

Withington Primary School: Walk Home Wednesdays!

Background and rationale

Withington is a small rural school (87 pupils). Access to the school via public footpaths is limited, and many children are driven to school daily. As the school has grown there has been an increase of traffic flow and limited parking which makes school drop off and pick up dangerous.

Due to the rurality, limited bus routes and high number of children on FSM (28%) our pupils can have very inactive lifestyles, and may not access extracurricular clubs or be able to afford to access these clubs.

As a school we wanted to address these barriers and change people's attitudes in regards travelling to school, encourage a more active everyday lifestyles to benefit both their physical and mental health, whilst also continuing to develop our community links and at no costs to the families.

What did you do and how did you do it

When speaking to parents their attitudes were:

- Ø "I don't have time to walk I'm busy"
- Ø "I'm not walking with my toddler".
- Ø "It's not safe to walk".
- Ø "My children don't want to walk and neither do I, the path is muddy and wet."
- Ø "Why walk when I can drive the car!"

We introduced Walk Home Wednesday alongside the Living Streets Walk to School scheme. We funded this through our sports premium, purchasing the online tracker and initially 20 badges a month and launched in January.

We set a low threshold, initially asking children to make at least 1 journey to school each week on foot. To allow all children an opportunity we started Walk Home Wednesday in which children would be walked home by staff and parents to the village hall 0.53 miles away.

The first week we launched we could have not asked for better weather: the heavens opened, and the rain poured! All the children looked at us in disbelief as we donned our wellies and waterproofs, kitted them up in hi vis jackets (also purchased with sports premium) and headed to the door. In our first week we had 8 pupils, 2 staff and 1 parent - by the time we reached the village hall we were very soggy, but were still smiling.

We held an assembly the following Monday to tell the children more about our walk to school project and explained we wanted to encourage both them and their families to get more active. We explained that if they walked to school once a week for 4 weeks, they would achieve a badge and over the year could achieve 12 badges in total.

“ This is the best day ever! ”
A pupil after our first muddy
Walk Home Wednesday

The Impact

The great thing about Living Streets tracker is that, as well as developing physical skills, it also develops key skills such as honesty with the children. Each child was added to the online tracker, when they arrive in school each day they have to find their icon and identify how they travelled to school that day. As the children add more active journeys a circle builds around their icon, much to their excitement, and when they have achieved their goal, an image of the badge appears.

When we first started Walk Home Wednesday we had 8 pupils, this has grown and during our last session, we had 29 pupils walking home, which is a 1/3 of our school. As well as taking part in this session, we have seen an increase in families walking to school and those who said they wouldn't now are at least once a week.

Due to the number of children taking part, we also purchased some special badges to award to children each month for reasons we felt were appropriate; maybe they had walked every day, taken responsibility for younger ones when walking, walked in all weathers, these badges were also funded through Sports premium and were a big hit.

In February we launched the new badge and we have seen a gradual rise in children achieving badges. The activity rate rose to 31% and 39 badges were achieved.

This idea has been a hit and we now aim to target children who are not walking and find ways to support this, as well as developing a positive approach to everyday physically activities. It has also had a positive impact on teachers mental health and relationships with children, as Walk Home Wednesday allows an opportunity for them to chat to other pupils about their day and on our return walk to school an opportunity to unwind whilst enjoying our beautiful surroundings.

“ The initiative has grown in popularity and each week we have over 25 children joining us. This has reduced the amount of traffic around the school by at least half.

Parents also like the scheme and have organised their own walk home from school on other days, which again has reduced the congestion around the school. ”

Catherine Willis: Head of Primaries