

Active School Travel Programme FAQs

Who is Sustrans?

We're the charity making it easier for people to walk and cycle. We work with schools, workplaces, and communities to enable more people to travel actively. Sustrans has been delivering the [Active School Travel Programme](#) since 2013, with funding from the Department for Infrastructure and the Public Health Agency. We have worked with over 400 schools across the country.



What is the Active School Travel Programme?

The Active School Travel Programme is an exciting initiative for schools who wish to see more of their pupils choosing an active and healthy journey to school. Active school travel is an approach to transport that involves physical activity in the journey to school, such as walking, using a wheelchair, scooting, and cycling. Schools who partake in the Active School Travel Programme will have a dedicated Sustrans Active Travel Officer to help co-ordinate and deliver 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. For further information on how the programme works, please [visit our website](#) where you can watch a short video and download newsletters showcasing our work with schools across NI.

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 and pollution around schools
- improved academic performance and attendance rates
- increased road safety awareness and skills
- increased confidence, self-esteem, and independence for young people.

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 much does the programme cost?

It's free! There is no cost for schools to join. The Department for Infrastructure and Public Health Agency has funded the programme since 2013; however please note that the programme commencing in September 2022 is funding dependent.

“Sustrans’ Active School Travel Programme is a fantastic initiative. Not only does it benefit the children's health, but it's also fun and enjoyable for the children.”

“I have been involved in numerous programmes over my twenty-five years of teaching, and this one has been the best one so far.”

- Teachers from participating schools

Which schools can join the programme?

All primary and post primary schools in NI are eligible to apply to join the Active School Travel Programme. The programme is largely targeted at primary schools. However, post primary schools are welcome to submit an application as well. Due to funding and capacity, the number of schools selected will be limited. Priority will be given to schools who have not had any previous engagement with the programme. 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 may 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 who works directly with schools to deliver the programme. We have a skilled team of Active Travel Officers that are based around the country. If your school is successful, 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 valid Access NI Enhanced Disclosure certificates and have completed necessary training, including Safeguarding, First Aid, Health & Safety, National Standard cycle training, and bike maintenance training.

What is an Active School Travel Champion?

Champions are 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. You may wish to consider nominating two Champions representing different key stages, to enable the programme to run smoothly throughout the school. 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 with a small team 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.



“Our school began three years ago with zero bikes/scooters and a serious congestion/safety problem at the school gates. Now we have a regular average of 60% of pupils walking/scooting/cycling to school, and over the past few years this has become an established and celebrated school culture. As a team we are so thankful to everyone at Sustrans for helping us on our way!”

- Teacher from participating school

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.

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

Increasing active school travel aligns very well with the aims and ethos of Eco-Schools. As your school supports more pupils to walk, wheel, or cycle to school, you'll be directly contributing towards the following topics: Transport, Healthy Living, Climate Change and Outdoor Learning.

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.

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 behalf of all schools to lobby for funding to help schools provide cycle and scooter storage.

What about the safety of children travelling to school?

The 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 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.

What is National Standard cycle training?

As part of the Active School Travel Programme, participating schools might be given the opportunity to take part in National Standard cycle training – this is funding dependent. This valuable training 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 real on-road cycling experiences. 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 Unit.

"Both staff and children have gained a great deal from the programme. Not only has it had a very positive impact in terms of the children's health and well-being, but it has served to enhance our curriculum work and linked in well with Eco-Schools activities."

- Teacher from participating school



What is the Sustrans School Mark?

Sustrans School Mark is an accreditation 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.

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 walk, wheel and cycle to school with their children. We will help to organise family focused events and activities in your school.

How will the programme be monitored in my school?

Each school must complete a brief baseline hands-up travel survey with the target year groups asking pupils about their travel behaviour at the start of the programme. At the end of each consecutive 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.

This programme sounds great, but does it really work?

Yes, the number of children travelling actively to school is on the rise! At the end of the 2020-21 school year, the number of children walking, cycling and scooting 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%**.

There is still great potential to see even more children travelling actively to school and to reduce car use on the school run. While 43% of pupils now travel actively to school, as many as **80%** would like to. The exciting message here is that even more children want to walk, wheel and cycle to school.

Active school travel is also a great way to increase children's physical activity levels. After one year in the programme, the number of pupils completing physical activity for at least 60 minutes each day increased from **26% to 41%**.

We have worked with over 400 schools across the country; so, don't just take our word for it – you can ask other schools!



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

- Teacher from participating school

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

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