

Getting children active on the school run

Active School Travel Programme 2021-22 Summary Report

Background

Almost two-thirds (65%) of primary school pupils in Northern Ireland are being driven to school, despite 46% living less than a mile from their school. The **Active School Travel Programme** is working successfully to change the school run and to get more pupils to choose an active, healthy and eco-friendly journey to school. The fundamental aim of the programme is to provide schools with the support, skills and knowledge to get more children walking, wheeling, cycling and scooting to school. **Sustrans** has been delivering the programme since 2013 with funding from the **Public Health Agency** and the **Department for Infrastructure**. In the 2021-22 school year, **437 schools** across Northern Ireland participated in the programme, with 209 schools receiving direct support from a Sustrans Active Travel Officer and 228 schools receiving on-going, light touch support in the Extended Support network.

Key successes of 2021-22 programme

Figure includes scooting and multi-modal journeys



The Active School Travel Programme has proven to be effective as a behaviour change programme. At the end of the 2021-22 school year, the number of **children travelling actively to school at participating schools increased from 30% to 41%**. At the same time, the number of **pupils being driven to school fell from 62% to 51%**.

More active, healthier children

The low level of physical activity among children and young people is a major health concern. More than a quarter of children in Northern Ireland are overweight or obese. Active travel through walking and cycling can help reverse this trend and also helps a child's mental health. After one year in the programme, the number of **children completing physical activity for at least 60 minutes each day increased from 28% to 36%**.

Reducing traffic and associated carbon emissions around the school gates has the added impact of improving **air quality**, which has become a significant public health issue especially in urban areas.

"Sustrans' Active School Travel programme has been an excellent initiative for our school- one of the best initiatives in which we have been involved. The range of benefits is extensive and impressive."

"Every school could really benefit from participating in this programme. The children will find it so beneficial and fun."

Teachers at participating schools

Project funded by:



Project delivered by:





100%
of schools recommend
the Active School
Travel Programme to
other schools

Spotlight: Sustrans Big Walk and Wheel 2022

Sustrans Big Walk and Wheel is the UK's largest inter-school annual walking, wheeling, scooting and cycling challenge inspiring pupils, staff and parents to choose active modes for their journey to school. Schools compete to see who can get the most pupils to travel actively to school. It is one of the annual highlights of the Active School Travel Programme.

- Approximately 29,000 pupils at 112 schools across Northern Ireland recorded over 125,000 active journeys and physical activities over the 10 day challenge from 21 March to 1 April 2022.
- St James' Primary in Whiteabbey achieved 1st place in NI in the small primary schools category with 99% of pupils cycling, scooting and walking to school throughout their best 5 days of the challenge.
- St Mary's Primary in Newcastle achieved 1st place in NI in in the large primary schools category with 93% of their pupils travelling actively to school.



Vision

There is great potential to increase the number of children walking and cycling to school and to reduce car use on the school run. **While 41% of pupils now usually travel actively to school, as many as 79% would like to.** Sustrans wants to make that happen for these children. We believe that every child who can and wants to should be able to safely walk and cycle to school. We can do this by:

- Continuing and expanding the Active School Travel Programme.
- Developing a 'Safe Routes to School' infrastructure programme to make the road safety improvements needed around schools to persuade more parents to let their children walk or cycle to school.
- Creating a 'Schools Streets' programme in Northern Ireland to provide safe, car-free zones around schools.
- Offering on-road cycle training to all Primary 6 pupils to give them the skills to cycle safely.
- Providing secure cycle parking at schools for pupils and staff.

Help us to ensure every child who can and wants to is able to safely walk and cycle to school.

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Contact us

This summary is based on the 2021-22 Annual Monitoring Report for the programme, as well as statistics from the Department for Infrastructure and the Department of Health.

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