

Active School Travel Newsletter

Autumn 2022



Welcome to our Schools Newsletter! We hope you enjoy reading about what schools all over Northern Ireland have been doing to encourage Active and Sustainable travel over the last term. Feel free to get in touch at:
schoolsNI@sustrans.org.uk



Happy New Year

We trust you had a lovely Christmas and we welcome you back to a new year, working alongside [Sustrans](#) on the [Active School Travel Programme](#). We are delighted to partner with your school to encourage more pupils than ever, to walk, cycle or scoot in order to benefit their health, reduce congestion at the school gates, save families money and improve the environment and air quality in the areas that we travel through.



Cycle to School Week

Schools across Northern Ireland took part in Cycle to School Week from 3rd to 7th October, such as **Currie Primary in Belfast** featured in the photo above. It was brilliant to see so many bikes and scooters on the route to school, and many schools also ran special events including Dr Bikes, bling your bike and cycle and scooter skill sessions.

There was an option for families to sign up to a cycling pledge, and to appeal to as many as possible this could be to cycle to school, swap one car journey for a bike journey, go for a cycle ride as a family, or to discover somewhere new.

If your school didn't take part, it's not too late – the resources are available so schools can run the event at any time during the year – to find out more and access the posters, guides and lesson plans go to <https://www.bikeability.org.uk/cycletoschoolweek/> You can also speak to your Schools Officer and they can help you with planning or running activities in school during the week.

Beverley Gaston, Active Travel Officer, North Central Region



"Roll Model" School Visit

St John's Primary in Coleraine welcomed a special visitor for Cycle to School week in September. World Record Holder (and former Sustrans staff member) Ronan McLaughlin came to school for a special Q&A session for the lucky P7 year group. The visit is the first in a series called 'Roll Models' which will see inspirational people who have done amazing things on wheels come to schools in the NE region to meet pupils in special one-off events.

Ronan is the current world record holder for a cycling challenge called 'Everesting'. Everesting is an activity in which cyclists or runners ascend and descend a given hill multiple times to have cumulatively climbed 8,848 metres (the elevation of Mount Everest). To reach the height of Everest, Ronan had to complete 78 laps up and down of the iconic Mamore Gap in County Donegal! Ronan fended off stiff competition from previous record holders including that of six-time Grand Tour winner Alberto Contador to scoop the top spot.

The pupils and staff loved hearing about Ronan's time as a professional racing athlete; various record breaking challenges as well as getting an in-depth look at the record-breaking bikes and equipment used. This was no doubt a highlight for the pupils who got the opportunity to look closely at the technology involved in the bikes as well as to feel the weight of the ultra-lightweight designs.

The pupils and staff had lots of brilliant questions to ask Ronan, ranging from the importance of healthy eating through to 'what does determination mean' and no doubt went away not only with a better understanding of bike technology and bike racing but also learning life lessons in goal setting and dreaming big! A massive thanks to Ronan for taking the time out to visit St John's PS.

Johnny McCrystal, Active Travel Officer, North East Region



Good Shepherd PS hosts Recycled Bike Sale

Sustrans and Life Cycles teamed up to hold a bike sale at **Good Shepherd Primary School** to allow parents and members of the wider community to buy upcycled bicycles. The Principal, Mrs McCafferty, was only too happy to host the event as Sustrans and Life Cycles align with her environmental vision for the local eco school.

She said: "We have been supported since September by Steven Ward through the Active School Travel programme which has been brilliant. We were delighted to be selected for it as where we are is such a hotspot for traffic and we are very keen to adopt active travel for the environment, for health and safety and for the children's health and wellbeing. The work with Sustrans has been very well received by the whole school community."

"I had seen Life Cycles on Facebook and thought it would be brilliant to host a bike sale in the school, anything that benefits the local community, helps people save a few pounds and gets the children equipped with quality bikes so they're

able to get out and about. Our Eco Council have been delighted to help Steven set up for the sale too," she added.

Judith Blythe bought a bike for her four-year-old daughter Leah who is a pupil in the nursery school. She said: *"I think the sale at the school is such a good idea because it means parents can buy bikes for a good price. I'm happy to support it."*

Good Shepherd nursery school staff were thrilled to have the event in the school. They were able to buy a number of bicycles with stabilisers for their little pupils to use during the school day.

Life Cycles, a Zero Waste North West initiative, saves hundreds of bicycles from landfill by upcycling those left at Pennyburn Recycling Centre Bike Drop-off and other unwanted bikes which are donated to them. Life Cycles had support from mechanics The Bike General in Greysteel and BP Cycles from Strabane as well as a dedicated team of volunteers to get a wide selection of bikes ready for the Good Shepherd PS sale. It's hoped another bike sale will take place at the school in the spring.

Sustrans is based at the Active Travel Centre within the North West Transport Hub. Life Cycles sells bikes from the Active Travel Centre at Waterside train station; check out their Facebook page for details.

Steven Ward, Active Travel Officer, North West Region



Puncture Repair Lessons

Last term saw us back in school delivering a range of classroom-based lessons, with some linking directly with the school curriculum. One of the most well received is a practical workshop on how to mend a puncture on your bike.

One of the workshops was carried out at **Ballynahinch Primary School**. The workshop began with a class discussion about what a puncture is and the best ways to prevent them. We shared stories about our own experiences on bikes, with many pupils being able to recall a time where they had a puncture themselves and had to send their bike away for repairs. Well not anymore, kids!

After a quick demonstration on how to remove a wheel from a bike and how to use tyre levers to access the inner tube inside, we learnt the steps to repair the puncture itself. Then it was on to the fun bit – getting practical!

Pupils were given a pre-punctured tube, a pump, and a puncture repair kit.

Working together in small groups, their task was to successfully find and fix the puncture before testing it to see if it holds air.

The workshop was a great success; it is always so rewarding to see pupils learn a new skill for life which will enable them to be more independent and get back out on the bike!

Here's what one pupil had to say –

“I enjoyed learning how to repair a puncture just in case I ever get one. I will know what to do myself.” Nevaeh P6

Some teachers have even shown an interest in delivering the lesson themselves!

“Teaching the children life skills is a very important part of my job. The children of BPS were thoroughly engaged, saw a purpose to the lesson and were able to do repair multi punctures with no aid. There was an evident confident boost in children that find learning hard, as this was a skill they could excel in. I, myself, now have the confidence to deliver this lesson to the future KS2 children of BPS.”

If you are interested to learn more about how to fix a puncture, please get in touch!

Iain Sneddon, Active Travel Officer, South Central Region



36,238 Miles

During November and December, 13 schools in the South East area took part in a challenge called, Journey To Santa (The North Pole Edition).

With deteriorating weather in mind, the Journey To Santa challenge was designed to encourage pupils and families to continue their active journeys to school regardless of a little drop in temperature or an increase in precipitation.

The challenge was for classes, key stages or whole school groups to virtually travel the 2,500 miles from N.Ireland to the North Pole (and back?) together, either by walking/cycling/scooting to school, doing a 15 minute period of exercise during the school day or doing a 15 minute period of exercise outside of school.

Each pupil was able to contribute a maximum of 3 miles per day and despite the difficult weather at times, we were delighted that the 13 schools contributed a combined total of 36,238 miles! Each school who took part received a Sustrans goodie bag valued at over £50.

A tremendous effort, well done everyone!

Dave Wiggins, Active Travel Officer, South East Region



PHA Funded hi-vis vests

All the new primary schools that joined the Active School Travel programme this term benefited greatly from funding from the Public Health Agency, to provide every child in the school with a free high-visibility vest.

Schools Officers deliver lots of safety sessions in schools, especially during the Autumn term. We focus on staying as visible as possible when undertaking walking, cycling and scooting journeys.

The funded hi-vis vests were delivered to our 58 new primary schools around mid-term, just in time for Road Safety Week which ran from 14th to 20th November this year.‘ As pupils from **St. Patrick’s PS Dungannon** are

modelling in the photograph above, it has been brilliant to see lots of pupils wear them on their 'Ditch the Dark' and 'Bling your Bike' active travel fun days since.

We hope these vests will help encourage even more families to make safe, active, and healthy journeys to school.

Ann-Marie McManus, Active Travel Officer, South West Region



Extended Schools Network

It has been a pleasure to start working with schools in our Extended School Network. I began working for Sustrans at the end of August and I have really been enjoying supporting schools who have already completed three years with an Active Travel Officer, and are now ready to carry on the programme independently with 'light touch' support from myself. There are over 300

schools in Extended Support which is amazing! It is great to hear about everything you do in your schools to encourage Active Travel.

It was brilliant that so many school champions attended an online webinar on 'School Mark' in November in order to learn more about how to achieve their Bronze, Silver or Gold awards. I look forward to receiving applications in this coming year and give out well deserved awards.

Laura Coey, Project Support Officer, Schools

Big Walk and Wheel



[Sustrans Big Walk and Wheel:](#) Registration opens in January on the Big Walk and Wheel website. All schools in the UK can take part in Sustrans Big Walk and Wheel, it is free to register and easy to take part.

Once registered you will have access to a school login where you can log your journeys on each day of the challenge and track how your school is doing. You can even compete with your neighbouring schools.

Travelling actively and sustainably has never been so important, it helps pupils arrive to school alert and ready to start the day and helps create a nicer environment around the school.

We have designed our interactive school resources to be fun, flexible, and informative on how small changes can make a big difference.

Free resources available include:

- Curriculum linked lesson plans
- Top tips
- School assembly presentation

Other Sustrans news and events

- [Volunteers transform milepost with teenager's winning design](#): Sean Toner, a junior member of Friends of Callan River, won a competition to come up with a new design for the Millennium Milepost along National Cycle Network Route 91

- [Belfast Volunteers begin leading activities on the Forth Meadow Community Greenway in Belfast](#). More than 30 volunteers have trained as Sustrans Walk and Cycle Leaders for the Forth Meadow Community Greenway in Belfast.

- A [new active travel hub](#) has opened in Belfast city centre to enable more students and people living in the city to walk, wheel and cycle. We now have three Hubs in Belfast and one in Derry~Londonderry.

[Find out more about Sustrans work](#)