

How to encourage cycling at schools with anti-cycling policies

This is our campaigning kit for people who wish to transform anti-cycling schools into schools that allow - and even promote - cycling. It is aimed mostly at parents, but we hope it will be useful for teachers, head teachers, school governors, local authorities, after-school programmes, and of course, children themselves.

There is plenty of information available on how to promote cycling at schools where there is already a positive outlook (you can learn more about this in the ['working with the willing'](#) section). This guide, however, is primarily designed to help anyone who's trying to change the attitudes of obstructive schools.

Cycling allows children to travel quickly and independently through their local areas, providing not just autonomy and a learning experience, but a daily sense of achievement. We hope that this kit helps you work with your child (or children) to make cycling a part of their everyday life. Although many of our suggested actions will be led by adults, the issue remains essentially about children, so we strongly encourage anyone using this kit to work closely with the affected child(ren) at every step of the process.



Good luck with your campaign and happy cycling!

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1) Why cycle to school?

We believe that all children should have the opportunity to cycle to school. It contributes to the government-recommended 60 minutes of moderate exercise each day, tackles obesity and helps them concentrate in the classroom.¹ Cycling also gives children autonomy and the opportunity to learn how to explore and navigate their environment safely on their own – both of which are vital life skills. What's more, it's inexpensive, good for the environment, and can help cut down on the congestion caused by the 18% of school run cars on the roads at 8.45 am.²

Even though there are so many reasons to encourage children to cycle to school, currently only 1% of British primary and 2% of secondary school children do so³, as opposed to half of children in the Netherlands.⁴ However, 80% of UK children say they would rather cycle to school than be driven.⁵

On the other hand, anti-cycling schools and parents often quote a range of arguments to support their views. These are mostly grounded in fear – fear that children will not cycle safely, that surrounding motorists will drive dangerously, or that children alone in public are at risk. These fears simply do not reflect real experience, as discussed below:

- Children can learn safe cycling through cycle training. Bikeability (www.bikeability.org.uk), the government-backed national standard, provides three levels of cycle training for real-world conditions. Bikeability helps children protect themselves by teaching the techniques for looking and anticipating the movements of motorists and other road users. Children can also learn safe cycling by riding regularly with their parents or other skilled adult cyclists.
- It's true that cycling has more inherent dangers than staying indoors wrapped in cotton wool. However, the health benefits of cycling – e.g. greater cardiovascular fitness, reduced levels of some cancers and obesity - far outweigh the risk of being hurt in a traffic crash.⁶ Furthermore, the risk involved in cycling is similar or less than the risk involved in many other everyday activities. A person is less likely to be injured in an hour of cycling than in an hour of gardening.⁷ Getting into cycling early helps establish it as a healthy habit for life.
- For children, cycling is a particularly good way of doing two things at the same time: commuting *and* keeping fit. A recent study of 6,000 school pupils in eastern England showed that 10-16 year-old boys who regularly cycled to school were 30% more likely to meet recommended fitness levels, while girls who cycled were 7 times more likely to do so.⁸
- The media has greatly exaggerated the risk of 'stranger danger'. Since 1985 there has been no increase in the numbers of children killed by strangers.⁹ Allowing children to navigate their environments starting with short journeys – which is what many home to school trips are – helps prepare them for further travel later in life

2) The law

- **Cycling 'bans'**

Schools do not have any legal right to ban cycling to and from their premises.

However, schools can discourage cycling through letters to parents or anti-cycling statements at assemblies and in publications. Schools can also ban bicycles from school grounds or refuse to supply cycle parking, which in many cases creates a *de facto* ban.

- **Liability**

Some schools make incorrect claims (either knowingly or out of ignorance) about their liability for students and/or their bicycles in order to justify a ban on cycles/cycle parking on school grounds.

The Government's advice on liability and cycling to school says:

- Schools are not liable for students travelling independently to or from school. That means that a school would be liable for a student on a school-operated bus, but it is not liable for a student cycling on his or her own.
- Schools are not liable for theft or damage caused to bicycles on school grounds, just as schools are not liable for theft or damage to a student's jacket left in a cloakroom.

(Source: teachernet:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20101104122447/http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/atoz/h/hometoschooltravel/>)

3) School Travel Plans

School Travel Plans (STPs) look at the journeys that schools generate and how to make them more sustainable. They should be based on consultation with the whole school community and present clear targets, specific interventions and agreed monitoring criteria to shift journeys that are currently made by car to more environmentally-friendly modes of travel – such as cycling.

In 1999, the Government issued guidance calling for all schools to complete an STP. A follow-up in 2003 made it clear that both schools and local authorities are required to promote sustainable transportation through STPs. Many schools have already complied, or they are in the process of completing STPs.

STPs can be an important tool for encouraging your child's school to listen to your concerns. They usually include a survey of pupils asking them not only how they currently travel to school, but also how they *want* to travel to school. Many children want to cycle, and this can provide motivation for the school to examine the issue. Some local authorities have school travel coordinators, who can prove useful champions for your cause.

Sources for more information on School Travel Plans

Government guidance:

- Department for Education:
www.education.gov.uk/popularquestions/schools/a005642/what-is-a-school-travel-plan
- Department for Transport / Department for Education and Skills. *Travelling to School: an action plan*. 2003.
<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/t/travelling%20to%20school%20action%20plan.pdf>
Updates 1999 guidance, including responsibilities of schools, local and transport authorities, and the government in delivering STPs.

Other guidance:

- Sustrans. *Developing a School Travel Plan: information for parents and schools*.
www.sustrans.org.uk/assets/files/Safe%20Routes/resources/infosheets/SRS_Developing_an_STP_ST16.pdf (a short and accessible introduction to the topic).
- *Your local authority might also have its own guidance. Try searching for the name of your local authority plus + 'school travel plan' on the web.*

4) How to convince your child's school to allow cycling

- ***Is there a problem?*** Does your child's school discourage cycling through the prospectus and/or official announcements? Do they ban it outright? Do they ban cycles from school grounds? If your child is discouraged or not allowed to cycle to school, try to find out exactly what the problem is and – if possible – their reasons. Writing to them might be the only way of finding out for sure.
- ***Discuss the situation with your child.*** What does your child want to do? Does he or she have any ideas about how to change things? Is your child concerned about being singled out? Find out what they want, make sure they understand what you're doing and keep them fully involved.
- ***Get other families involved.*** Identify other parents at your child's school who want their children to be able to cycle. Ask them to help you approach the school. The more families requesting a change in school policy, the more difficult it becomes for the school to dismiss your request.

Be prepared to talk to parents who don't support cycling to school. Listen, be respectful and try to address their concerns. But be ready to concede that there are some people who just aren't interested in changing their minds. Don't waste your energy on skirmishes that won't help your cause.

- ***Talk to the head teacher.*** You can begin the dialogue either in a face-to-face meeting or on the phone. It is possible that the school's policy on cycling is out-dated or ill-considered. Politely ask the head why the school has the policy it does. Try to find out who made the decision, when, and if there was a specific incident or reason that prompted it.

Try to understand the head teacher's position, and respond gently and sensitively to his or her concerns. Even if you think they are being silly or dismissive, do your best to maintain a dialogue – not a confrontation. Remember that this policy may not be the head's decision, and that they may actually be an ally, underneath it all.

- **Find and offer solutions to any objections.** Whether or not you think the head teacher's concerns make sense, they are real to him or her. You need to provide solutions...

- **Children lack safe cycling skills** – suggest that all pupils at the school are offered cycle training. You can learn more from the cycle training pages on CTC's website or from the Bikeability site: www.ctc.org.uk/cycletraining / www.bikeability.org.uk

Apart from formal training, parents may also have the skills to teach their children to cycle. It's reassuring to accompany children under the age of 10, or those who have not had Bikeability level 2 (or in cases where schools are surrounded by very busy roads, level 3).

- **No cycle parking/not enough space for cycle parking** – ask the council to install parking. Many local authorities have budgets for this and appreciate suggestions from the general public. Alternatively, cycle parking is surprisingly inexpensive and you can buy it direct from many manufacturers. For information on cycle parking best practice, see: www.ctc.org.uk/resources/Campaigns/CYCLEPARKINFO.pdf or www.camcycle.org.uk/resources/cycleparking/guide

- **The school is concerned about its liability** – See (2) above.

- **The roads surrounding the school are too dangerous** – this can be one of the most difficult objections to overcome. Due to years of car-oriented planning, unpleasant and high-speed roads are difficult to avoid in many areas of the UK.

Your council might be able to help you decide the best approach to take by carrying out a risk assessment of the area for you. At least you'll then have an official perspective on what the hazards may or may not be and some ideas on what could be done about them – e.g. introducing a new crossing point or 20 mph limits. Remember also to think about measures that would help discourage people from driving their children to school, e.g. no-stopping zones around schools and reducing nearby car parking.

Keep pushing the idea that more children cycling to school will mean fewer people driving, and that will make the roads safer, as well as reducing school run congestion on roads in the school's neighbourhood. Stress that you want the *whole* community to benefit, not just you and the school!

Sustrans's Safe Routes to Schools programme offers free information and advice to parents, pupils, schools and local authorities: www.sustrans.org.uk/what-we-do/safe-routes-to-schools. See also www.sustrans.org.uk/what-we-do/safe-routes-to-schools/resources for online resources, such as curriculum guides, case studies and sample STPs.

- ***The children will run over other children and/or neighbours and there will be chaos.*** This is very unlikely to happen. In any case, cycles do far less damage than cars, so third parties are much more likely to benefit than otherwise.

Try recommending that all children at the school are offered cycle training, but be wary of moves to make it a compulsory prerequisite to cycling. Primary schools often only arrange for training for pupils at the end of their last year, which means that younger pupils would not be permitted to cycle unless their parents arrange for them to receive cycle training outside of school.

If this issue remains a sticking point, you might want to suggest that children who cycle must be registered with the school. This is not an ideal solution, however, as it gives the impression that cycling is somehow not an everyday activity and it needs to be regulated.

- ***The children don't want to cycle to school.*** Around half of all children in the UK want to cycle to school. This is a figure that comes up over and over again in school travel surveys. In order to submit a School Travel Plan, each school should measure how children currently travel to school, and how they wish they did travel. If your child's school has not already collected this information, ask them to do so.

- ***Present the solutions to the head teacher.*** Write to the head explaining that cycling is a healthy and relatively safe way to travel to school, and address any concerns they gave in your initial discussion. Suggest your solutions and a date by which you would like a response.

Continue trying to discuss the issue with the head teacher, even if they do not respond positively to your letter. Make it clear that you don't want to make a fuss, but that you will be forced to go down that route if the school's cycling policy does not change.

- ***Take the discussion to the Board of Governors.*** If the head teacher does not respond positively to your letter, try to attend a meeting of the Board of Governors. At the very least, the AGM should be open to everyone and you should be able to submit a question for discussion beforehand. Ask for a written response.

A good outcome would be for the Board to agree to delegate a committee to look into cycling (or cycling and walking) to the school and to report back. Ideally, you should be invited to be a member. You may also find it useful to become a parent governor yourself, but you will need to stand for election first.

- ***Involve the local authority.*** Since all local authorities should be promoting sustainable school travel (as part of School Travel Plan requirements), they should be broadly supportive of your campaign.

All local authorities are organised differently, but yours is likely to have teams or departments focused on sustainability, transport or road safety. Look to these teams for people who are particularly excited about your campaign. They don't need to be the heads of those departments, but they must want you to succeed. If your local authority has a cycling officer or school travel plan officer, contact them. They should be able to help you navigate local bureaucracy and policies.

- **Use policy and the political system.** Write to your MP and to local councillors, explaining your plight. Ask them to visit the school.

Look up the school's Travel Plan and quote it. It should be based on a survey, which you should be able to access. If you don't like the questions on it, ask the school to issue a new survey. Your contacts within the local authority should be able to help you with this.

- **Complain to the school's line manager.** Many schools are managed by Local Education Authorities. They have very strict rules about how they get involved in disputes between parents and schools. You will need to do your research, and it is likely that you will have to present evidence that the school is failing to meet a mandated requirement. Once again, your contacts within the local authority may be able to help with this.

If your child attends a religious school, write to the local head of the church/institution.

- **Get the local media involved.** This is really a tactic of last resort, as it will probably anger the head teacher and Board of Governors – and please make sure that the children concerned won't be angry with you as well. But this is worth doing if other methods have not worked. The local media tends to be quite interested in cycling to school stories and schools don't like bad press!

There's advice on working with the media at: www.ctc.org.uk/campaignsAdvice

- **Don't give up hope!** Overturning a school cycle ban can be a long and complicated process – in fact, your child(ren) may not even be at the school long enough for you to get the message across and see things change. But please keep trying! We know of several instances where one family has campaigned unsuccessfully, but has nevertheless paved the way for another family to work the necessary wonders a few years later on.





working for cycling

5) Working with the willing

Over the past decade, a number of effective interventions at individual schools have encouraged more children to cycle. These programmes can help you promote cycling once you have successfully overturned the school's cycle ban, thus beginning the process of transforming an anti-cycling school into a pro-cycling school:

- [Bikeability](#) – updated National Standards Cycle Training for the 21st century, with a focus on providing training on-road in real traffic conditions
- [CTC's Bike Club](#) (with partners UK Youth and ContinYou) – provides cycle training and promotional activities delivered via youth clubs /after-school activities
- [Sustrans' Bike It!](#) – works with individual schools to provide concerted programmes of cycling promotion, raising cycle levels significantly in many cases
- [Sustrans' Safe Routes to Schools](#) – provides travel information and infrastructure changes at participating schools to make the local environment more attractive for sustainable travel, and the local community more informed about sustainable travel options

Join CTC's 'Right to Ride to School' Facebook group and share campaigning stories and advice with other families:

www.facebook.com/home.php#/pages/Right-to-Ride-to-School/124438494469

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¹ Sustrans. *The Health Benefits of Walking and Cycling to School (FS15)*.

www.sustrans.org.uk/assets/files/Safe%20Routes/resources/infosheets/SRS_Health_Benefits_FS15.pdf

² Department for Transport. *Personal Travel Factsheet: Travel to School*. March 2008.

www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/datatablespublications/personal/factsheets/school.pdf

³ *Ibid*

⁴ Ministerie van Verkeer en Waterstaat. *Cycling in the Netherlands*. 2007.

www.fietsberaad.nl/library/repository/bestanden/CyclingintheNetherlands2009.pdf

⁵ Bike for All. 'Kids want to ride their bikes to school'. 20 April 2009. <http://www.bikeforall.net/news.php?articleshow=631>

⁶ Cycling England. *Cycling and Health: What's the evidence*: http://www.dft.gov.uk/cyclingengland/site/wp-content/uploads/2009/01/cycling_and_health_full_report.pdf

⁷ Powell KE, Heath GW, Kresnow MJ, Sacks JJ, Branche CM. 'Injury rates from walking, gardening, weightlifting, outdoor bicycling, and aerobics.' *Med Sci Sports Exerc* 1998. vol 30. 1246-9

⁸ Voss C, Sandercock, G. *Aerobic Fitness and Mode of Travel to School in English Schoolchildren*. Journal of the American College of Sports Medicine. Feb 2010.

⁹ Sustrans. *Staying Safe on the School Journey (FS02)*.

http://www.sustrans.org.uk/assets/files/Safe%20Routes/resources/infosheets/srs_staying_safe_infosheet.pdf