

Special Education School Transport Assistance (SESTA)



Special Education School Transport Assistance (SESTA) helps caregivers with students who, because of their special needs, do not have ready access to education at their closest school or the closest school that is able to meet their special educational needs. The assistance provided may not cover the whole journey or the full transport cost.

Eligibility

To be eligible for SESTA, a student must:

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

To be eligible for full SESTA, a student must attend the closest school to their home that is 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** based on distance to the closest school able to meet the student's needs and the caregiver will need to meet the remaining costs.

What is the closest school eligibility requirement?

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

How is the closest school or educational setting determined for SESTA?

The closest school or education setting is determined by considering the needs of the student and matching them with the closest school or education setting to the **student's home** that is able to meet those needs.

Mobility and safety criteria

To be eligible for SESTA, a student must fall within one of the following two categories:

Mobility criterion

SESTA is provided for students whose mobility needs prevent them from travelling independently to and from school. Examples of where assistance may be provided for mobility needs are:

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

Safety criterion

SESTA is provided for students whose safety needs prevent them from travelling independently to and from school. A safety need is where there is a significant risk of harm or danger to the student, or to others, during travel to and from school. This significant risk may relate to a learning disability and/or serious behavioural or medical condition.

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 students under ACC care for temporary incapacitation eligible?

No. Students temporarily incapacitated as the result of an 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.

What types of assistance are available?

Assistance may be provided for students eligible under the safety/mobility criteria in the form of:

- › a place on a school bus, and/or
- › a place on a contracted special education transport service, and/or
- › a **conveyance allowance**.

What journey does the assistance cover?

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

Limited assistance to transport a student between 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 circumstance.

Applying for SESTA

To apply for SESTA, the student's caregiver needs to fill out an application form (the Special Education School Transport Assistance Form). The application form is available online at www.education.govt.nz/schooltransport, from the Ministry of Education's **service agents**, or from local Ministry Special Education offices. A new application should be completed if a student's circumstances change (for example, they move house or school). The application has three sections:

- › section A – information provided by the caregiver
- › section B – information provided by the school, and
- › section C – Ministry Special Education confirmation that the student meets the SESTA eligibility criteria and the student is attending the closest school able to meet the student's special education needs.

The **service agent** uses the application form to assess a student's eligibility for School Transport Assistance and to determine the type of assistance to be provided.

At the end of the assessment process, the **service agent** will write to the student's caregiver about the decision regarding SESTA.

Reviewing decisions made

For students with special education needs, there is a process for reviewing decisions on applications, if required. Contact the school principal or the local Special Education Manager (Ministry of Education) who will discuss the final decision and provide advice on the review process. A review is able to consider the following:

- › a student's eligibility for assistance
- › the closest school able to meet the student's needs
- › the type of assistance to be provided
- › the level of assistance to be provided.

How long will a student receive SESTA?

A student will continue to receive SESTA for as long as they remain eligible. SESTA will only stop or be reassessed if:

- › a student's circumstances change (for example, they move house or school), or
- › there is a specified review or stop date for their assistance.

What is the process for resolving complaints?

The Ministry of Education aims to provide a safe and efficient transport service for all students who are eligible for SESTA. If you have concerns about the service or the level of assistance provided, you can raise your concerns with your **transport service provider, service agent**, or school.

Please follow the steps below to raise a concern about your service.

- › contact your **transport service provider** and raise your concern
- › the **transport service provider** will ensure that your concern is noted and will respond to you within 24 hours.
- › However the **transport service provider** will work towards resolving the issue immediately
- › if you think that your concern has not been adequately addressed, you can then contact the **service agent** who manages all school **transport service providers**
- › the **service agent** will ensure that you receive a response within 24 hours from the time you raised your concern.
- › A solution may be provided by the **service agent** at this time
- › where concerns are serious or ongoing, the service agent will contact relevant agencies and the Ministry of Education
- › if you are not happy with how your concern has been dealt with, you can contact the Ministry of Education for further advice.

Where can I find more information?

This series of fact sheets and our website www.education.govt.nz/schooltransport are designed to provide you with all the information about SESTA you need. Please read these resources first.

If you still have questions about SESTA, talk to your school's principal. They can provide you with the information you need or direct you to the person who can best answer your questions.

Glossary of defined terms

Conveyance allowance

A conveyance allowance is funding paid directly to a caregiver or school as a contribution to the cost of transporting an eligible student to and from school.

Student's home

A student's home address is defined as the point on the closest public road that is closest to the student's roadside gate.

Service agent

A service agent is the transport agent contracted by the Ministry of Education to manage and administer School Transport Assistance on its behalf.

Transport service provider

The transport service provider is the company contracted by the Ministry of Education to provide a school transport service.

