



Preparing your child for independent travel to secondary school

Useful information and tips for parents





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Introduction

Moving on to secondary school is an exciting but slightly scary time for children, and for parents too, who want to support their child at this important stage of their lives.

Getting to secondary school usually involves travelling further distances, so it is the natural time to consider the possibility of more independent travel, and is seen by parents and children as an important stage of growing up.

All parents should have received two booklets that contain information about getting to school: “**Home to School Transport**” and “**Admission to Secondary School in Kent**” (see details in the general information section). There are sections in both of these booklets which deal with getting to school, but hopefully the next few pages will help you and your child decide how they will travel to their new school.

With proper preparation, children should be able to travel independently from the first day at secondary school, and for health and environmental reasons, the more active their means of travel is, the better. However, safety on journeys is the most important consideration, so this needs to be discussed too.



Walking

Walking to school is an excellent way of starting the school day, if your child's secondary school is close enough. Children are said to be more alert and ready to learn after they have had a short burst of physical exercise, such as walking, before they enter the classroom. It is also very good for the environment and free! It can also be a social activity.

Many parents are concerned about their child setting off on the journey to school on their own.

Things which you might like to consider with him or her:

- What do you both think is the safest route from home to school? (Some schools might have a map which shows common walking routes to the school)
- Do they know to walk away from the kerb, at the back of the footpath?
- Where are the safer places to cross, and do they know how to use formal crossings properly? (It might be a good idea to do a practice walk jointly in the summer holidays)
- Are there any hazards on the way, and how can they deal with these hazards?
- Is there a Road Crossing Patrol (lollipop) person near the school?
- Can they arrange to walk with other children? (Some schools might try to match people up at induction events)
- Do they have any other worries about the walk to school? (See "General preparation for safe journeys" section of this leaflet)

For advice on the safe crossing of roads, go to:

<http://www.kent.gov.uk/transport-and-streets/roadsafety/safety-awareness/safer-crossing.htm>



Cycling

When asked how they would like to travel to school, many children of secondary school age will say that they would like to cycle. It is certainly a means of transport which keeps people fit and healthy. If you and your child decide that cycling to school is a good, safe option, you might like to discuss together the following points:

- Has the child received suitable training to ride on the road?
- Is their bike properly maintained and will they wear a cycle helmet?
- How visible is the child and the bike? (Consider the use of lights, reflective clothing and/or rucksack covers.)
- Where will the bike be stored at school?
(It would be worth asking the school if they have a cycling to school policy or contract. Many secondary schools have invested in improved cycle storage in the past few years, and some will issue permits to enable pupils to use this.)
- Which would be the safer cycling route to school?
(A safer cycling route to school is specific to the area and the child. A safer route for one child may not be the safer route for another. This will depend upon the child's age, confidence, bike handling skills, knowledge of the local area and the time that they need to travel.)

When deciding on the safer route to school, you might both like to consider:

- Are there designated cycle tracks/routes available?
- What is the volume of traffic and what are the traffic speed limits?
- How many junctions are there?
- How many left versus right turns will need to be made?
- Is the route well lit during the winter months?
- Will the child be cycling on his or her own, or will others be taking the same route?
- Are there places along the way (shops or friends houses) where they can stop if feeling unsafe?
- Is there anything that worries them about cycling to school?

Why not speak to your child's new school about how they support pupils who cycle to school?

Good quality cycle instruction is essential and Kent Highway Services' Road Safety Team offer cycle instruction to all year 6 pupils in the County. For more information please contact your child's school or Kent Highway Services on

08458 247 800.

See also

<http://www.kent.gov.uk/transport-and-streets/roadsafety/cycling-safety/>





Using Public Transport

The move to secondary school quite often involves travelling further distances, so it is not always possible to choose an active form of travel, such as cycling or walking. It is the natural time to consider the possibility of more independent travel by public transport, particularly as many pupils will receive bus or train passes for travel to and from school. If your child applies for a Kent Freedom Pass, he or she can also use this on registered bus services at evenings and weekends. If your child has not previously used public transport on his or her own, these are points you might like to discuss:

- Where is the bus stop or the train station?
- What is the number of the bus they need to catch?
- Which platform does their train leave from?
- How do they buy a ticket, if they need to?
- What time does the train/ bus leave in the morning and in the afternoon?
- Where should they cross the road after getting off a bus?
- What should they do if the bus or train is late or cancelled?
- Can they read a bus or train timetable?
- Who can they ask for information?
- How they should behave on the bus or the train.
- Which is the safer route to walk to and from the bus stop or the station?
- Do they have any concerns about travelling by public transport? (Your child might appreciate a practice journey with you by public transport before the start of their first term.)

For information on public transport services your child can use to get to their secondary school, and access to a journey planner, go to:

<http://www.11-19travel.info>

For information about the Kent Freedom Pass, ask for a leaflet and application form from your child's new secondary school, or go to:

<http://www.kent.gov.uk/kentfreedompass>



General preparation for safe journeys

When children start to become more independent while travelling to school, parents naturally have concerns regarding their personal safety. They worry about where their child is going and what time they will be home, and are troubled by “stranger danger”, although the actual risk of abduction is low.

The points below might be useful for you to consider with your child, so that both of you can minimise risks:

Does your child

- ... have money, plus some for emergencies?
- ... know that listening to music through headphones can be dangerous when walking, and certainly when trying to cross roads?



- ... have a mobile phone, or phone card which they know how to use?
(remember that mobile phones can be targets for thieves)
- ... have the right equipment or high visibility clothing for their journey?
- ... have places along the way (shops or friends houses) where they can stop if feeling unsafe?
- ... know where to go if they forget their door key?

Do you

- ... know who your child is with?
- ... know where he or she is going and how he or she is getting there?
- ... know how / when you expect him or her to get home?
- ... have an updated list of the phone numbers of your child's friends
(including surnames, not just first names or nicknames)



Photo Credit: J Bewley/Sustrans



Travelling by car

Sometimes this is the only option for getting to school. However, it is possible to look at ways of doing this in a safe and environmentally friendly way. You might like to discuss the following options with your child:

Car sharing with other children who live in the same area, either on an informal basis or through [www.kent.gov.uk/journeyshare](http://www.kent.gov.uk/journeysshare)

Dropping off or parking at a distance from the school to avoid congestion in the immediate area around the school.

Always observing the parking restrictions outside the school (zigzags, single and double yellow lines) – these are there to keep your child safe.

Also remember that wearing a seat belt can be a life saver.



Photo Credit: David Rose/Sustrans

General information

One of Kent County Council's main aims is to tackle congestion, particularly on the school run, and would like children travelling to school to find their way using an active, healthy means of transport whenever possible. Download our Sustainable Travel to School Strategy from:

<http://www.kent.gov.uk/publications/transport-and-streets/school-strategy.htm>

Most Kent secondary schools now have School Travel Plans. In this document, the school sets out what it will do to encourage pupils and staff to travel in environmentally friendly and active ways. You might like to ask the headteacher of your child's new school about this, or take a look at the school's Safer Travel to School information on the Kent Schools Database:

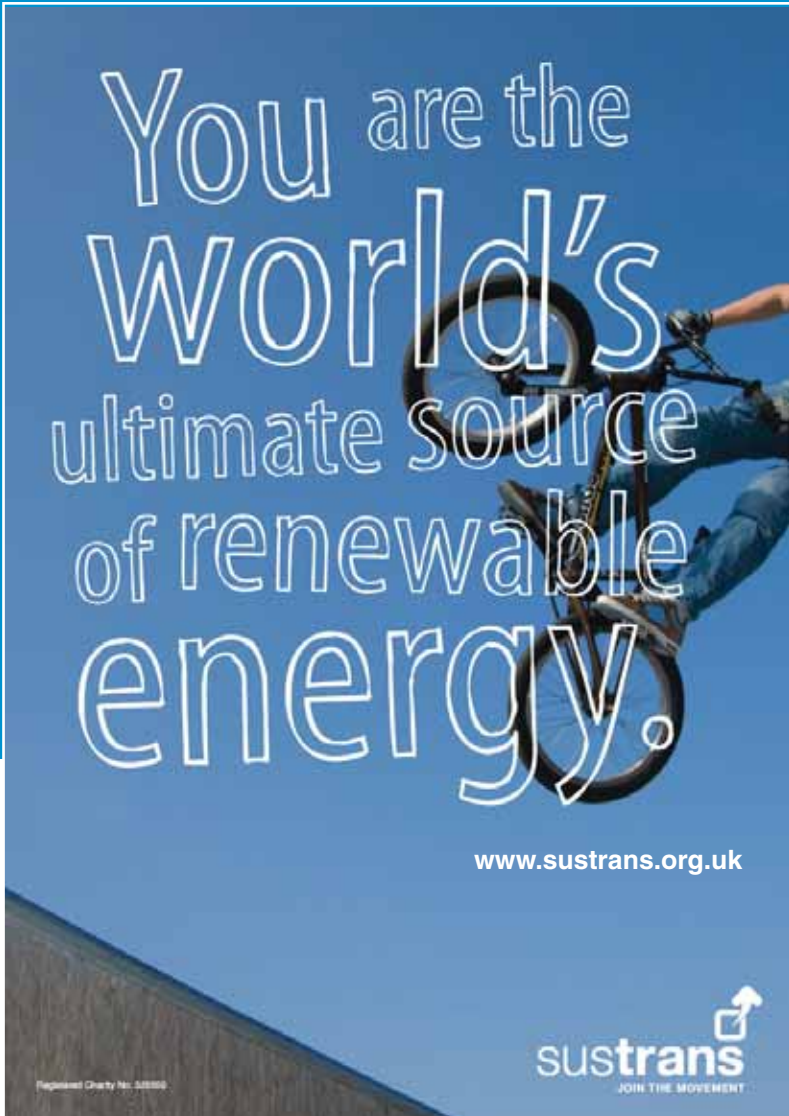
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If you have not already received the two booklets that contain information about getting to school: "Home to School Transport" and "Admission to Secondary School in Kent", these can also be downloaded from the county's website:

<http://www.kent.gov.uk/publications/education-and-learning/home-to-school-transport.htm>

<http://www.kent.gov.uk/publications/education-and-learning/admission-to-secondary-school-2009-booklet.htm>

For more details please contact Kent Highway Services on **08458 247 800**.



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