



4 March 2024

An Open letter to the Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge Community regarding Brighter Futures for Children - Travel Plan Consultation

We are writing to you today to share our concern regarding the proposed new school transport policy from Brighter Futures for Children, which threatens to withdraw funded bus travel for our pupils who travel to Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge (MECE) from Reading Borough. We are calling on Reading Borough and Brighter Futures for Children to reconsider their proposals.

Five years ago, Chiltern Edge School was threatened with closure by Oxfordshire County Council. The local community, along with Reading Borough Council, came together to successfully campaign to keep the school open; proving that there was a desire for a school in the area to serve, not only the immediate south Oxfordshire area, but over the arbitrary border into north Reading. The school joined Maiden Erlegh Trust and, as a result of improvements to the school, the numbers of children on roll has been growing and in 2022 the school received an Ofsted grading of "Good".

Whilst located in South Oxfordshire, MECE serves a community that includes families in the northern part of Reading borough/Caversham. We are delighted that parents from this wider local community want to send their children to MECE. We know this as the last two years have seen a significant increase in the number of applications made to join the school. In fact, this year, on 1st March 2024 129 offers for year 7 places were made to families who had applied for a place at the school.

Whilst additional school place capacity in Reading Borough is coming on stream, this doesn't alter the fact that MECE is the preferable school for many in the community, including a significant number who happen to live in Reading Borough. The removal of funded transport would mean that, in future, fewer families will be able to have their preference for secondary schooling met. Parents who find themselves in this situation quite understandably will consider this a disservice from their local authority and unfair.

Moreover, the threatened removal of transport will mean that the families whose children currently attend the school and who chose MECE in good faith that transportation from Reading Borough would be provided, may face significant financial challenges in sending their children to school. Whilst some of our parent community might be able to afford additional transport costs, there are a significant number who won't be able to do so. The immediate removal of funded transport would be especially harsh and, in our view, egregiously unfair. Access to reliable and affordable transportation is essential for students to attend school regularly and participate fully in their education. By withdrawing funded bus travel, the proposed policy risks creating significant barriers to education for some of our most vulnerable students.



We understand the need to make difficult decisions in managing resources, but we urge decision-makers to consider the broader impact of this policy change. Without adequate transportation options, students may face increased absenteeism, reduced participation in extracurricular activities, and limited access to educational opportunities outside of their immediate community. This may have long-term consequences for their academic achievement, personal development, and future prospects.

We believe that every student deserves the opportunity to receive a quality education in a supportive and inclusive environment. Access to transportation should not be a barrier to achieving this goal. Instead of cutting funding for bus travel, we urge Brighter Futures for Children to explore alternative solutions that prioritize the needs of our students and ensure equitable access to education for all members of our community.

Many recipients of this letter have been part of the story of Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge's success in recent years and we would ask you to make your voice heard once again in the consultation on whether the new policy should be introduced. Together, we can make our voices heard and advocate for a fair and equitable solution that upholds the principles of accessibility and inclusivity in education and ensures that Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge remains a strong school into the future.

Details of the proposed policy changes can be found here:
<https://brighterfuturesforchildren.org/school-transport-policy-consultation/>

As part of the consultation, views are being sought through a questionnaire:
<https://brighterfuturesforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/School-Transport-consultation-questions-Feb-2024.docx>

This should be completed and returned to Brighter Futures for Children using this email address:
School.Transport@brighterfuturesforchildren.org by the 17 March 2024.

Additionally, Brighter Futures for Children have arranged a series of "engagement events":

Monday 4 March, 6.30pm – Online
Wednesday 6 March 10am - Online
Wednesday 6 March 6pm - Civic Centre Reading
Thursday 7 March 6pm - Civic Centre Reading
Friday 8 March 9.30am and 4.30pm - Online

Places are limited and will need to be booked by contacting:
School.Transport@brighterfuturesforchildren.org

Thank you for taking your time to read and consider.

Yours sincerely



Jonathon Peck
Chief Executive Officer
Maiden Erlegh Trust

