

# **Transport Service**

## **Special Educational Needs Transport Controllers Survey 2004**

**Research study for**  
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Special Educational Needs Transport

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## **1 Executive Summary**

The Passenger Assistants satisfaction survey was commissioned for the purpose of finding out the current perceptions and needs of the Transport Controllers in Lancashire Special Educational Needs schools. This information will be used to feed into the Best Value service improvement plan for the Transport Service.

A link to an online questionnaire was sent to 31 SEN schools. Five questionnaires were returned giving an overall response rate of 16%. This small sample size means it is not possible to draw conclusions for all Lancashire SEN schools, though the issues highlighted may be similar for other schools. One recommendation is to consider a different methodology for the next commission of the survey, such as depth interviews as performed in 2001.

The Transport Controllers were asked for their satisfaction with a wide variety of areas of the service. All of these appeared good with the exception of the Area Education Office, with which two respondents said they were dissatisfied. Three schools added comments for their concerns, which were the suitability of escorts and passenger assistants, and communication when there are changes to the service.

One respondent had made a complaint about the service. While they were satisfied with the outcome, they considered finding the right person to be difficult.

## **2 Introduction**

Special Educational Needs (SEN) transport provides return transport from home to school/college for children with special educational needs.

Over the past three years Best Value reviews have been operating at Lancashire County Council. Best Value aims to examine and challenge the ways in which services are provided to the general public in Lancashire. As part of this process school transport services have been reviewed.

In October 2001 research was carried out into the views of Transport Controllers, mainly headteachers, in Special Educational Needs (SEN) schools. This report is of an update of the 2001 research, though the methodology has changed, (see section 4).

## **3 Research Objectives**

The Transport Controllers' Satisfaction Survey was undertaken to provide another angle to the current Best Value improvements that have been made in home to school transport.

The main themes of the questionnaire were:

- Overall satisfaction with the SEN home to school transport service
- Reason for complaints and how they are handled
- Methods of improvement

## 4 Methodology

This version of the Transport Controllers Satisfaction Survey differed from the first version by its methodology. The 2001 survey consisted of face-to-face in depth interviews with Transport Controllers. For this version it was decided to try an online methodology, taking advantage of the Schools Web Portal. An online questionnaire was set up and an email link was sent to each SEN school.

The questionnaire went live on Monday 5 July 2003. Fieldwork was undertaken over a period of two and a half weeks, ending on Wednesday 21 July.

No incentive for respondents to complete the questionnaire was given. There are only 31 SEN schools in Lancashire, these were all sent the link and invited to reply. A reminder was sent on Thursday 15 July. An error in the mailing meant some schools were sent the link that should not have. The responses that were not SEN schools were quickly identified and have not been used for this report. While these schools do have some SEN pupils it would not be possible to be sure that they were being specific about the SEN service. Leaving these schools out means there is only a disappointing response of five schools, or a response rate of 16%. In comparison, the 2001 survey managed 25 interviews.

All data are unweighted and figures are based on all respondents unless otherwise stated.

## 5 Limitations

The very small sample size means that data can only be used for qualitative and indicative investigation. It is not possible to draw conclusions for all Lancashire SEN schools, though the issues highlighted **may** be similar for other schools.

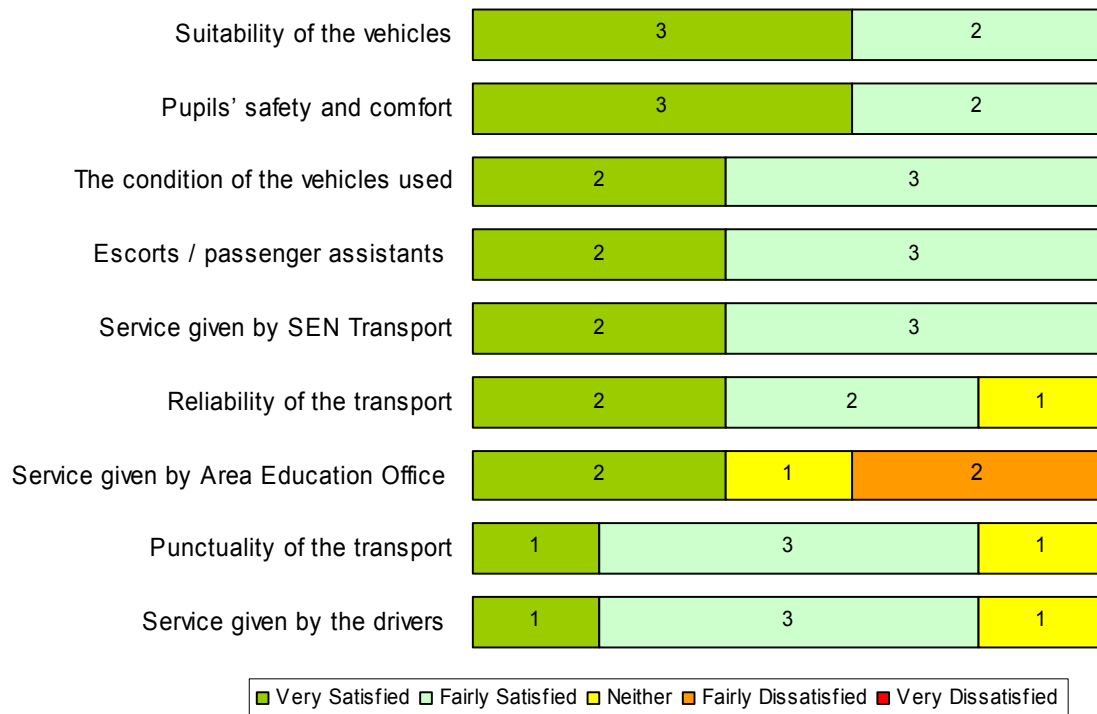
## 6 Main Research Findings

A marked up questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1.

### 6.1 Satisfaction with transport factors

The first section of the questionnaire asked the Transport Controllers to give their satisfaction with a variety of factors, shown in Chart 1 below.

**Chart 1 - How would you rate the home to school transport service for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in the following areas?**



Base: All respondents (5)

Only one area caused any controllers to be dissatisfied, that of the Area Educational Office.

After these questions, respondents were asked what their particular concerns were. These are given below.

**Q3 - From those areas identified in question 2, please tell us which are of particular concern to you?**

“Nothing of great concern.”

“Escorts being unsuitable for EBD children in some cases. Need for training of escorts. Poor service when escorts have to be replaced due to illness etc. communication is poor in most instances.”

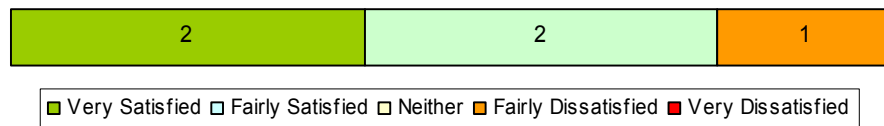
“Better liaison with schools when replacement escorts are sent.”

“Lack of information to and communication with parents and school re: requirements risk assessments needs etc. I have developed a good relationship with XXXX who does her very best to deal with the operator and meet our children’s’ needs but I regularly get serious earache off parents because they have not then been informed by the office that things have changed. As a deputy head I end up having to ring parents if transport is late or to tell them that there is a problem - this is not my job and a waste of my time - who should be doing this? Who could do it? I am led to believe that the office that should do it is short-staffed and often not available at the times needed. This need a serious looking at as does the whole issue of training (managing behaviour moving and handling basic safety first aid) suitability of some escorts and preparation for the role they will play. I would be more than happy to work with anyone on developing improved practices and processes as this is a major bug bear in my working life!”

The suitability of escorts and passenger assistants and communication of changes appear to be the major concerns of these schools.

**6.2 Transport Overall Satisfaction**

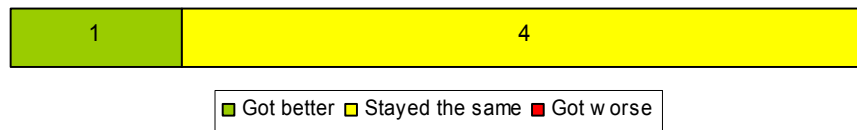
**Chart 2 - Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the SEN school transport service?**



Base: All respondents (5)

Only one respondent does not say they are satisfied with their pupils’ home to school transport, though this respondent is actively dissatisfied.

**Chart 3 - And, over the last two years has the SEN school transport service overall...?**



Base: All respondents (5)

One respondent thinks the service has got better, whilst the rest think it has stayed the same. None think it has got worse.

**6.3 Complaints**

Only one respondent has made a complaint, though this was on a wide variety of topics. The respondent says they complained to the bus or taxi or minibus operator, Lancashire County Council and given an 'Other' box, gives Education Transport. They have given every possible option for what the complaint was about:

- Safety of the vehicle
- Reliability of the service
- Punctuality of the service
- Service given by the driver
- Service given by the escort
- Passenger assistant
- The condition of the vehicle that is used
- Pupils' safety and comfort

The respondent says they have made several complaints and many recur. On a more positive note the respondent says they were fairly satisfied with the outcome of the complaint and that staff were **helpful** and **efficient**. However, getting hold of the right person was **difficult**.



## 6.4 Final Improvements

Finally, respondents were given another open question to identify any ways the service could be improved.

### **Q12 - Please tell us how you think the home to school transport service for SEN pupils could be improved?**

“Prompt risk assessments!!!! Sorry could not help that one. Seriously the service is very good and I could not suggest ways in which we could improve it.”

“Closer liaison between SEN Transport District Offices and Fleet Management particularly in the admission of pupils when special transport is required. This might reduce the workload where three agencies are all dealing with the same issues and each is waiting for another to complete their piece of the jigsaw. This may speed up the admission process where SEN transport is necessary.”

“Communication with county is excellent but this is not the case with the area office. Often it is the escorts themselves who relate that they won't be able to complete certain runs and then we have to contact the office.”

“Better preparation and training for escorts, clearer information to schools about what the escorts and drivers are expected to do. Better communication from transport to school and parents, someone on the end of the phone or email who will resolve problems, someone else to ring up parents when there is a problem instead of the head or deputy at the school etc.”

## 7 Conclusions

With such a small sample, the open quantitative questions are more useful than the closed quantitative questions.

The replying Transport Controllers are most concerned about communication, escorts and the link between the two in SEN transport.

Escorts are considered to need extra training, particularly for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) and in first aid. One respondent says that they would like more information about what escorts and drivers are supposed to do.

Communications are considered in need of improvement when changes to arrangements are made; parents are sometimes not informed, causing annoyance. This is also true of changes to escorts. The service of the Area Office in general is considered to be in need of improvement.

For ways to improve the service, one respondent mentions closer communication between the various agencies that run the transport. This is particularly for the admission of pupils requiring SEN transport, since the inference is that this can take too long.

Several of these points, particularly training of assistants and the need to provide clearer information also came out of the research into both the views of pupils' parents and Passenger Assistants.

## 8 Recommendations

This, and other research, has shown the SEN home to school transport is a highly rated and successful operation. Following this research a number of areas of investigation and recommendations are made that aim to improve the service further.

The recommendations are:

- Provide extra training for escorts for dealing with children with emotional and behavioural difficulties and also in first aid.
- Consider communicating to Transport Controllers with essential information, one respondents says they are unsure of what escorts and drivers are supposed to do, but this could also be true of others.
- The Area Office needs to communicate better with schools and parents. More staff or longer opening hours may be needed to achieve this.
- Try to create closer links with the Area Educational Office and the transport operators and consider changes to the systems for allocating SEN transport for new pupils.
- Revert to the previous face-to-face depth methodology for the next Transport Controllers survey. Transport controllers are often headteachers and therefore have great pressures on their time. Arranged meetings would fit in with their work more easily and therefore give a higher response than was possible this time. Another possibility could be more outcome-focussed work with Transport Controllers, such as focus groups or workshops.

## **9 Appendices**

### **9.1 Appendix 1: Marked Up Questionnaire**