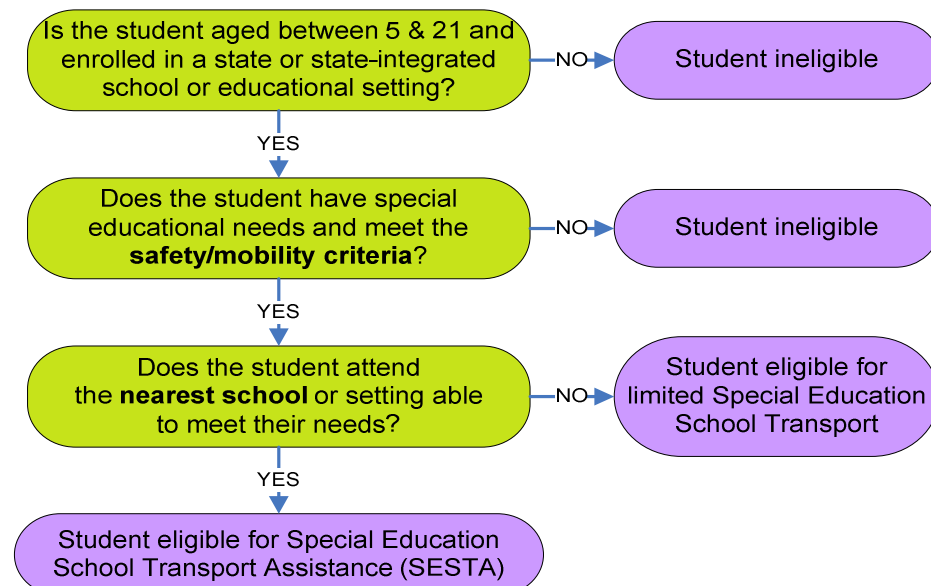
Caregivers have the prime responsibility for ensuring attendance at, and if necessary, the transport of students to and from school. If a student is eligible for SESTA, the Government accepts a share of this responsibility and provides a level of assistance to help with transport between home and school. The assistance provided may not cover the whole journey or the full transport cost.

## Who can receive special education school transport assistance?

To be eligible for full SESTA a student must:

- ◆ be aged between 5 and 21
- ◆ meet the mobility and/or safety eligibility criteria (see below)
- ◆ be on the roll of a state or state integrated school
- ◆ be attending the nearest school or setting that is able to meet their special education needs (see over).

The diagram below will help you see if a student may be eligible for SESTA. Notes on the terms in bold type can be found overleaf.



## School Transport: What you need to know

The following fact sheets about school transport are available:

1. Who is eligible for school transport assistance?
2. What if a student doesn't attend the nearest school?
3. What if the nearest school doesn't offer education in the desired language?
4. What types of assistance can a student get?
5. How is transport assistance provided for students with special needs?
6. What should I know about school bus services?
7. Student behaviour on buses: What is expected?
8. What is good practice for school bus safety?
9. Who has a responsibility for school bus safety?
10. What is a Conveyance Allowance and who can receive it?
11. Who can I contact about school transport?
12. How are bus routes designed?

For more information visit our website at:

[www.minedu.govt.nz/schooltransport](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/schooltransport)

## **What are the mobility and safety criteria?**

To be eligible for special education school transport assistance, a student must fall within one of the following two categories:

### ***Mobility criteria***

SESTA is provided for students whose mobility needs prevent their travelling independently to and from school. These mobility needs will often be related to physical or medical conditions that prevent independent travel. Instances where assistance may be provided for mobility needs are:

- ◆ where wheelchairs or other specialist equipment must accompany the student
- ◆ where mobility reasons prevent the student from independently making their way to school (eg students who are not able to walk freely).

### ***Safety criteria***

SESTA is provided for students whose safety needs prevent their travelling independently to and from school. A safety need is where a significant risk of harm or danger to the student, or to others, exists during the passage to and from school. This significant risk may relate to a learning disability and/or serious behavioural or medical condition. Instances when assistance may be provided for safety reasons are where:

- ◆ the student has a learning disability that inhibits their ability to go to and from school safely
- ◆ the student has a medical condition that inhibits their ability to go to and from school safely
- ◆ there are significant safety risks for the student or for others during the passage to and from school (eg behavioural issues).

## **Are the needs of the student's caregiver taken into account?**

No. Eligibility is based on the needs of the student not of the caregiver. Students whose caregivers have a safety or mobility need, but do not have these needs themselves are ineligible.

## **Are ACC students eligible?**

No. Students temporarily incapacitated as the result of accident are ineligible as the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) assists those accidentally injured.

## **Are the financial circumstances of a caregiver taken into consideration?**

No. There is no financial assessment or consideration of parental income made when determining whether a student is eligible for SESTA or the type of assistance that may be provided.

## **Is transport assistance available for students boarding at residential schools?**

There is no SESTA available to transport boarding or residential students home or back to school, or for the weekend, or for the start or end of the school term. Travel to and from residential special schools is separate to SESTA and should be followed up with the school concerned.

## **What is the nearest school eligibility requirement?**

There are many different types of schools and settings providing education to students with special educational needs – such as mainstream schools, special schools, satellite classes of special schools, units attached to schools (including teen parent units) as well as education settings that are not part of a formal school (eg an alternative education provider).

Full SESTA eligibility is based on the student attending the nearest school (or education setting) to their home that is able to meet their special educational needs. The age range, gender and special character of a school will be considered when deciding what is the nearest school able to meet a student's special educational needs.

## **How is the nearest school setting determined?**

The nearest school or setting is determined by considering the needs of the student and matching these with the nearest school or educational setting to the student's home able to meet those needs. In doing this, the Ministry of Education may consider:

- ◆ the special educational needs of the student
- ◆ why the school the student is currently enrolled in or planned to be enrolled in was chosen
- ◆ any specialist resources, support or teaching provision required to meet the student's special educational needs
- ◆ how schools in the student's home area provide for students with special educational needs.

## **What if a student does not attend the nearest school?**

To be eligible for full SESTA, a student must attend the nearest school to their home able to meet their special educational needs. A student who meets the mobility and safety criteria, but who attends a school further away, may be eligible for limited SESTA. This assistance will only be provided in the form of a conveyance allowance to the nearest school.

## **What types of assistance are available?**

There are three types of Special Education School Transport Assistance which may be provided to students eligible under the safety/mobility criteria:

- ◆ a place on a school bus; or
- ◆ a place on a contracted special education transport service (taxi, minibus or total mobility vehicle); or
- ◆ a conveyance allowance.

## **How is it decided what type of assistance a student will receive?**

If a place on a school bus service is available, so long as it is accessible and meets the student's safety needs, this option will be offered first.

If the student cannot safely access the school bus service, the type of assistance provided to eligible students is determined by considering the special educational needs of the student, the school attended and the availability of places on existing transport routes.

## **What journey does the assistance cover?**

Assistance is provided to support the journey between the student's home and school only. It is not provided to transport students to or from medical appointments, therapy sessions, counselling, etc.

Limited assistance to transport a student to or from school and an alternative home address may be arranged – for example, where formal respite or alternative care arrangements have been made at an address other than the student's usual home, or in situations of shared custody where the student is resident at more than one home address. In all cases, however, transport between the student's home and/or care addresses is the responsibility of the caregiver. You should speak with your transport service agent for more information regarding the type and level of assistance available in this instance.

## **How long will a student receive SESTA for?**

Once eligible for SESTA, the assistance will continue to be provided unless there is a specified stop date or as long as the student's circumstances or special educational needs do not change. The student must also continue to meet the safety/mobility criteria.

A new SESTA application form should be completed if a student's circumstances change (eg home address, school) or if their special educational needs change. This allows the service agent to determine if the student continues to be eligible for assistance and if the type of assistance provided remains appropriate.

## What is the process for applying for SESTA?

All requests for SESTA must be made using the SESTA Application form. Application forms are available from the Ministry of Education's website ([www.minedu.govt.nz/schooltransport](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/schooltransport)), from the Ministry of Education's transport service agents or from local Special Education offices.

The application form has 3 sections:

- ◆ Section A – Information provided by the caregiver
- ◆ Section B – Information provided by the school and
- ◆ Section C – Ministry of Education confirmation that the student meets the SESTA eligibility & assistance criteria.

The service agent uses the application form to determine if the student is eligible for transport assistance. It also provides information to support decisions about the type of assistance required. It is therefore important for caregivers and for schools to provide as much information and detail on the form as possible.

At the end of the assessment process, the service agent will write to the student's caregiver about any decision regarding transport eligibility and the type of assistance to be provided.

## Is it possible to get an application for SESTA reviewed?

Yes. There is a review process in place for caregivers to ask for decisions regarding SESTA to be reconsidered. A review is able to consider the following SESTA decisions:

- ◆ the student's eligibility for assistance
- ◆ the nearest school able to meet the student's needs
- ◆ the type of assistance to be provided
- ◆ the level of assistance to be provided.

If a caregiver would like a decision reviewed, they must fill out a SESTA Review Application Form. This is available from the Ministry of Education's website ([www.minedu.govt.nz/schooltransport](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/schooltransport)). It is also available from service agents or local Special Education offices.

Reviews will be considered by the SESTA Review Panel – a panel of managers based at the Ministry of Education's national office. Once considered, the Review Panel will write to the caregiver with a decision regarding the provision of transport assistance.

If a caregiver would like to request a review, it is strongly recommended that they contact the service agent or their local Special Education office for more information regarding the review process.

**Looking for more information on school transport assistance?**

Then visit our website at: [www.minedu.govt.nz/schooltransport](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/schooltransport)

**To find out more about the policy outlined in this document, you can talk to your school or contact your local service agent (contact details can be found at the above web address).**