

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

WRITTEN QUESTION

Ms Moss to the Minister for Transport:

Bus Service for Children with a Disability

What steps are being taken to restore the door to door bus service for children with a disability, deemed eligible according to their assessed clinical need, instead of bus transport difficulties associated with street width?

There have been no changes to the special needs bus services since May 2015 when pick-up points were introduced in Palmerston in order to provide new and existing students with transport and get them to school in a reasonable time. This occurred in consultation with schools, parents / caregivers and the Department of Education.

Note, students living in rural areas have been collected from pick-up points since 2013. Applications for special needs transport are assessed in accordance with the Policy, Guidelines and Frequently Asked Questions. Applications are first considered by the school in accordance with the guidelines. The guidelines require the school principal to discuss with parents options for transport including access to the bus service.

Currently the Department of Education assesses the level of disability and approves the application. Transport is provided to those assessed by Department of Education with an identified disability and enrolled in a special school. Consultation on access to bus services occurs with parents / care givers, schools and Department of Education. Individual arrangements take into account the specific needs of the students and parents / caregivers.

Currently 298 students access Special Needs Transport in Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine and 254 students are picked up door to door.

Currently 25 students access transport from group pick-up locations and 19 students are picked up at alternate locations other than their home address.

Group pick-ups are provided where students have to travel some distances to school and where buses are unable to navigate cul-de-sacs and narrow streets. These distances make it impractical to pick up all students door to door as travel times begin to extend well beyond 1 hour.

A group pick-up point provides a fair and equitable service within acceptable travel times. Students get picked up at alternate locations for a mixture of reasons such as limited access to the student's home (e.g. poor road conditions or small roads) or if times do not suit other family arrangements such as parents starting work.

The Department of Transport is currently reviewing operations in other jurisdictions including door to door pickups.

Options including providing door to door pick-ups to all special needs students in Darwin are being explored. The review outcomes will advise on policy options including costs.