



# THE VIEW FROM THE SCHOOL RUN

Parent and carer perspectives on the journey to school



# CONTENTS

|                                          |    |
|------------------------------------------|----|
| <u>Foreword from Mat MacDonald</u>       | 3  |
| <u>Executive summary</u>                 | 4  |
| <u>Key findings</u>                      | 4  |
| <u>Introduction</u>                      | 5  |
| <u>Travel to school</u>                  | 6  |
| <u>Main motivators for active travel</u> | 6  |
| <u>Barriers to walking and wheeling</u>  | 7  |
| <u>What change is needed?</u>            | 8  |
| <u>Park and Stride</u>                   | 9  |
| <u>Accessibility and inclusion</u>       | 10 |
| <u>Recommendations</u>                   | 10 |
| <u>Conclusion</u>                        | 11 |

## Foreword from Mat MacDonald, West Midlands Road Safety Commissioner



“

Our streets should be safe spaces for children to socialise, play and travel. Yet too often we are falling grimly short of that entry level standard for liveable communities, with an average of nearly seven children killed or seriously injured in traffic collisions across Great Britain every single day.

These incidents cause unthinkable devastation for everyone who experiences them, and no parent or carer lives free of the anxiety they create.

That fear fuels a vicious spiral: more journeys being taken in private vehicles, more danger for people outside of them, and the simple pleasure of walking together as a family seeming less attractive for everyone.

Sometimes the task of breaking this cycle can seem almost insurmountable. But as the ethos of Living Streets teaches us all, the longest journey starts with the first few feet. Understanding and articulating the concerns shared by parents and carers about their journeys to school is a vital part of challenging the unacceptable dangers facing our kids as they travel to and from their education every day.

It shows all of us who have any sway over the layout and regulation of public space where we're getting it wrong, and what we can do to make it right. Because there's no better representation of who we are and what we value as a society than the look and feel of our streets.

So let's listen closely to what parents and carers are telling us, to help create a streetscape that truly reflects what matters. Where children can be safe, where sustainable travel is accessible to all, and where walking or wheeling to school with those you love is a source of joy rather than fear.

”

## Executive summary

This report presents findings from a survey of 1,634 parents and carers representing 120 local authorities across the UK. The survey explored how families travel to school, the factors influencing travel choices, barriers to active travel and priorities for improving the school journey. It gives us a snapshot of how families across the UK experience the school run.

The findings suggest that parents recognise a wide range of benefits associated with active travel. Health and wellbeing emerged as the strongest motivation, while spending time outdoors, supporting children's independence and opportunities for family connection were also frequently cited.

Despite these benefits, concerns relating to traffic, parking and road safety continue to shape travel choices. Parents consistently identified traffic volumes, pavement parking and unsafe crossing points as significant barriers to walking and wheeling.

Respondents prioritised practical improvements that would create safer and more accessible routes to school. There was also evidence of interest in alternatives such as 'Park and Stride', suggesting that many families may be willing to reduce their reliance on car travel if suitable options are available.

The survey was distributed through our projects, programmes and public communications channels, during the 25/26 academic year.

## Key findings

**44%**

respondents currently walk/wheel to school.



Health and wellbeing are the strongest motivations for active travel (19%).



**41%**

respondents rated pavement parking as the biggest barrier to walking to school.



Heavy traffic (39%) and crossing safety (32%) are also significant challenges.



Accessibility concerns are also frequently linked to pavement parking and the condition of walking infrastructure.

Parents prioritise improvements that make journeys safer and easier.



Interest in Park and Stride suggests opportunities to reduce school gate congestion.



## Introduction

The journey to school plays an important role in children's health, wellbeing and independence. Active travel can contribute to daily physical activity, provide opportunities for social interaction and help children develop confidence in their local environment.

However, travel choices are influenced by a wide range of factors, including distance, safety, accessibility, family circumstances and the quality of local infrastructure.

Understanding these factors is important for schools, local authorities and transport planners seeking to support active travel.

This report explores the experiences and perspectives of parents and carers across the UK and highlights key themes emerging from the survey.

It is based on 1,634 parent and carer responses, representing 120 local authorities across the UK.



## Travel to school



Walking was the most commonly reported mode of travel among respondents, demonstrating that active travel already forms an important part of many families' daily routines, with nearly half of respondents (44%) walking or wheeling with their child/ren to nursery or school. It is noteworthy that this is below the national average (51%).

However, a substantial proportion of respondents reported travelling by car at 22%. The findings suggest that travel choices are often shaped by practical considerations, including the distance to school, work commitments, childcare responsibilities and perceptions of safety.

A number of parents described balancing multiple commitments during the morning journey, including travelling onwards to work, accompanying younger children and managing multiple school drop-offs. These responses suggest that decisions about travel are not determined solely by attitudes towards active travel, but also by the wider realities of family life.

The findings highlight the importance of understanding travel behaviour within its broader context. While many families already walk, others face barriers (real or perceived) that may limit their ability to do so consistently.

## Main motivators for active travel

Parents identified a broad range of benefits associated with active travel. Health and wellbeing emerged as the strongest motivation (19%), with respondents frequently describing the value of physical activity, fresh air and improved mental wellbeing. Many parents viewed the school journey as an opportunity to contribute positively to both their own health and that of their children.

Family connection was another prominent theme (11%). Parents highlighted opportunities to spend time together before the school day begins, describing the journey as a chance to talk, connect and prepare children for the day ahead.

Parents also identified active travel as an important mechanism for supporting children's independence. Opportunities to build confidence, develop road safety awareness and socialise with friends were commonly mentioned.

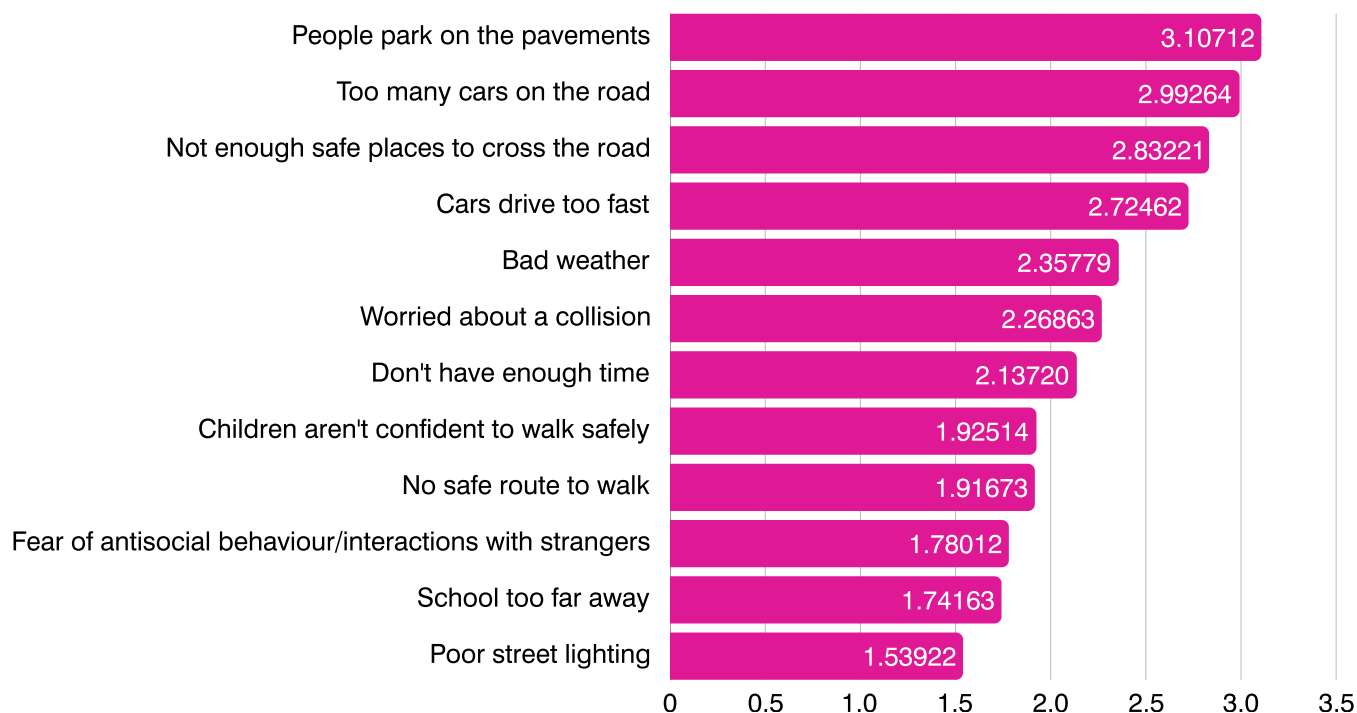
Environmental considerations featured throughout the responses, although they were generally discussed alongside personal and family benefits rather than in isolation.

Taken together, the findings suggest that active travel is valued for a combination of health, social and environmental reasons. For many families, the decision to walk or wheel reflects a desire to support wellbeing and quality of life, as well as a practical means of transport.

## Barriers to walking and wheeling

### Perceived severity of walking barriers (average)

1 = not a barrier, 5 = major barrier



Although many respondents recognised the benefits of active travel, several recurring barriers were identified.

Traffic-related concerns were among the most frequently reported challenges. Parents described worries about vehicle speed, congestion and the volume of traffic around schools, particularly during peak drop-off and collection times. Safety concerns often centred on crossing roads. Respondents highlighted difficulties crossing busy routes, a lack of controlled crossings and concerns about driver behaviour.

Pavement parking emerged as a particularly common issue. Many parents described situations where parked vehicles reduced visibility, obstructed footways or forced pedestrians into the carriageway. These concerns were frequently linked to the safety of children and the accessibility of routes for people using wheelchairs, mobility aids or pushchairs.

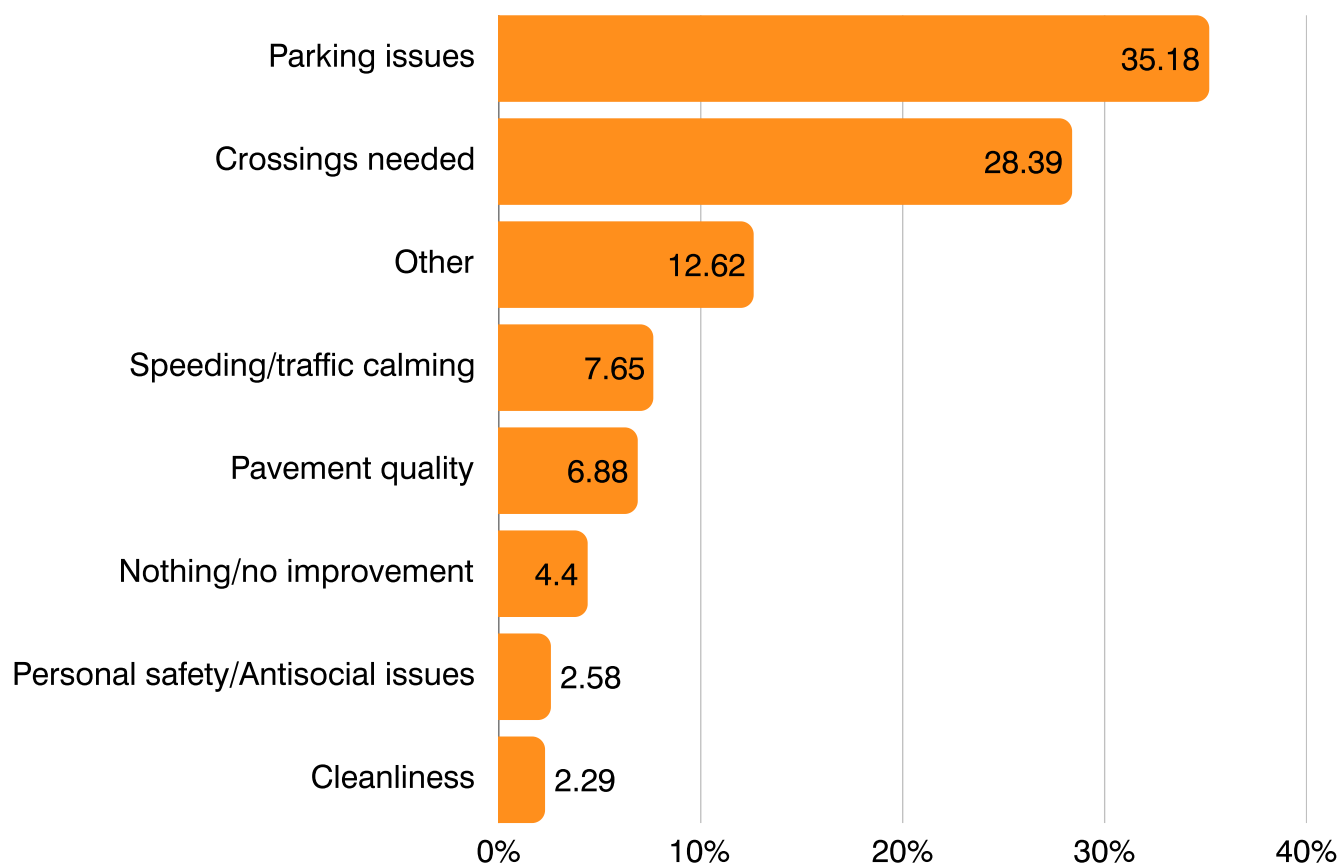
Cars parked on the pavement often force us into the road with the pushchair.

Distance also influenced travel choices. Some respondents reported that the journey to school was too long to walk regularly, while others cited time pressures associated with work and family commitments. The findings suggest that while active travel is often viewed positively, concerns relating to safety, convenience and accessibility continue to influence behaviour.

## What change is needed?

Parents consistently prioritised practical improvements that would make journeys safer and easier.

### Top community priorities for improvement



Parking was among the most frequently requested. Many respondents felt that poor parking behaviour contributes to congestion, reduces visibility and creates additional safety risks for pedestrians.

Safety-related measures also emerged as a significant concern. Respondents highlighted the importance of safer crossing points, reduced vehicle speeds and measures to address dangerous driving around schools.

Parents also expressed support for improvements to walking and wheeling infrastructure, including wider pavements, better maintenance and routes that are easier to navigate with wheelchairs and pushchairs.

Overall, the findings suggest that parents are seeking practical changes that make walking and wheeling to school feel safer, more convenient and more accessible.

## Park and Stride



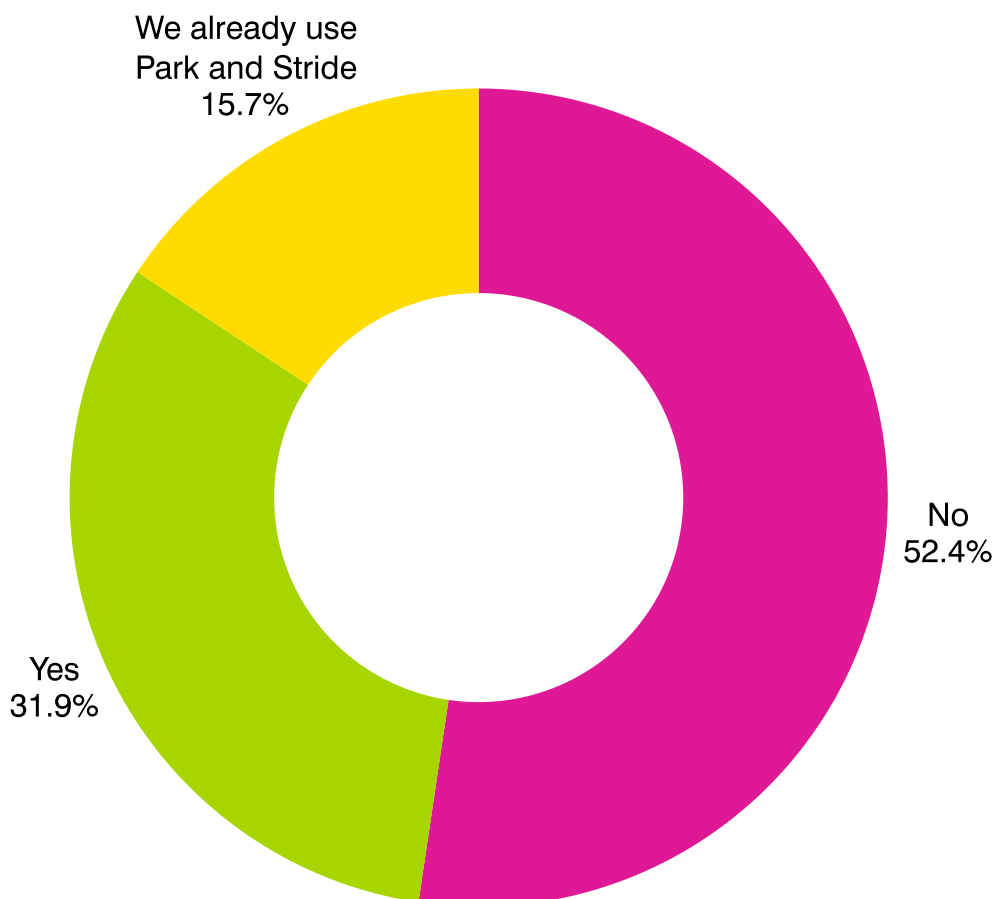
The survey identified significant interest in Park and Stride (whereby families park their car at least ten minutes away from school and walk the final distance). Many respondents indicated that they already use Park and Stride or would consider doing so if suitable facilities were available.

This suggests that some families are willing to reduce the distance travelled by car if alternative arrangements can be accommodated within daily routines.

The findings indicate that Park and Stride may provide a useful option for families who are unable to walk/wheel the entire journey.

While the approach is unlikely to meet the needs of all families, the level of interest suggests that it may form part of a wider package of measures aimed at reducing congestion around schools.

### Interest in Park and Stride



## Accessibility and inclusion

Accessibility emerged as a consistent theme throughout the survey. Parents described a range of challenges relating to pavement conditions, pavement parking, dropped kerbs and physical obstacles within the pedestrian environment. These issues were frequently linked to the experiences of wheelchair users, people with mobility impairments and families travelling with young children.

Several respondents noted that routes that appear accessible in theory can become difficult or impossible to use when footways are obstructed by vehicles. Others highlighted concerns about uneven surfaces, narrow paths and street clutter.

The findings suggest that accessibility should not be viewed as a separate issue affecting a small number of users. Rather, accessible streets benefit a broad range of people, including disabled people, older adults and families using pushchairs.

An inclusive approach to school travel planning may therefore help improve the experience of a wide range of people, while supporting increased levels of active travel.

## Policy implications and recommendations

The survey points towards several considerations for policymakers, local authorities, schools and practitioners.

- 1** Prioritise a holistic approach to road safety across the whole route to school - combining lower speeds, safer and more crossings, and traffic reduction measures to increase the safety of journeys from start to finish.
- 2** Tackle pavement parking through bans rolled out across as many local authorities as possible.
- 3** Embed accessibility in planning by removing barriers and obstructions like EV charging points, improving pavements and dropped kerbs, and designing streets to be inclusive.
- 4** Improve walking and wheeling routes with wider pavements, better surfaces, improved lighting, clear wayfinding and safer crossings and junctions.
- 5** Expand Park and Stride schemes to provide families with flexible alternatives to driving all the way to the school gate.
- 6** Recognise active travel as a public health intervention that supports physical activity, mental wellbeing and healthier lifestyles.
- 7** Adopt a whole system approach to school travel by aligning transport, planning, education and public health policies to meet the flexible needs of different families.

## Conclusion

The findings demonstrate strong support for walking and wheeling among parents and carers.

Families value active travel for its contribution to health and wellbeing, opportunities for family connection and its role in supporting children's independence.

However, concerns relating to traffic, parking, road safety and accessibility continue to shape how people travel to school. Parents consistently identified safer environments and improved infrastructure as priorities for change.

The survey suggests that creating safer, more accessible and inclusive school journeys could support increased levels of active travel while directly addressing the issues identified by parents and carers.



Read more about Living Streets' walk to school campaign

[livingstreets.org.uk/  
WalkToSchool](https://livingstreets.org.uk/WalkToSchool)





**We are Living Streets, the UK charity for everyday walking.**



**LIVINGSTREETS.ORG.UK**

 **@LIVINGSTREETS**  **LIVINGSTREETSUK**  **@LIVINGSTREETS.BSKY.SOCIAL**