Active School Travel Programme – FAQs

Who are Sustrans?
We are a sustainable transport charity enabling more people to travel by foot, bike and public transport for more of the journeys we make every day.

What is the Active School Travel Programme?
Active school travel is an approach to transport that involves physical activity in the journey to school, such as walking, cycling and scooting. Schools who partake in the Active School Travel Programme will have a dedicated Sustrans Active Travel Officer to help co-ordinate a range of activities, events and curriculum lessons. The aim of the programme is to increase the number of pupils travelling actively on their journey to school. To see examples of how the programme is being delivered in your area, please click here: www.sustrans.org.uk/northern-ireland/what-we-do/active-school-travel-northern-ireland.

What are the benefits of active travel for my school?
Increasing the number of children who regularly walk, cycle or scoot to school has numerous benefits including:

- increased physical activity levels resulting in improved health and well being
- reduced congestion around schools
- improved academic performance and attendance rates
- increased road safety awareness
- increased confidence, self-esteem and independence for young people.

For further information on the benefits of active travel for young people, please click here: www.sustrans.org.uk/sites/default/files/file_content_type/sustransinfosheet_benefits_active_travel_youngpeople_web_0.pdf

What about pupils who live far away from school?
We know that for some families, walking or cycling the entire journey to school is not possible due to distance, nature of roads or perhaps an adult needing the car to travel on to work. Therefore, we also promote ‘park and ride/stride/scoot’ journeys to school, which involve a child being driven part of the journey to school and then walking, cycling or scooting the remainder (minimum time for travelling actively should be at least 10 minutes).

How much does the programme cost?
It’s free! There is no cost for schools to join the Active School Travel Programme. The programme is being funded by the Department for Infrastructure and the Public Health Agency. Your school may wish to supply some additional resources to contribute to the programme, such as prizes and incentives.

Which schools can join the programme?
The programme is predominantly targeted for primary schools. However, post primary schools are welcome to submit an application to join the programme as well. Every primary school in Northern Ireland has been invited to apply to join the programme. Due to funding and capacity, the number of schools selected will be limited. You should be aware that consideration has to be given to geographical clusters of schools and proximity to where Active Travel Officers are based to maximise the Active Travel Officers’ time in schools and
to minimise travel time. So please encourage your neighbouring schools to join you in submitting an application as this will increase your chance of being accepted onto the programme.

**What is an Active Travel Officer?**

An Active Travel Officer is an experienced, dedicated support officer that works directly with schools to deliver the Active School Travel Programme. We have a skilled team of Active Travel Officers that are based around the country.

Unlike some other initiatives in your school, you will have an enthusiastic Active Travel Officer regularly visiting your school and offering you direct support to organise and run various events and activities.

All our Active Travel Officers have attained valid Access NI Enhanced Disclosure certificates and have completed necessary training, including Child Protection, First Aid, Health & Safety, National Standard cycle training, bike maintenance training and behaviour change training.

**How long does the programme last?**

The Active School Travel Programme will engage schools in a 3-level programme over three years. Schools will gradually take on more responsibility for the programme over the three years so that a culture of active school travel becomes sustainable.

At Level 1, the Active Travel Officer will lead the delivery of the programme and provide most of the resources and materials. Schools will be involved in the development of the plan of activities. At Level 2, the school will take more responsibility for the programme with some support from the Active Travel Officer. At Level 3, the school will be working independently to plan and deliver the programme, with some support provided by the Active Travel Officer when required.

After schools have completed the three year programme, Sustrans will continue to provide light touch active travel promotion through our Active School Travel Extended Support service.

**What is an Active School Travel Champion?**

Champions will be the main staff contact point between the school and the Active Travel Officer. With support from Sustrans, champions will help to organise programme activities and events within the school. Champions are committed to active travel and want to help generate positive changes in the school.

Each school must nominate at least one member of staff to be an Active School Travel Champion, with time committed to the project. Champions can be teachers, teaching assistants, head teachers or other staff, but can also be joined by governors, parents or other members of the wider school community. Working in small teams of champions is more effective than relying on one person. It enables the sharing of ideas, responsibility and workload. Having someone in the team who has access to the school diary for setting dates and bookings is vital to ensure plans can be made and stuck to.

Over the course of the programme, Sustrans will provide guidance and specific training for Active School Travel Champions to support them in their important roles.
What is the Sustrans School Mark?

The Sustrans School Mark is an award scheme which recognises and supports schools’ excellence in active and sustainable travel. It enables them to be beacons of best practice, and consists of three progressive levels for schools to work through – Bronze, Silver and Gold.

What age groups of children does the programme engage?

Our target age group is Key Stage 2 (P5-P7) in primary schools and Years 8 and 9 in post primary schools. However, many of our activities and events involve the whole school community – all year groups, teachers, parents and carers. Also, some of our activities can be specifically aimed at younger pupils, such as our very popular Ditch the Stabilisers sessions which teach children how to cycle independently.

How will the programme be monitored in my school?

Each school must complete a brief baseline hands-up survey with the target age group asking pupils about their travel behaviour at the start of the programme. At the end of each school year, a brief follow-up survey will be completed to monitor your school’s progress in increasing the number of pupils traveling actively to school. These results will be made available to your school and are useful for school development plans, Eco-Schools award applications, etc.

Can Sustrans help with cycle and scooter storage?

Unfortunately, funding for the programme currently does not include the provision of cycle and scooter storage. Sustrans can provide advice and guidance as you work towards providing good quality storage. We will also continue to work on the behalf of all schools to lobby for funding to help schools provide cycle and scooter storage.

How does the programme help our school reach Eco-Schools targets?

The Active School Travel Programme and Eco-Schools are two school initiatives that complement each other very well. Working with Sustrans will help ensure your school achieves the ‘Transport’ component of the Eco-Schools programme on your way to a Green Flag.

How does the programme link to the Curriculum?

Sustrans offers a range of free resources connecting Active Travel to the school curriculum, covering a broad range of subjects. Specific lessons can be delivered by Active Travel Officers; lesson plans can also be made available to teachers.

What is National Standard cycle training?

As part of the Active School Travel Programme, schools will be offered the chance to take part in National Standard cycle training, which is like cycling proficiency, but better! National Standard cycle training (Levels 1 and 2) gives children the skills and confidence for cycling on traffic-free paths and on quiet roads. At Level 1 children learn to control and master their bikes on the playground. Level 2 takes place on local streets, giving trainees a real on-road cycling experience. Children learn how to deal with traffic on short journeys such as cycling to school or the local shops. The training is delivered by fully accredited, experienced instructors from Sustrans’ Cycle Skills Team.
Will the programme involve parents and carers?

Our programme is based on a whole family approach to ensure that parents and carers ‘buy in’ to the initiative. We recognise that parents and carers are ultimately responsible for how their children travel to school; therefore engagement with them is of utmost importance. We will encourage parents and carers to cycle, scoot and walk to school with their children. We will help to organise family focused events and activities in your school.

What about the safety of children travelling to school?

The Active School Travel Programme increases the skills and confidence of young people so that they can safely cycle, walk or scoot to school. We provide a range of appropriate on-road and playground-based cycling, walking and scooting skills training. The programme champions road safety education and seeks to maximise safety of all children, including the promotion of correctly fitted helmets, high visibility clothing and road worthy bicycles.

At the inaugural NI Road Safety Awards in November 2015, the Active School Travel Programme was named a joint winner in the primary schools category because of the important work that we are doing to help improve children’s’ road safety awareness and skills.

This programme sounds great, but does it really work?

Yes! After just one year of engagement, we saw a fantastic increase in the number of children walking, cycling and scooting to school from 38% to 50%. We also saw a corresponding reduction in the number of pupils being driven to school from 51% to 41%.

There is still great potential to see even more children travelling actively to school and to reduce car use on the school run. Eight out of ten children surveyed want to travel actively to school, but only half of pupils are currently doing so. The exciting message here is that children want to cycle, scoot and walk to school.

And don’t just take our word for it; you can ask other schools! In the last school year, 191 schools took part in the Active School Travel Programme. 100% of teachers have stated that they would recommend the programme to other schools.

For any further queries, please contact us or visit our website:

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www.sustrans.org.uk/northern-ireland/what-we-do/active-school-travel-northern-ireland