

Getting children active on the school run

Active School Travel Programme 2020-21 Summary Report

Background

It is of great concern that more children than ever are being driven to school. The number of primary school pupils in Northern Ireland being driven to school has risen in the past six years from 59% to 68%, despite 46% living less than a mile from their school.

The **Active School Travel Programme** is working successfully to reverse this trend and to get more pupils choosing 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 and cycling as their main mode of transport to school. **Sustrans** is being funded by the **Public Health Agency** and the **Department for Infrastructure** to continue delivering the programme until July 2022. In the 2020-21 school year, 209 schools across Northern Ireland received direct support from Sustrans.

Key successes of 2020-21 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 2020-21 school year, the number of **children travelling actively to school at participating schools increased from 31% to 43%**. At the same time, the number of **pupils being driven to school fell from 61% to 50%**.

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 26% to 41%**.

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.

"Everything about this programme is so beneficial. It should be something every school has access to on an ongoing basis."

"Active school travel has been a great way to increase children's physical activity levels. The programme is based on a whole family approach to ensure that parents and carers 'buy in' to the initiative."

Teachers at participating schools

Project funded by:



Project delivered by:





Over 

140,000


active journeys and physical activities over the 10 days of The Big Pedal

Spotlight: Sustrans Big Pedal 2021

Sustrans' Big Pedal is the UK's largest inter-school walking, wheeling and cycling challenge inspiring pupils, staff and parents to choose active modes for their journey to school. In this year's Big Pedal, pupils unable to attend school due to isolation or school closures had the option to record 30 minutes of physical activity at home.

- Pupils at 129 schools across Northern Ireland recorded over 140,000 active journeys and physical activities over the 10 day challenge in April 2021.
- St Colum's Primary in Portstewart achieved 1st place not only in NI but in the UK overall with 100% of pupils walking, wheeling and cycling to school throughout their best 5 days of the challenge.
- Culmore Primary in Derry/Londonderry achieved 1st place overall in NI in the 1 day challenge of The Big Pedal with 100% of their pupils travelling actively to school.




43% of pupils now usually travel actively to school,  but **80%** would like to

Vision

There is great potential to increase the number of children walking, wheeling and cycling to school and to reduce car use on the school run.

While 43% of pupils now usually travel actively to school, as many as 80% 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 beyond July 2022.
- 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.
- 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.
- Creating a 'Schools Streets' programme in Northern Ireland to provide safe, car-free zones around schools.

Children active for 60+ minutes every day 

UP from **26%** to **41%**

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

Contact us


This summary is based on the 2020-21 Annual Monitoring Report for the programme, as well as statistics from the Department for Infrastructure and the Department of Health.

Sustrans Northern Ireland

Tel: 028 90434569

Email: schoolsNI@sustrans.org.uk

www.sustrans.org.uk/NIschools

 @SustransNI

