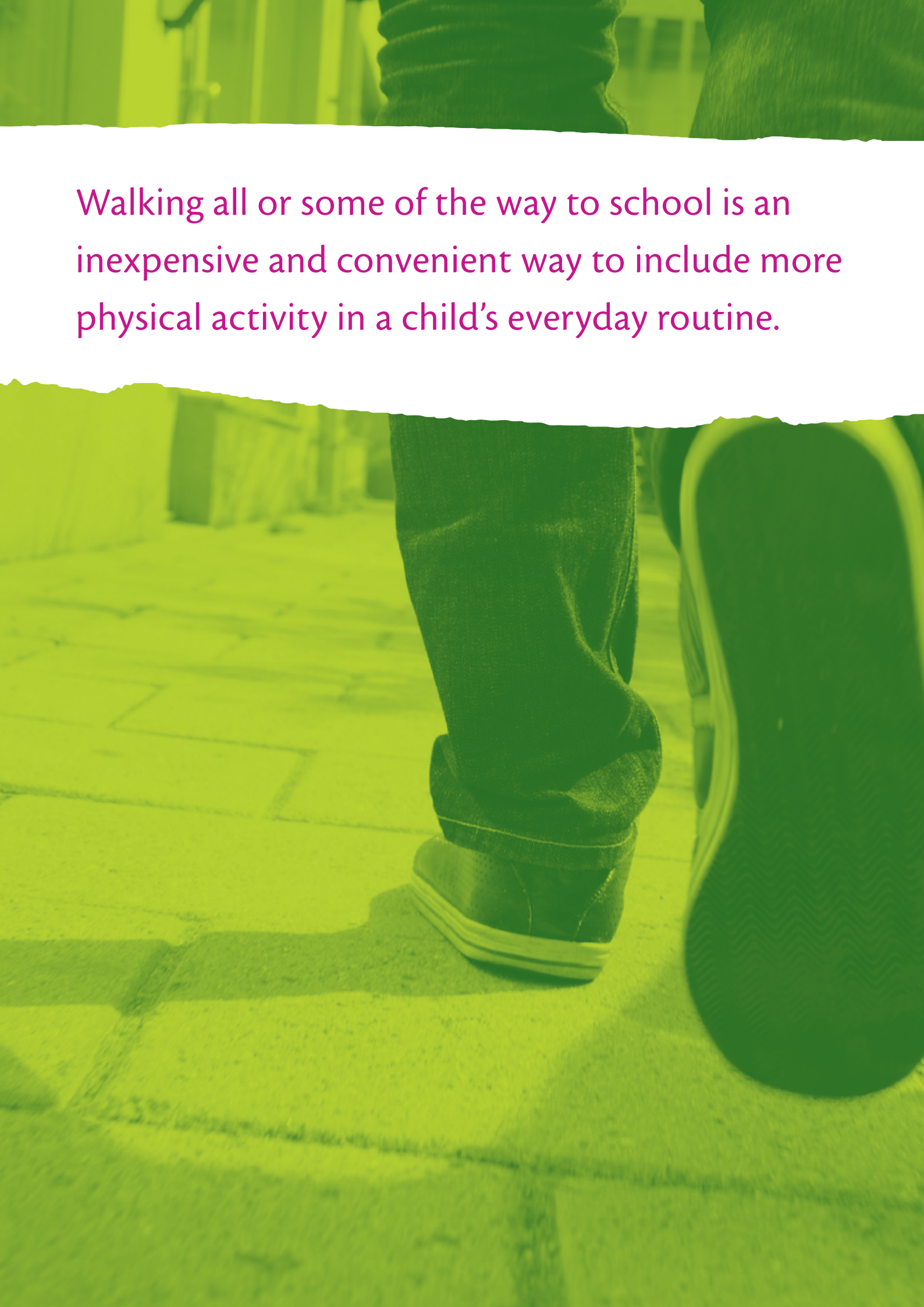




Get your school walking

a guide to promoting walking for schools

A photograph of a person walking on a sidewalk, with a focus on their legs and feet. The person is wearing dark blue jeans and black sneakers with white soles. The sidewalk is made of light-colored concrete slabs. The background is slightly blurred, showing a street and some buildings. The image has a white torn-paper effect at the top and bottom edges.

Walking all or some of the way to school is an inexpensive and convenient way to include more physical activity in a child's everyday routine.



Introduction

Figures show that fewer children walk to school nowadays than a generation ago⁽¹⁾. Walking all or some of the way to school is an inexpensive and convenient way to include more physical activity in a child's everyday routine.

The National Guidelines on Physical Activity for Ireland recommend that children and young people should be active for at least 60 minutes a day every day⁽²⁾. The evidence is that four out of five children are not sufficiently active for health benefits⁽³⁾. On average, children spend almost half of their day in the school environment. School breaks and PE classes do not provide enough opportunities for physical activity for a growing child. One way to increase levels of physical activity is to incorporate it into the child's daily commute to school.

Get your school walking – a guide to promoting walking for schools, has been developed to assist school communities – teachers, parents and students – create a school environment that supports and promotes walking. The resource provides information on the benefits of walking, a six step guide for promoting walking in schools, examples of walking initiatives and a range of useful tools to help you implement a walking initiative in your school. You will find the toolkit online at www.healthpromotion.ie or www.getirelandactive.ie

Benefits of walking to school

Walking to school is beneficial for children, the whole school community and the environment. Children who walk some or all of the way to school will experience more opportunities to be:

- **active,**
- **social – meet friends and other children,**
- **independent, and**
- **part of their community.**

Children also experience increased levels of confidence and concentration. By increasing the amount of physical activity, there are also many health benefits including:

- more energy,
- less stress and anxiety,
- greater sense of well-being,
- improved muscle tone and bone strength, and
- reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer, as adults.



The evidence is that increasing the levels of physical activity in children is an effective way to help manage weight and prevent overweight in children⁽⁴⁾.

The National Guidelines for Physical Activity in Ireland also recommend that adults are physically active for at least 30 minutes a day five days a week. By encouraging children to walk to school, parents and carers also have an opportunity to be more physically active.

Benefits to the environment and wider school community include:

- reduces the level of traffic around school gates and surrounding areas, making it safer for all to get to the school;
- reduces the level of traffic in general which results in less air pollution;
- gives the opportunity to teach road safety skills; and
- helps children and their families become more familiar with the school neighbourhood.

References

1. Central Statistics Office, (2006) Census of Population Volume 12: Travel to work, school and college.
2. Department of Health and Children, Health Service Executive (2009) The National Physical Activity Guidelines for Ireland
3. Nic Gabhainn S, Kelly C, Molcho M. 2007 The Irish Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Study 2006. Health Promotion Research Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway
4. McMasters C (2006) National guidelines for community based practitioners on prevention and management of childhood overweight and obesity. HSE



Six steps to promote walking in school

The six steps outlined in this section will help you develop successful school walking initiatives.



Step 1: Establish support

Successful initiatives of any form generally have the support and participation of the whole school and local community. It is important from the outset to have the commitment of the school principal, staff, board of management, parents and pupils.

Many local agencies and organisations such as Local Authorities (Town and County Councils), Health Service Executive (Health Promotion Departments), Local Sports Partnerships, the Gardaí and An Taisce (Green Schools) have an interest in supporting walking to school type initiatives. Check with your Local Authority to see if they have a Smarter Travel Officer or Road Safety and Education Officer, this person is usually responsible for the development and promotion of school travel. Involving public officials and other community leaders, such as the mayor and county/city council members can also be beneficial. Walk to School celebrations and events can give them the opportunity to publicly show their support for health, environment and safety initiatives. You may also need their assistance if you want to deal with issues such as repairs to footpaths or safe road crossings. Local businesses may also be willing to sponsor walking events or initiatives by providing refreshments, high visibility vests or small gifts for participants.



Step 2:

Set up a working group

Schools involved in the HSE Health Promoting Schools programme, An Taisce Green Schools programme or the Department of Education Active School Flag can use the working groups set up for these. Otherwise you will need to set up a working group. The working group should include representatives from:

- school staff (committed to active travel),
- pupils (student council), and
- parents (parents association).

Others who may be part of your working group, or may be able to assist with your plans include:

- An Garda Síochána,
- Smarter Travel Officer (Local Authority),
- Road Safety Officer (Local Authority),
- Physical Activity Health Promotion Officer, HSE,
- Schools Health Promotion Officer, HSE,
- Local Sports Partnership,
- nearby residents associations, and
- local businesses.

Some questions the working group should ask themselves from the beginning are:

- How many people and who will sit on the group?
- Who will be the chairperson or coordinator?
- How often will the working group meet up?
- Where will the group meet?
- Who will take minutes of each meeting?

For information on Health Promoting Schools contact your local Health Promotion Department - contact details on **www.hse.ie**

For information on the Green Schools, visit **www.greenschools.ie**

For information on the Active School Flag, visit **www.activeschoolflag.ie**

For information on Smarter Travel, visit **www.smartertravel.ie**



Step 3:

Assess current walking situation

The first task of the working group is to assess the current walking situation. A whole school travel survey can be a great way to establish current methods of travel to school and to invite comments and suggestions from pupils and parents. Focus groups, use of a suggestion box, one to one discussions and discussions with existing groups such as parents and student councils can also be useful. Feedback from these methods can be used to decide the most appropriate way to get your school walking.

See *Toolkit for: Pupil/parent travel questionnaire*

Step 4:

Develop a walking plan

The working group are responsible for developing the walking plan. It should be specific, focused and realistic.

A school walking plan:

- provides a focus and framework for the group to work from,
- identifies priorities and key activities,
- sets realistic goals and time frames, and
- identifies resources (those already available and others required),

A good plan provides sound direction for decision-making and a solid base for evaluation. It should address the following areas:

- objectives,
- proposed activity,
- resources required,
- list of tasks,
- responsibility,
- evaluation, and
- timeframe.



Elements of a school walking plan

Element	Example
Objectives Clear objectives help the working group have sense of focus and purpose. Use information gathered through the walkability survey and other assessments to help create your objectives.	Current situation is that 12% of pupils currently walk to school; an objective may be to increase that number to 15% by the end of the current school year.
Proposed activities What activities will you run to help you achieve your objective/s.	Organise a walk to school day each week for the month of October (WOW – Walk on Wednesday).
Resources required Physical resources: what and where are the physical resources we can use. People: who are the people that can help with your activity.	Physical resources: Identify local car parks or parking areas that could be used for people to Park & Stride or walk. Is there access to high visibility vests for each pupil and adult? People: Parents, Teachers, Pupils, Local Gardaí, School Traffic Warden.
List of tasks How will you carryout your proposed activities.	Send information letter/leaflet to parents informing them of school plans and inviting them to take part if possible. Use a wall chart in each class to track how many walk to school each week.
Responsibility Individuals on the working group need to be assigned specific tasks to ensure the work gets done.	Principal – Inform Gardaí of walking plans, days and routes. Sue Power – write information letter for parents, give to school secretary. Jim Smith – ask local supermarket to provide fruit and water for the walk.
Evaluation Evaluation tells us if activities are having the desired effect, if we are achieving our objectives. It will also inform future programmes. Evaluation should be built into your plan from the start.	Review class wall charts. Record numbers of children and parents who take part in initiatives. Questionnaires/surveys or discussion groups with the pupils, parents and school staff to discuss what worked well, what could be changed, recommendations for the future.
Timeframe Set out how much time is available, deadlines etc.	WOW – every Wednesday beginning 14 October for 8 weeks. Send letter to parents on Monday 5 October.

See *Toolkit for: School Walking plan template*



Step 5:

Implement the plan

This is where you put the plan into action and monitor its progress. It is important to keep the whole school community engaged by raising awareness and keeping people informed. Some of the different methods which can be used would be:

- information booklets and leaflets,
- banners or posters,
- information on school noticeboard, newsletter or website,
- staff training day,
- parent and staff meetings,
- make a short presentation to parents, staff and pupils, or
- have an official launch day.

Step 6:

Evaluate

It is important that once you have implemented the plan you keep track of what is going on and evaluate. Evaluation is crucial to ensure that the planned activities are having the desired effect. It also helps to inform future programmes. Ensure evaluation is built in from the start. The following questions can be useful when thinking about evaluation:

- What do we hope to achieve?
- How will we measure if we have achieved it?

Some questions the working group should ask themselves regularly when implementing the initiative are:

- What progress have we made?
- What is working well?
- What needs to be erased or changed?
- How can we overcome these issues?
- Are we gathering and recording important data and information?
- Have we still got support from the staff, parents and pupils?

See *toolkit for:* **Evaluation questionnaire and letter**



Children from the Holy Cross Mercy National School in Killarney participating in the Active Travel programme.



Photograph by Dominic Walsh www.dwalshphoto.ie



Other issues to consider

When introducing any change, you will have to address the reasons people give for not making the change.

Some reasons for not walking	Suggested solution
Not enough time	<p>For one week record the time it takes to get to school using the car (include time spent getting the children into the car, sitting in traffic jams, finding parking near the school).</p> <p>For one week record the time it takes to get to school walking.</p> <p>Compare the weeks.</p>
The distance between school and home is too far to walk	<p>Drive part of the way to school, park up and walk the rest of the way (Park & Stride).</p>
Roads are too busy or not adequate for walking	<p>Up to 80% of traffic on the roads around schools is due to parents dropping and collecting children in cars.</p> <p>Consider:</p> <p>Designated safe drop off or parking stations away from the school.</p> <p>Carry out a walkability survey.</p> <p>Work with local authority to assess the safest route to use and identify potential improvements.</p>
Children have little road safety skills	<p>Use the resources outlined on page 10 to build road safety skills of the children.</p>
Bad weather	<p>Dress for the weather.</p> <p>Welly boots and water-proof coats for rain.</p> <p>Walk faster to warm up in cold weather.</p>
Heavy school bags	<p>Provide space in the school to store sports gear and books not needed for homework.</p>



Safety

Safety is an important consideration in any school initiative. While it is parent's responsibility to teach their children the safety skills for walking to school, schools can help promote safety by teaching the safe cross code.

- **Check with your Local Authority** – many have Road Safety and Education Officers that offer road safety training to schools.
- **Check with your local Gardaí** – they can provide information on road safety and may become involved with your walking initiative.
- **Contact the Road Safety Authority** – they work with schools to promote road safety and provide safety training. They also have a range of leaflets, DVDs and CDs such as 'Going to School Safely' leaflet and the 'Safe Cross Code' CD, and a website www.safetoschool.ie

Postal address:

Road Safety Authority, Moy Valley Business Park,
Primrose Hill, Ballina, Co. Mayo

www.rsa.ie

Phone: 096 25000 or Lo-call 1890 50 60 80

Traffic management

It has been found that when the speed at which vehicles travel is reduced through traffic calming measures people consider it safer to walk or cycle on that road. Local authorities use traffic management plans to reduce vehicle speed. These can be used as part of a Safer Routes to School scheme. There are a wide range of measures that can help to reduce traffic speed, including:

- Pedestrian crossing such as Zebra/Pelican/Toucan/Puffin.
- Traffic calming measures such as:
 - gateway features,
 - build outs,
 - mini traffic islands,
 - speed humps,
 - speed cushions,
 - 30 kmph zones,
 - speed cameras,
 - pedestrianisation,
 - road surface and white lining, or
 - cycle lanes.

You will need to work with your Local Authority or local city/county councilors to decide which measures would benefit your school most and have them put in place.



Examples of walking initiatives

There are a number of things you can do to encourage your school (pupils, teachers and parents) to walk more. These include:

- Walkability survey
- WOW Days (Walk Once a Week or Walk on Wednesdays)
- Walk the World challenge
- Park & Stride
- Walking School Bus
- International Walk to School month – October
- Golden Boot Challenge
- Step It Out at School – 10,000 step challenge
- Local walking routes and activities
- School walking trail

See the toolkit for resources to help you:

Walkability survey / Record card / Certificates

Walkability survey

A Walkability survey is a good starting point for planning a school walking initiative. Ask pupils to complete a survey of their route to school. Information from the survey will be valuable when planning activities such as Park & Stride, Walking School Bus or WOW days. It will also help highlight safety and other issues along routes to your school and can be used to lobby for improvements with your local council.

WOW days

Walk Once a Week or Walk On Wednesdays encourages pupils and teachers to walk to school and/or home at least once a week. This scheme can be run for a particular period of time in the school calendar such as a term, once a month or on a continuous basis throughout the year. You can offer children incentives such as a classroom wall chart or record card to keep track of how many WOW days they take part in, badges or certificates can be awarded when they complete a certain number. Other incentives include having refreshments or fruit in the mornings for those that walk on WOW days.

WOW originated in the UK - for more information log on to www.walktoschool.org.uk



Walk the World challenge

The Walk the World challenge encourages pupils to walk while also teaching subjects such as geography and mathematics.

To start, pupils work out roughly how far their walk to school is. The following chart can be helpful:

Kilometers	Miles	Fast Pace	Moderate/Brisk Pace	Easy Pace
1	0.62	7 min	10 min	12.5 min
2	1.24	14 min	20 min	25 min
3	1.86	21 min	30 min	37.5 min
4	2.48	28 min	40 min	50 min
5	3.11	35 min	50 min	62.5 min
6	3.73	42 min	60 min	75 min

For example, a pupil whose walk to school takes them 10 minutes (walking at a brisk pace) lives roughly 1 km from the school.

Next you select a journey, for example Ireland to England, decide on the route you will take and how long it is. Pupils keep a record of how much they walk each week. At the end of the week all the totals are added together and a marker on the map is moved roughly that distance.

As you move along the journey pupils can learn about the different countries and cultures. For larger journeys, such as Ireland to Australia, why not make it a whole school challenge!

A few to try:

Journey	Kilometers	Miles
Malin Head to Mizen head (Donegal to Cork)	620	385
Full Coastline of Ireland	5631	3,500
Ireland to England (Dublin to London)	462.60	287.46
Ireland to Italy (Dublin to Rome)	1885	1171
Ireland to France (Dublin to Paris)	776.83	482.72
Ireland to Australia	15,696	9,753



Park & Stride

Park & Stride works in a similar way to the Park & Ride schemes in many larger towns and cities. Parents who normally drive their children to school are encouraged to park away from the school gate (usually in a designated area) and walk with, or allow their children to walk, the last part of the journey to school. Park & Stride can be a way of involving the whole school in WOW, in particular those who live more than a reasonable walking distance from the school, or those whose parents drive to work after dropping children at school.

The following are some good sites for Park & Stride stations:

- Shop car parks,
- Public car parks,
- Church/community hall car parks, or
- Quiet stretches of road, away from the school, which will not disturb local residents.

You will need to get permission of owners/managers and talk to local residents who may be affected. Try to identify more than one site to avoid further congestion.

Walking School Bus

A Walking School Bus involves adult volunteers walking children along a set route to school. There should be at least two adults with each group of approximately 12 to 15 children. Children are picked up at agreed stops along the route at set times. The walking bus can be a great way for parents to share the responsibility of the school run while allowing children, who would usually be driven to school, the opportunity to walk.

For more information on how to set up a walking school bus, download a copy of Waterford Sports Partnerships “Walking School Bus” Start Up Pack from www.waterfordsportspartnership.ie/walking

October = International Walk to School Month

October is International Walk to School Month. Use this time to start your Walk to School Programme or to promote the idea of walking to school. Each year over 42 countries and millions of walkers take part in this event which originated in the UK in 1994.

Some of the goals of International Walk to School Month include:

- Encouraging physical activity by teaching children the skills to walk safely, how to identify safe routes to school and the benefits of walking.
- Raising awareness of how walkable a community is and where improvements can be made.
- Raising concern for the environment.
- Reducing traffic congestion, pollution and speed near schools.
- Sharing valuable time with local community leaders, parents and children.

For more information and activity ideas for International Walk to School Month log on to www.iwalktoschool.org



Golden Boot challenge

Pupils score points when they walk to school. Points are recorded on a class wall chart. Totals for each week are added up and at the end of a set period of time the class or group with the most points wins the Golden Boot. The challenge can be run every week, month or term. It can be run across the whole school or in one class. In some schools where the challenge is run over a number of weeks, each pupil in the winning class gets a chance to bring home the Golden Boot for a night.

Step it out at school challenge

The Step it Out at School challenge is mainly for pupils from 5th class and 6th class in primary schools, post primary students and teachers. Pupils record the number of steps they take each day using a step counter. Over a four-week period, pupils try to increase the number of steps they take. Their target number of steps should be at least 10,000 a day by the end of the four weeks. Contact your local Health Promotion office or the Irish Heart Foundation to help organise your Step Challenge. Step counters may be available on loan.

Local walking routes and activities

Get the school involved in walking activities/festivals organised by outside agencies or the local community, for example, walk for “World Heart Day” with the Irish Heart Foundation and National Trails day. Identify local walking routes and use them for nature trips or to teach geography and history. Local walking routes may include Irish Heart Foundation’s Sli na Slainte routes or Historical trails. The school can also organise family walking days on local walking routes which can help to promote walking as well as raise funds for the school.

School walking trail

Map out a walking trail on the grounds of the school or within the school itself. Calculate the distance of the trail - place markers or posters along the route to highlight it and the distance (kilometers, meters or steps). A map of the route with information on the distance, and how long it takes to complete, should be clearly shown at the starting point.

If you have access to a metal or woodwork class why not see if they can produce the signs, art students could also help to design them. Pupils and staff should be encouraged to use the trail as often as possible, especially at break times.

Some points to consider:

- What route will you use and where will be the start and finish points?
- How do you want to calculate the distance? e.g. steps, kilometers etc.
- Time – how long does it take to complete the walk? e.g. 10 –15 minutes.



To keep your school and working group motivated why not try some of the following suggestions:

- **Well-earned publicity:** Ask your local media and press to come along to some of your walking events to give your school some well-deserved publicity. If you plan your event to coincide with National Walk to School Day or International Walk to School month you may get more coverage.
- **Make it fun:** Whatever type of walking event you are planning always ensure there is an overriding FUN element for pupils and volunteers alike. You can do this by having a theme. Some ideas include fancy dress, no uniform day, bad hair days, Santa hats for Christmas, World Book day or Chinese New Year.
- **Points:** Points collected on record cards could lead to prizes of stickers, high visibility jackets or reflective slap straps.
- **Certificates:** Present certificates at the end of school term or school year to those who made great efforts to walk to school and participate in walking events throughout the school year.
- **School newsletter and/or website:** Showcase events in your school newsletter or website, include photographs.



Children from the Holy Cross Mercy National School in Killarney participating in the Active Travel programme.

Photograph by Dominic Walsh www.dwalshphoto.ie



Useful Websites:

www.getirelandactive.ie

This is a dedicated website for physical activity information including the benefits of being active, how to get started, tips to stay motivated and a comprehensive resource section. You can use the site to search for physical activities in your area.

www.healthpromotion.ie

Provides information on lifestyle topics such as physical activity, alcohol/drugs, smoking, mental health etc. Resources for the various health topics are available to order online.

www.irishheart.ie

The Irish Heart Foundation is the national charity fighting stroke and heart disease. The website has a section dedicated to Slí na Sláinte community walking routes.

www.irishsportscouncil.ie

The Irish Sports Council aims to plan, lead and co-ordinate the sustainable development of competitive and recreational sport in Ireland. This website provides a link to your Local Sports Partnership.

www.greenschools.ie

Green-Schools is an international environmental education programme and award scheme that promotes and acknowledges long-term, whole-school action for the environment.

A number of travel resources can be downloaded such as pictures and tasks to do in class.

www.activeschoolflag.ie

The Active School Flag was launched by the Department of Education in 2009. It is a non-competitive initiative which seeks to recognise schools (both primary and post primary) that provide quality PE, co-curricular physical activity and sports programmes for their students.

www.smartertravel.ie

Provides useful information about the Government's commitment to sustainable travel across various sectors including workplace, schools and communities.

www.iwalktoschool.org

This site offers information about the importance of the International Walk to School event, who's walking around the world and how you can get involved.



www.discoverireland.ie/Things-To-Do/Activities-and-Adventure/Walking-and-Hiking/Find-a-Walk

- Selected day walks
- Looped walks
- Waymarked walking trails

www.coillteoutdoors.ie

Coillte, Ireland's leading forestry company has over 150 recreation sites around the country. Click on a county on the online map of Ireland for a list of these recreation sites where you will find full details of trails and facilities with downloadable maps.

www.irishtrails.ie

- Cycling - Off Road: low level or easy cycling trails (suitable for family groups)
- Cycling - On Road: waymarked cycling routes on public roads.
- Mountain Biking Trails: technical or waymarked trails suitable for mountain biking only.
- Greenways: trails that are developed for both walking and cycling.



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www.getirelandactive.ie