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Sustrans School Mark

A guide for schools

Foreword



Congratulations on your decision to take part in Sustrans' School Mark. You have made a fantastic choice that will help transform your whole school, with happier, healthy pupils and quieter, safer streets.

That's not all. Schools tell us how increasing cycling and walking has strengthened ties with their community, how excluded or unconfident young people have found something they can excel at, and how families and siblings have also been raring to get involved – saving money, feeling fitter and simply having fun along the way.

It has never been more critical to encourage healthy, active travel. Only about a third of young people meet the recommended daily 60 minutes of physical activity. The area around their homes where they travel, play or socialise unaccompanied has shrunk significantly in a generation. Meanwhile petrol price rises are costing families hundreds of pounds more on the school run each year.

The cost of inactivity to our health services and our economy is huge and predicted to rise still further. But the cost to our young people's wellbeing is even higher.

Fortunately, schools are perfectly placed to change this. Habits, skills and confidence learnt whilst young can influence how people travel for life. Young people love to be active, so when their whole peer group joins in and the activity is easily replicated day after day – such as the journey to school – it becomes the norm.

By involving pupils, their families, staff and the community, the schools we work with have dramatically bucked national trends on travel choices.

Why? Because sustainable journeys become embedded in the school ethos, from assemblies to after-school clubs, the curriculum to the playground.

In schools where we provide intensive support, we average regular cycling to school rates of 27% (2% is the national average). Car-use drops by an average of 11% a year.

We aren't happy with producing just one or two years of impressive results, we want these changes to be for life. That's why the School Mark is so important. It encourages and rewards schools as they improve year after year, until positive travel choices are as much a part of school as lessons and break time.

Good luck with your endeavours. The difference you make now will last a lifetime.

Malcolm Shepherd, Chief Executive

How it works



The School Mark is flexible to allow schools to focus on one or more forms of active travel (walking, cycling and scooting) or sustainable travel (using public transport). Where a Sustrans officer is available to support a school, they will help decide what the most appropriate focus might be.

The award consists of progressive levels for schools to work through. A school must complete the previous level before moving on to the next.

There is no time limit and schools simply need to meet the set criteria to achieve each level. However, a typical school working at a good pace should aim to achieve Bronze by the end of the first year of participation, Silver by the end of the second year and Gold after a further two years.

Further opportunities beyond the Gold level may be available, including an additional level for schools acting as ambassadors for best practice. You can discuss this with your Sustrans contact at the appropriate time.



Bronze will be awarded to a school that has worked to bring about some organisational, cultural and behavioural changes that help the school community choose to travel in more active and sustainable ways.



Silver will be awarded to a school that continues to demonstrate its commitment to promoting active and sustainable travel, but with much of the energy and resources coming from within the school and its community.



Gold will be awarded to a school that has demonstrated on-going commitment to promoting active and sustainable travel over several years, which has led to significant and lasting organisational, cultural and behavioural changes.

Support and assessment



Evidence of completion of each level may take the form of a 'scrap book' of images, resources, documents and other evidence, or may make use of audio, visual or digital media.

We do not require a full written report – just a portfolio of evidence to show achievement and progress. Assessment is formative and ongoing, so may be completed at any time of the school year. Your Sustrans contact will guide you through the assessment process.

On successful achievement of the Bronze level the school will be awarded a plaque, certificate and digital motif to use as appropriate, each bearing the year that the award was presented.

The plaque will be added to as subsequent levels are achieved, along with a new certificate and digital motif.

Top tips

Create a file at the start of your School Mark efforts to help keep everything together, adding evidence as you complete the tasks. Ask your Sustrans contact for a School Mark planner, or download one at www.sustrans.org.uk.

When you have achieved the School Mark, celebrate with an event and invite a local special guest to attend, along with the press.

“ When we started working with Sustrans in 2009 we had no cycle storage and only 9% of our children were regularly cycling to school.

We've completed an award each year since then and now we have covered cycle storage for 20 bikes and at least 31% of children cycling to school regularly ”

Many schools taking part in the School Mark benefit from the direct support of a Sustrans member of staff working in the area. Where this local support is not available, a wide range of resource materials are available via our website www.sustrans.org.uk. Your Sustrans contact will also be able to put you in touch with our local volunteer network for help with events and activities.

Frequently asked questions



Can any school take part?

The School Mark is available free of charge to schools who are benefitting from engagement with a Sustrans project. Where direct Sustrans officer support is not available, schools may also be able to participate, subject to a charge for the necessary support and resources.

Can a school start at any level?

The different levels of the School Mark are cumulative and therefore schools must be assessed on the Bronze level before moving on to the Silver and then Gold levels.

What is the target age group for the award?

Depending on the size and age range of a school, it might be appropriate to focus activities on a particular age range of pupils during the Bronze and Silver levels. Your Sustrans contact will help you to decide on this. For Gold, the criteria apply across the whole age range of the school.

Will the School Mark create extra work for school staff?

Some extra work may be required if the school is not already promoting active and sustainable travel. However, the School Mark also provides an alternative theme for elements of the core curriculum and other school awards (see next FAQ), so can help schools achieve many of their other targets at the same time. Sustrans can provide guidance and resources to help make these links.



Does the School Mark work alongside other awards?

Yes. Elements of the School Mark can help meet the criteria of programmes such as Eco-Schools and Healthy Schools. Work on sustainable travel has also been viewed positively in Ofsted inspections.

When do we need to submit evidence?

As the assessment is ongoing, schools can collect evidence of their achievements throughout the year, to be reviewed by Sustrans as and when the school chooses.

What happens if the school doesn't achieve the requirements?

Assessment is formative, so a school that has yet to meet the requirements may continue to work to achieve them. There is no time limit for completing each level, subject to Sustrans being able to provide the necessary support.

At what time of year will the award be presented?

A school can be nominated for completion of a level at any time of the year. Our aim is to present the award within one month of receiving the completed evidence.

Bronze



Tick each box when complete

A. Organisation and policy

A1 The school has an inclusive travel policy which promotes active/sustainable travel. The policy is written down and clearly communicated to pupils, staff and parents.

A2 The school has at least one member of staff in the role of a 'school travel champion' who is named and known to all pupils and staff. They may be supported in their role by non-teaching staff, parents or other volunteers.

A3 All school staff have been briefed about the project by a Sustrans officer or the school travel champion and receive regular information and updates about forthcoming events and activities, e.g. an agenda item at staff meetings or tutor group meetings, or communicated in the staff bulletin.

B. Raising awareness

B1 There are regular dedicated active or sustainable travel-themed assemblies delivered to the target age group with a minimum of three spaced across the academic year. These may be led by school staff, pupils or a Sustrans representative.

B2 The school has access to, and provides information about, safe routes to school. This information is available to all staff, pupils and parents. It might take the form of a display, or information such as a local cycle map.

B3 Active and sustainable travel and related activities are advertised to staff, pupils and parents via notice-boards, web pages, newsletters, LCD display screens etc.

B4 Other opportunities to promote active/sustainable travel to parents are utilised, e.g. at parents' evenings, school fetes, PTA meetings and through student champions. If this cannot be done face-to-face then information and displays are made available.

C. Empowerment

C1 The school allows pupils and staff to bring and store their bikes and scooters on-site. If cycle/scooter storage is needed then plans are in progress to obtain this.

C2 The school provides the opportunity for pupils and staff to have their bikes safety-checked to enable small problems to be fixed, e.g. through a 'Dr Bike' session. This service should be available free of charge where possible.¹

C3 The school provides the opportunity for pupils to take part in an ability-appropriate level of cycle training, e.g. Bikeability Levels 1-3 or comparable. The training is accessible to all pupils in the target age group. On completion, information on progressing to the next level is available.²

C4 There is an opportunity for pupils to participate in sharing ideas and decision-making, e.g. through a group that holds regular meetings (a minimum of once a term). A simple record of each meeting is kept along with details of agreed actions.



Action

D1 The school has taken part in regular active/sustainable travel events throughout the year, with at least three whole-school events taking place. “Whole-school” means it is open to anyone, but not everyone needs to participate.



Moving forward

E1 The school has ambitious targets to increase active/sustainable travel amongst pupils and staff. These are written into an up-to-date School Travel Plan or an appropriate planning document.

E2 The school has taken steps to encourage the involvement of volunteers (e.g. parents, governors) to assist at events and deliver activities.

E3 The school undertakes an annual school travel survey in the target age group. This data is shared with Sustrans.

E4 The survey data is evidence that within the target age group, the percentage of pupils regularly travelling to school by an active or sustainable mode has increased since the start of participation in the School Mark. “Regularly” means at least once a week. Where the school is focusing on a particular mode of travel (e.g. cycling) then the number of pupils regularly travelling to school in that way must have increased.

Top tips

Your travel policy should include cycling, walking and scooting policies as well as any on public transport, lift-share etc. This can be a single document or multiple ones, but should always present consistent messages and should not include any undue barriers, e.g. a condition which insisted that cycling to school is limited to certain age groups or those who have undertaken cycle training.

Local mapping of routes may be available from your local authority. Other cycle and walking mapping is available online from the Sustrans website, Google maps, walkit.com, cyclestreets.net etc. Pupils could use these to produce their own map of the best walking and cycling routes near the school, and highlight points of interest or facilities, parks or attractions in the community.

Notes

1. Ideally pupils should be able to have their bikes safety checked and basic repairs undertaken free of charge, although it is likely that replacement parts would incur a cost. This activity may be provided by Sustrans, a local bike shop, or a local bike recycling project. Schools should consult with their local authority to ensure that the provider of the activity meets accepted professional standards.

2. Contact your Sustrans officer or local authority for information about cycle training opportunities in your area or visit www.bikeability.org.uk.

Silver



Tick each box when complete

A. Organisation and policy

A1 There is specific reference to active and sustainable travel included in any wider schools action plans, such as Eco-Schools or Healthy Schools.

A2 Responsibility for promoting active and sustainable travel is shared between several named individuals. These 'champions' could be school staff, senior management, governors or parents.

B. Raising awareness

B1 Active and sustainable travel is being used as a teaching tool within classroom lessons. This could be in any of the curriculum areas, with at least one lesson for every pupil in the target age group each academic year.

“ Consistently high levels of sustainable travel choices made by parents are a proud achievement for our school – making students happier, healthier and more productive.

We've even seen reduced congestion in the surrounding area so our work is benefitting the rest of the community as well.”

C. Empowerment

C1 There is sufficient, secure cycle and scooter storage within the school grounds to meet demand.

C2 The school provides the opportunity for all pupils in the target age group to take part in ability-appropriate bike maintenance skills sessions. The sessions may take the form of an optional school club or an in-class activity and must be accessible to all pupils, i.e. pupils do not need to have a bike to take part.

C3 In addition to Bikeability cycle training or equivalent (see Bronze C3), pupils also have the opportunity to take part in other types of active/sustainable travel skills training, e.g. further cycling, pedestrian or scooter skills, or training about public transport use. The training is accessible to all pupils in the target age group and information on progressing to a higher level is available.

C4 The school encourages parental participation and assistance in events and activities that promote active and sustainable travel.

D. Action

D1 The school organises and carries out regular self-initiated events with the help of volunteers, with at least three whole-school events taking place annually.



E. Moving forward

E1 The school is actively engaging with other schools in the community and sharing best practice, for example through attendance at a Sustrans training event or participation in a local school cluster group.

E2 The school continues to undertake an annual school travel survey in the target age group. This data is shared with Sustrans.

E3 The survey data will be evidence that within the target age group, the percentage of pupils regularly travelling to school by a sustainable mode remains the same or higher than that recorded at the start of participation in the Silver level. Where the school is focusing on a particular mode of travel (e.g. cycling) then the number of pupils regularly travelling to school in that way must have increased.

“ We started working with Sustrans in 2007 and in a little over five years we’ve managed to get 57% of children regularly cycling. The numbers are still growing!

We’ve had to get covered storage for over 60 bikes and the racks are full nearly every day.

Our children are so enthusiastic about cycling and encourage each other to get to school by bike because they know it’s the healthiest, most fun way to travel.

The whole school community is involved at every level so we feel confident we’ve made a permanent and positive change. ”

Top tips

Pedestrian skills training and advice are available from most local authorities. Cycle skills can be developed through a lunch time or after-school club, or organised rides led by suitably qualified people – there may be a community club in your area that could assist with activities like these.

Use our curriculum wall planner for ideas to involve active and sustainable travel in the classroom. **This and a number of other resources** are available on Sustrans’ website www.sustrans.org.uk.

Gold



Tick each box when complete

A. Organisation and policy

A1 A working group comprising of staff, senior management, a governors representative, parents and pupils is established and meets at least twice a year to agree priorities and actions for promoting active and sustainable travel.

A2 The school champions have access to an appropriate and adequate amount of time (ideally two hours per fortnight across the term, this could be split between two people) to devote to organising events and activities and developing links to the school curriculum.

A3 The school is supporting the training and development of the school champions and volunteers.

A4 Active and sustainable travel is promoted within the school prospectus and associated literature.

A5 The issue of school travel is explicitly written into the School Development Plan (or equivalent plans), with identified resources set aside to support the continued promotion of active and sustainable travel.

B. Raising awareness

B1 There is evidence that active and sustainable travel is regularly being used as a teaching tool in at least two curriculum areas. This is included in schemes of work/medium-term planning documents and is reviewed annually or as part of a rolling programme.

B2 The journey to and from school is included as part of the induction and transition programme for incoming and outgoing pupils and the opportunity is taken to promote active and sustainable travel to pupils and their parents.

B3 The school is identifying groups with low levels of active and sustainable travel behaviour through on-going monitoring, e.g. specific age groups or other demographics. These groups are being targeted with appropriate intervention activities informed by examples of good practice from other schools.

C. Empowerment

C1 The school provides enough secure, well-maintained cycle and scooter storage such that on a normal school day there is adequate space for all bikes and scooters. At least part of this storage must be covered. "Secure" could mean separate to general public areas but accessible to individuals within the school (practical for most lower-age schools), or may have further restricted access for cyclists only (appropriate in some secondary schools).



C2 The school is actively engaging with their local authority and parents to identify and confront any existing physical barriers that are limiting the number of pupils and staff who are able to travel actively and sustainably to school. The School Management Team is working with their local authority to limit the constraining factors identified in its School Travel Plan or equivalent documents.

C3 The school continues to provide opportunities for all pupils to gain further practical skills and experience in active and sustainable travel, e.g. for cycling skills – sessions in PE, organised walks and bike rides or participation in cycling activities such as those provided by British Cycling.

C4 Where required, lockers or other personal storage and changing facilities are provided for pupils who travel to school actively.

D. Action

D1 Regular events are included throughout the academic year and are present within the whole-school year plan/calendar.

E. Moving forward

E1 Links between the school and local organisations such as cycle clubs, bike shops and community policing teams are well established. These links are utilised wherever possible to support activities and events.

E2 In addition to the annual school survey, the school also collects bike/scooter/walk counts at least once a month. The data is used to identify travel trends and is shared with Sustrans.

E3 The annual school travel survey is now a whole-school survey. The findings are used to determine targets for further increasing active and sustainable travel levels at the school. These findings are recorded in appropriate planning documentation and shared with all pupils, parents and school staff.

E4 The survey data will be evidence that within the whole school population, one of the following criteria has been met and maintained over at least two full academic years:

- 90% of pupils are travelling regularly to school in a sustainable way, with at least 75% of those journeys being made by active modes.
- where the school is focusing on a particular mode of travel, at least 25% of pupils are regularly travelling in that way.

Where significant barriers exist out of the school's control that act to prevent these targets being met, then an alternative but comparable achievement may be considered, e.g. evidence of the school community significantly increasing active and sustainable travel behaviour outside of the journey to school. Any alternative targets must be approved by Sustrans School Mark coordination team.

About Sustrans

Sustrans makes smarter travel choices possible, desirable and inevitable. We're a leading UK charity enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day.

We work with families, communities, policy-makers and partner organisations so that people are able to choose healthier, cleaner and cheaper journeys, with better places and spaces to move through and live in.

It's time we all began making smarter travel choices.

If you'd like to work with us or discuss how we can best achieve what you need, then please get in touch via our dedicated email address youngpeople@sustrans.org.uk, or for more information visit www.sustrans.org.uk.

Our central education and young people team is based at our head office in Bristol, but you can also discuss your requirements with any of our offices UK-wide:

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