

Active School Travel Programme FAQs

Who is Walk Wheel Cycle Trust?

Walk Wheel Cycle Trust is the new name for Sustrans. We're a UK-wide charity making it possible for everyone to walk, wheel and cycle. In Northern Ireland, we have been delivering the Active School Travel Programme since 2013. We have worked with over 500 schools across the country.

What is the aim of the 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 includes walking, scooting, cycling, using a wheelchair, and park and stride journeys. Schools who partake in the programme will have a dedicated Project Officer from Walk Wheel Cycle Trust 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.

How much does the programme cost?

It's free! There is no cost for schools to join. The Public Health Agency and the Department for Infrastructure have funded the programme since 2013. The initiative simply requires dedication of reasonable time and commitment to working with Walk Wheel Cycle Trust and promoting active school travel.



What are the benefits of active travel for my school?

- Increases children's physical activity levels
- Improves children's mental health and wellbeing
- Reduces congestion and pollution around schools
- Safer school neighbourhoods with improved air quality
- Children arrive awake and alert and ready to learn in the classroom
- Improves children's road safety awareness and skills
- Increases children's confidence and skills on bikes and scooters
- Contributes to eco-friendly and sustainable aims of school
- Increases children's self-esteem and independence
- Builds healthy habits at a young age



Who can join the programme?

The programme is primarily aimed at primary schools, but all primary and post primary schools in NI are eligible to join. 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. Unfortunately, Special Schools are not currently included in the remit of the programme.

How can my school join the programme?

There is a simple application form to fill out, along with supporting materials. 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 and those with the most historical engagement.

How long does the programme last?

Subject to funding, the Active School Travel Programme will engage schools in a 3-level programme over three years with direct support from a Project Officer from Walk Wheel Cycle Trust. Schools will gradually take on more responsibility for the programme over the three years with the goal of creating a sustainable culture of active school travel. After schools have completed the 3-year programme, Walk Wheel Cycle Trust will continue to provide light touch support through our Extended Support network.

What does a Project Officer do?

A Project Officer from Walk Wheel Cycle Trust is an experienced, dedicated support officer who works directly with schools to deliver the programme. We have a skilled team of Project Officers that are based around the country. If your school is successful, you will have an enthusiastic Project Officer regularly visiting your school and offering you direct support to organise and run various events and activities, such as walking buses, cycle skills, ditch the stabilisers, assemblies and active travel challenges. All our Project Officers have Access NI Enhanced Disclosure certificates and have completed necessary training, including Safeguarding, First Aid, Health & Safety, cycle training, and bike maintenance training.

What is an Active School Travel Champion?

Each school must nominate at least one member of staff to be an Active School Travel Champion, with time committed to the project. Champions are the main point of contact between the school and Walk Wheel Cycle Trust. With support from the Project Officer, 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.

Champions can be teachers or principals, and can also be joined by additional staff, parents or other members of the wider school community. A champion 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, we will provide guidance and specific training for Active School Travel Champions to support them in their important roles.

Does the programme link to the curriculum?

Walk Wheel Cycle Trust offers a range of free resources connecting active travel to the school curriculum, covering a broad range of subjects such as World Around Us and PDMU. Specific lessons can be delivered by our Project Officers; lesson plans can also be made available.

Does the programme help our school reach Eco-Schools goals?

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 families 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 (ideally at least 10 minutes).

Will we get cycle parking?

Unfortunately, funding for the programme currently does not include the provision of cycle and scooter storage. We 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.

"It's great for the children and their families to experience the joys of an active journey to school. We find that this burst of energy in the morning enhances the children's concentration in class as well as improving their social and communication skills. It brings a lovely sense of community."

~ Principal Máire Mhic Lochlainn,
Bunscoil Cholmcille, Derry

What about the safety of children travelling to school?

The programme increases the skills and confidence of children 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. We support schools to develop an Active Travel Policy that communicates clear expectations and responsibilities to safeguard children, families and the school.

Will parents and carers be involved?

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.

What are the Active School Travel Awards?

The Active School Travel Awards are an accreditation scheme run by Walk Wheel Cycle Trust 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. Your school can achieve awards to celebrate your commitment to promoting active school travel.

Where can I go for more information?

Please visit our website at www.walkwheelcycletrust.org.uk/NIschools where you can watch a short video and download the recent newsletter showcasing our work with schools across NI. Also, please talk to other schools that have participated in the programme and hear about their experiences! You can also email us at schoolsNI@walkwheelcycletrust.org.uk.



Does the programme really work?

Yes, the number of children travelling actively to participating schools has risen every year since 2013!

Key achievements from 2024-25:



Pupils travelling actively to school up 35% to 45%



Pupils being driven to school down 58% to 49%



Increase from 25% to 35% of pupils getting 60 minutes of daily exercise



Over 1,600 activities delivered, reaching over 57,00 pupils, parents, siblings and teachers



526 schools across NI participated



180 schools received direct support from a Project Officer, and 346 schools received light touch support in the Extended Support network



For our health.
Our wellbeing.
Our world.

