

Argyll and Bute Council

Internal Audit Report

March 2024

FINAL

Pupil and Public Transport

Audit Opinion: Substantial



..... 3

..... 3

..... 3

..... 3

..... 5

..... 5

..... 5

..... 5

..... 8

..... 13

..... 16

100.872.024.689.38.Im1.92 reW*BT/F1 11

Internal Auditor: *Annemarie McLean*

Telephone:

7. Parents remain responsible for their child's journey to and from school or, where the authority is providing school transport (either through a dedicated service or local bus service), between home and the designated pick-up/drop-off point.
8. In Scotland, there is a 'presumption of mainstreaming' – this means that children and young people have the right to an education in a mainstream school, unless their needs cannot be met within that environment. Every mainstream Scottish school has a 'catchment area' fixed by the local authority. Children living within a catchment area are normally provided with a place at the school serving that specific geographical area. A group of primary schools in an area is normally associated with a single secondary school. Parents can make a request to place their child in any school under the management of the education authority. This is known as a placing request. Parents are responsible for the transport to the school in the placing request where it is not within their catchment area as the education authority does not provide transport for those pupils in receipt of a placing request.
9. Local authorities and other agencies have duties under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 (as amended) to identify, provide for and review the additional support needs of their pupils. Children or young people may require additional support for a variety of reasons, either for short periods of time or throughout their education. An additional support need (ASN) can arise for any reason and be of short or long term duration. Additional support may be required to overcome needs arising from the learning environment; health or disability; family circumstances or social and emotional factors.
10. For children with additional support needs (ASN) and where mainstreaming does not meet the needs of the child, they may be educated in a learning centre based in the school or where a learning difficulty or a physical impairment is particularly severe or complex, in a separate day school or residential school, which may be located out-with the pupil catchment area or in exceptional circumstances outside

20. Further details of our conclusions against each control objective can be found in Section 3 of this report.
21. This internal audit review was due to be carried out in July, during the school holidays to minimise the impact upon the team, however, the commencement of fieldwork and testing was delayed due to long term ill health staff absence and the commencement of an external review of Roads and Infrastructure Services. We acknowledge that there may be some minor overlap with the potential findings and recommendations contained in these reports.

[The Council has a School Transport policy, procedures and Service Level Agreement in place, for the provision of ASN home to school transportation.](#)

22. The Council has a School Transport policy (the policy) which contains clear eligibility criteria and takes cognisance of the statutory distance from home to school. The policy clarifies that “transport covers a return journey each school day, to school in the morning and to home at the end of the school day.”
23. The Council’s policy on school transport is more generous than that required by statute and it outlines the circumstances in which the Council will provide transport, the main instances are:
- Where a child at primary school, at the start of the school session, lives more than 2 miles away from the catchment primary school (by the shortest safe walking route)
 - Where a child at secondary school, at the start of the school session, lives more than 3 miles away from the catchment secondary school (by the shortest safe walking route)
 - Where the child has been recommended for transport on health grounds by a medical officer designated by the Education Service (these are internal transport requests).
24. The Integrated Transport Team have produced a School Transport Guide for parent and pupils (the guide) which condenses the information contained in the policy, this is reviewed annually and sets out:
- What free school transport means, who is entitled to this and what transport is provided
 - Suggestions for healthy travel options to get to school
 - The responsibilities of the Council, schools, parents, pupils, bus and taxi operators and drivers
 - Safety information, frequently asked questions and complaint and contact details
25. The [school transport page](#) on the Council’s website sets out the Councils’ aims, the legislative requirements for parents and the Council and further provides all the relevant information in one place, including, links to find a school, copies of the policy, the guide and all application forms that parents and carers require as well as contact details should they require assistance.
26. Assessment of pupils needs are carried out within the framework of GIRFEC (Getting it right for every child) guidance from the Scottish Government, by specialist trained professionals within Education, sometimes with support from Social Work Services, while the logistical planning and management of the home to school transport is carried out by the Integrated Transport Team within Roads and Infrastructure Services.
27. Currently there is no formal protocol or agreement in place that sets out the roles and responsibilities of each service nor standard timescales for submitting requests to the School

Education and Roads and Infrastructure, so have different reporting structures. Any additional cost pressures, relating to the provision of ASN pupil transport, due to increased demand should be escalated in accordance with corporate budgeting processes, by the budget holder.

48. The School Transport Manager maintains a spreadsheet capturing the costs of in house transport, including allocations for annual fuel, vehicle related costs and driver and escort costs. This is a moving picture, but during the period covered by the review, there were 291 pupils receiving home to school transport at an estimated cost of £1.137m which averages at £3900 per pupil. It is our opinion this is well managed, monitored and demonstrates that this Council is achieving best value while meeting its statutory requirements and the challenges of increased demand.



In order to assist management in using our reports a system of grading audit findings has been adopted to allow the significance of findings to be ascertained. The definitions of each classification are as follows:

	A major observation on high level controls and other important internal controls or a significant matter relating to the critical success of the objectives of the system. The weakness may therefore give rise to loss or error.
	Observations on less significant internal controls and/or improvements to the efficiency and effectiveness of controls which will assist in meeting the objectives of the system. The weakness is not necessarily substantial however the risk of error would be significantly reduced if corrective action was taken.
	Minor recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of controls or an isolated issue subsequently corrected. The weakness does not appear to significantly affect the ability of the system to meet its objectives.
	An observation which does not highlight an issue relating to internal controls but represents a possible opportunity for the council to achieve better value for money (VFM).

--	--