

Getting children active on the school run

Active School Travel Programme 2022-23 Summary Report

Background

Despite most children wanting to walk or cycle to school, and largely living near enough to do so, the proportion of children walking and cycling to school in Northern Ireland has been declining since 1995. 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 safely walking, wheeling and cycling to school. **Sustrans** has been delivering the programme since 2013 with funding from the **Public Health Agency** and the **Department for Infrastructure**. In the 2022-23 school year, **469 schools** across Northern Ireland participated in the programme, with 150 schools receiving direct support from a Sustrans Active Travel Officer and 319 schools receiving on-going, light touch support in the Extended Support network.

Key successes of 2022-23 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 2022-23 school year, the number of **children travelling actively to school at participating schools increased from 30% to 42%**. At the same time, the number of **pupils being driven to school fell from 60% to 47%**.

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 29% to 46%**.

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.

"The Active School Travel programme is one of the best initiatives that we have introduced into our school. We have noticed an improvement in not only our children's fitness levels but also their concentration. We would highly recommend the AST programme to other schools!"

"The activities for the children teach so many important life skills and are invaluable in developing healthy habits for each child's future."

~ Participating schools

Project funded by:



Project delivered by:





Spotlight: Sustrans Big Walk and Wheel 2023

Sustrans Big Walk and Wheel is the UK's largest inter-school annual walking, wheeling, scooting and cycling challenge. 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.

Pupils from over 150 schools across Northern Ireland recorded nearly **155,000 active journeys** over the 10 day challenge from 20 to 31 March 2023. Dunseverick Primary in Bushmills 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, and St Mary's Primary in Newcastle achieved 1st place in the large primary schools category with 89% of their pupils travelling actively to school.

"The support we have received through the Active School Travel Programme has been brilliant. We are very keen to adopt active travel for the environment, for health and safety, and for the children's health and wellbeing." ~ Participating 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 42% of pupils now usually travel actively to school, as many as 76% 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.

1,550 activities were delivered during 2022/23, reaching over **60,000** pupils, parents siblings and teachers



42% of pupils now usually travel actively to school, but **76%** would like to



Children active for 60+ minutes every day



UP from 29% to 46%

Contact us

This summary is based on the 2022-23 Annual Monitoring Report for the programme, as well as statistics from the Department for Infrastructure and the Department of Health.

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