SAFE TO SCHOOL

An Ideas Document for Safe Access to Schools
July 2020
The Green-Schools Travel Programme is funded by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and supported by the National Transport Authority. The ultimate aim of the theme is to increase the number of students walking, cycling, scooting, using public transport or carpooling on the way to school.

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In the context of social distancing requirements in 2020 since the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, this document is designed to present ideas for school principals, boards of management, teachers, parents and students to consider implementing to address front of school vehicle congestion. Measures presented range from creative, temporary initiatives that schools can implement themselves, through to measures to permanently upgrade active travel infrastructure, which will require Local Authority involvement.

In response to social distancing requirements since the COVID-19 pandemic, Local Authorities across Ireland have been implementing increased pedestrian space allocations. The National Transport Authority (NTA) have offered to fund Local Authorities for COVID-19 related works. Local Authorities can contact covidmeasures@nationaltransport.ie to apply for funding.

On 1st July 2020, the Health Service Executive (HSE) released ‘Interim Recommendations’ for the reopening of schools including physical distancing outside of the classroom and within the school. These recommendations and approaches are detailed on page five.

1. Staggered drop off/pick up times where practical/feasible, so that not all children arrive onsite at one time.

2. If the school has additional access points, consideration may be given to whether it would be beneficial to open these to reduce congestion.

3. Consideration may be given to where children go as they arrive at the facility. This could include heading straight to their small group’s designated learning space/classroom.

4. For those arriving by car, parents may be encouraged to park further away from the school and then walk with their children to avoid congestion, or alternatively use active travel routes where feasible.

5. Where learning spaces can be accessed directly from outside, this should be encouraged to decrease interactions between individuals in circulation spaces.
In preparation for the planned return to school in September 2020, Green-Schools conducted research in May and June 2020 to establish the level of concern about enabling safe access to schools. In the last week of May, Green-Schools posted two social media polls to its network on Twitter and Facebook. The polls, which were open for anyone to participate, indicated concern about social distancing being possible at front of schools, and a particular concern over space available due to parked cars.

Online Survey

In response to the social media polls, Green-Schools prepared a more detailed survey intended for Principals of schools to communicate their concerns about front of school congestion. From 7-19 June 2020, Green-Schools circulated an online survey to its network.

Responses

The survey requested responses from Principals across Ireland about the main challenges at their ‘front of school’, as well as supported measures to address challenges. One of the survey’s main findings is that vehicle-induced traffic congestion is a major concern of schools, as shown in the infographic on page 7.
FRONT OF SCHOOL CONGESTION

As highlighted in the research summarised in the preceding pages, front of school congestion is a chronic problem across Ireland in both rural, urban and suburban settings.

The chief executive of the Road Safety Authority highlighted the issue of front of school congestion in 2019, stating that:

“congestion at the school gates is another particularly serious problem, with parents often double-parking, or parking on yellow lines to drop their children off. The result is incredibly dangerous: small children weaving in and out of parked and moving cars at the school gate, many of whom are too small to be seen by drivers pulling in and out.”

Green-Schools have been working with schools to address this issue for over ten years. Congested vehicle drop-offs and picks-ups at front of schools pose serious safety risks to young people on a daily basis, discourages active travel, as well as posing long term health implications to young people of toxic emissions released at the school gates.

As per the HSE recommendations referenced above, the added requirement of social distancing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic poses a serious difficulty for schools to plan for reopening. It is hoped that this document can present some practical ideas for schools to implement to support safe and welcoming access to school.

EIGHT MEASURES
To tackle front of school congestion

In order to support schools preparing to return to school, the following pages outline various ways to alleviate front of school congestion. This document highlights eight effective measures that schools could pursue with the aim of making their front of school a safe and welcoming space, in which active travel is prioritised. Measures are numbered for reference but are not ordered in any particular order of importance. Locally based Green-Schools Travel Officers are available to support schools in implementing these and other solutions to prioritise active travel.

Responding to School Gate Congestion

- Widening Footpaths
- Preventing Illegal Parking
- School Streets
- Cycle Bus
- Informal Car-Free Zone
- Visual Interventions
- Separate Access
- Park ‘n’ Stride
MEASURE 1: CREATE A VEHICLE-FREE ENTRANCE FOR PEDESTRIANS AND CYCLISTS

SEPARATING ENTRANCES

Separating access points according to mode of travel is a positive way to improve safety at your school gate. As per the HSE guidelines, schools could consider opening alternative entrances to ease the pressure on a single entrance. Green-School Travel Officers can assist schools to implement separated pedestrian entrances.

VISUAL WAYFINDING

Where pedestrians and vehicles currently share an entrance, the most basic way to separate both is to paint a directional line or walker image on the surface to guide pedestrians and alert drivers.

LANDSCAPED BARRIER

Depending on the nature of the context, it may be possible to create a landscaped barrier between the driveway and the pedestrian gate, which can enhance the feeling of safety for students as well as improving air quality at the school gate, as shown the example from St Mary’s BNS.

What is involved?

- Review the structure of your front gate and determine your options.
- Create models or maps of your school grounds with your students to explore different ways to access the schools.
- Create a proposal for the school board of management or Local Authorities.

Who should be involved?

- Green-Schools Travel Officer.
- School management, students, parents.
- Neighbouring residents.

St. Brigid’s NS, Limerick City students modelling a separate pedestrian entrance

St. Michaels Infant School, Limerick

St. Mary’s BNS Rathfarnham, Dublin 14 created a landscape barrier separating vehicles and pedestrians at the school gate

Separated pedestrian access for students of St. Brigid’s NS, Limerick

Scoll Bhride NS Killasonna, Co Longford examining the school boundaries

Scoll Iosaf Girl’s Primary School, Newcastlewest, Co. Limerick

St. Mary’s BNS Rathfarnham, created a landscape barrier separating vehicles and pedestrians at the school gate
MEASURE 2: VISUAL OR CREATIVE INITIATIVES AT FRONT OF SCHOOL

SCHOOL GATE VISIBILITY

Increasing school gate visibility can encourage drivers to slow down and reduce car parking on footpaths in school zones. School entrances can often blend with the built environment which makes them less visible to motorists. Adding colourful visual installations to the school gate such as giant pencils or brightly coloured planter boxes can soften the built environment and signal priority to students walking and cycling.

CREATIVE INITIATIVES

Colourful visual initiatives can also be used temporarily as part of an event or celebration of active travel such as ‘Walk to School Week’ or ‘Walk on Wednesday’. Events like these can create a culture where active travel is celebrated and pedestrian and cycle priority is elevated at front of schools. For more permanent solutions, schools can also request standardised school road markings outside the school from your Local Authority.

What is involved?

* Engage with your Green-Schools Travel Officer, students and local Tidy Towns group to identify ways to brighten up the front of your school.

Who should be involved?

* Green-Schools Travel Officer.
* School management, teachers, students and parents.
* Local community groups such as the community council, Tidy Towns or local menshed group.
School visibility can be greatly improved through standardised road markings and signage. After conducting Walkability Audits, Green-Schools Travel Officers working with schools regularly request new or additional school signage or road markings from Local Authorities.

REQUESTING SCHOOL SIGNAGE AND ROAD MARKINGS FROM LOCAL AUTHORITIES

What is involved?

- Complete a Walkability Audit with a Green-Schools Travel Officer.
- Contact your Local Authority to discuss feasibility and options.

Who should be involved?

- Green-Schools Travel Officer.
- School management, teachers, students and parents.
- Local Authorities (Area Engineer or Road Safety Officer).
MEASURE 3: DISCOURAGING OR PREVENTING ILLEGAL PARKING

**ILLEGAL PARKING**

Illegal or irregular parking is one of the primary causes of front of school congestion. Lack of enforcement of parking on footpaths or at double yellow lines by parents driving their students to school reduces pedestrian space, impairs visibility of small children and causes toxic air pollution at the school gate.

**BETTER ENFORCEMENT**

Green-Schools across Ireland have attempted to address this issue in creative ways and Green-Schools Travel Officers advocate for better enforcement by local An Garda Síochána and preventative measures being implemented by Local Authorities.

**SCHOOL IDENTITY**

Creative measures that foster the school’s identity can be introduced to prevent or discourage illegal parking, including pencil bollards as shown in the below examples from the U.K.

**CREATIVE MEASURES**

Green-Schools is working with the NTA to develop similar creative measures that reflect the identity of schools and introduce a new and colourful front of school design language that can be implemented across Ireland to highlight the presence of a school to passing drivers and prevent front of school congestion.


Our Lady Queen of the Peace Primary School, Janesboro, Limerick

Star of the Sea BNS, Sandymount, Dublin 4

Barrier installed in St. Ronan’s NS, Keadue, Co Roscommon

Bollards installed Loughglynn NS, Co Roscommon

What is involved?

• Conduct a student-led workshop to design creative solutions to preventing illegal parking.
• Assess local skills and resources available to your school. You may have parents with carpentry skills interested in getting involved or a local mens shed group.
• Contact your Green-Schools Travel Officer for guidance and support.

Who should be involved?

• Green-Schools Travel Officer
• School management, teachers, students and parents.
• Local community groups such as the community council or Tidy Towns and a local Men’s Sheds groups.
• Local Authority (for any permanent measure to block footpath access).

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MEASURE 4: PARK ‘N’ STRIDE – AN ALTERNATIVE TO FRONT OF SCHOOL CONGESTION

PARK ‘N’ STRIDE

Park ‘n’ Stride is a concept Green-Schools have pioneered in Ireland. It involves designating locations in close proximity (between 300m and 1km) to schools. These locations act as alternative drop off / pick up locations for parents who drive students to school. Park ‘n’ Stride locations encourage students to walk some of the distance to school, increasing exercise, mental awareness and reducing the risk of accidents, congestion and pollution at the front of the school gate.

What is involved? 
- Mapping of school zone to determine where students are getting driven from.
- Identifying suitable locations (eg sports club car parks, shopping centre car parks) within 1km of the school.
- Consulting with owners / operators of the land to ensure informed consent.
- Disseminate information to parents and students about the PnS location and guidelines for use.
- Introduce signage to the PnS, and directional signage on the route to and from schools.

Who should be involved?
- Green-Schools Travel Officer.
- School, students and parents.
- Owners and operators of PnS locations.
MEASURE 5: THE CYCLE BUS – A PARENT-LED INITIATIVE

CYCLE BUS

In the context of social distancing requirements, cycling is seen as a safer mode of travel. Organising a Cycle Bus can be an effective way of encouraging large groups of students to cycle to school, which in turn alleviates congestion at the front of school. Cycle buses are parent-led initiatives, whereby several parents and volunteers lead groups of cycling students to one or more schools. Cycle buses will usually have a specific route with stops along the way where students can join. City-wide cycle buses have been operating successfully for students of multiple schools in Galway, Limerick and Dublin since early 2019.

NORMALISATION OF CYCLING

Cycle buses help to normalise cycling as a mode of transport to school. They are a fun and social way for students to improve their cycling skills, develop road-safety awareness and build confidence, as well as reducing vehicular traffic on the journey to school and at the school gate.

What is involved?
* Schools to engage parents and provide venue for planning.
* Devise and map routes and timetabled stops.
* Nomination of Parent cycle bus leaders
* Promotion to students and parents via texts, newsletters, social media, websites, etc.

Who should be involved?
* Green-Schools Travel Officer.
* School management, parents, students and local cycling volunteers.
MEASURE 6: TEMPORARY OR INFORMAL CAR-FREE ZONES

CAR-FREE TRIAL DAYS

Working with Green-Schools, several school across Ireland have trialled ‘car free’ trial days or weeks to demonstrate the wonderful possibilities that temporarily bar vehicles from travelling through the front of school street. Demonstration, or ‘pop-up’ projects like those pictured below can, if successful, lead to permanent solutions. Working with Green-Schools Travel Officers, schools can trial street closures, for example for Walk to School Week or Walk on Wednesday to demonstrate the benefits of vehicle free front of schools as pictured in examples below.

STREET EVENTS

Students can be involved in designing temporary street closures, allowing them to express the school's identity, for example in the example pictured at Ballyhahill NS.

What is involved?

- Conduct a workshop with students to design the layout of the street closure.
- Consider where traffic will be directed to determine if capacity exists.
- Engage local An Garda Siochána and Local Authority to seek support.
- Consult with parents, students and residents about the operations of the scheme.
- Plan action days for students, teachers and parents to fabricate creative elements needed.
- Ensure clear directional signage for vehicles that would normally use the road.

Who should be involved?

- Green-Schools Travel Officer
- School management, teachers, students, parents and local residents.
- An Garda Siochána and Local Authorities.
MEASURE 7: IMPLEMENT A ‘SCHOOL STREET’ – A FORMAL VEHICLE-FREE ZONE DURING PEAK TIMES

SCHOOL STREETS
A School Street initiative typically takes the form of a closure of a street (or section of a street) to vehicular traffic during school drop off and pick up times – in order to facilitate students to safely walk, cycle, scoot or park and stride to and from school.

VEHICLE-FREE ZONES
School Streets are a good way to test the benefits of vehicle free school zones in terms of safety to students, air and noise pollution, and active travel behaviour change. Although they begin as pilots, closure of streets for a prolonged period requires infrastructure, primarily bollards that are removed outside peak hours.

TRIAL PERIODS
School Street Pilots, such as that Fingal County Council have implemented at Green-School, St. Oliver Plunkett’s Primary School in Malahide, Co. Dublin, typically have an 18-month period in order to identify their longer term outcomes and to aid informed decision making on whether or not the pilot should become a permanent scheme.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION
Green-Schools advocates for all school street or temporary street closures to be monitored closely, to measure the behavior change. Fingal County Council have conducted a detailed evaluation of the Pilot with some highly beneficial findings in terms of mode change to active travel and reduced air pollution as shown in the infographic on page 26.

REMovable BOLLARDS
Another example of a school street has been initiated with the support of the local Green-School Officer in Portlaw, Co Waterford. Here, there was a simple solution to free up the front of school from vehicles by installing two removable (magnetic) bollards.

FILTERED PERMEABILITY
Simple interventions such as that at Portlaw NS can have a big impact on the sense of safety at the front of school and can lead to significant mode shift as seen at St. Olivers in Malahide. Increased demand for cycle access can be acknowledged by implementing ‘filtered permeability’ measures allowing active modes while restricting vehicles, as pictured in Drumcondra, Dublin City.
MEASURE 7

Infographic from Fingal County Council (Fingal School Street; Pilot Review 1, March 2020)

* Before it started I had to walk blindly onto the road to cross children as cars were parked all along the footpath *

* All in all, it has had a very positive impact on our school, and the children are very happy *

Shift from car travel to active modes

" the School Streets initiative is enhancing our community as it vastly decreases Malahide’s carbon footprint "

NO₂ 20% 43% Decrease in school related traffic on surrounding roads

Reduction in Nitrogen Dioxide outside school

Portlaw NS, Co Waterford ‘Streetwise Initiative’

What is involved?

- Register with Green-Schools to receive support of local Green-Schools Travel Officers.
- Conduct student workshops to determine what extent of street would be most beneficial.
- Closely examine the knock-on effects of diverting traffic from the school to neighbouring streets.
- Engage with local residents, local An Garda Síochána.
- Engage with Local Authority to discuss the feasibility of the school street.
- Begin formal design process and public consultation.

Who should be involved?

- Green-Schools Travel Officer.
- School, students and parents.
- Local residents.
- An Garda Síochána.
- Local Authority.
Safe to School

MEASURE 8

MEASURE 8: NEW OR WIDENED FOOTPATHS, PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS AND CYCLEWAYS

WIDENING FOOTPATHS

By conducting Walkability Audits with schools across Ireland, Green-Schools regularly advocate for new or wider footpaths, pedestrian crossings and cycleways to allow safe access to schools and encourage a modal shift towards walking and cycling to and from school. In many cases, the lack of pedestrian infrastructure in school zones is the main barrier to active travel for students. Green-Schools work with Local Authorities to pinpoint problems and design solutions to support active travel for students. When designing new active travel infrastructure, it is useful to refer to the Government’s Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS).

WIDENING CYCLEWAYS

The response to social distancing requirements has focussed on introducing or widening cycleways. Cycling is an excellent alternative to public transport and vehicle use, however space is required for cyclists in order to increase modal shift. Space can be created through allocation of previous car parking spaces, as pictured in the above image from Ursuline College, Sligo and outside Green-Campus, Trinity College.

PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS

In many cases schools lack pedestrian crossings that slow traffic speeds and allow safe access to schools. Working with Green-Schools, Local Authorities are guided by the students as to the best solution to these problems with many positive outcomes across the country, as pictured in Leitrim Village NS.

What is involved?

• Seek assistance of your Green-Schools Travel Officer.
• Conduct a Walkability Audit of your school to identify key shortfalls in pedestrian or cycle space.
• Engage with Local Authority to discuss the feasibility of the requests for additional pedestrian or cycle space.

Who should be involved?

• Green-Schools Travel Officer
• School, students and parents
• Local residents, walking and cycling groups
• Local Authority
REFERENCES

All images included are property of Green-Schools unless otherwise stated


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AN IDEAS DOCUMENT FOR SAFE ACCESS TO SCHOOLS

For further information on the ideas presented in this document or to register with the Green-Schools Programme, please contact:

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