

Developing an Active Travel School



The Ysgol Hamadryad Story

Foreword

I am extremely grateful to Dr Dafydd Trystan, Chair of Governors at Ysgol Hamadryad, for authoring this inspiring account of how a school can play its part in tackling some of our most challenging problems. The motorised school run is a contributor to climate change, childhood obesity, traffic congestion and poor air quality, to name but four; Ysgol Hamadryad's radical approach will have positive impacts on all of these. I am delighted to be able to publish the school's story as an aid to others who want to embark on this journey. Every school is different and what is possible in one may be more difficult in another, but I am sure this account will be useful to all schools who see the journey to and from school as a key factor in their commitment to sustainable development.

Huw Irranca-Davies AM

Assembly Member for Ogmore

Chair of the Cross Party Group on the Active Travel Act



Introduction

In 2016, the governors at Ysgol Hamadryad met with the senior staff and decided that the new build 21st Century School which would be our permanent home would be an Active Travel School. Three years later that vision has become a reality – with many ups and downs along the way. We hope our experience will provide ideas and inspiration to others, along with some suggestions of the pitfalls to avoid!

This document, published following a range of discussions with the Cross Party Active Travel Group at the Senedd, is in two parts. The first is a case study of Ysgol Hamadryad and the steps taken to create Wales' first active travel school ... by design. The second is a number of practical suggestions as to how schools might set out on their active travel journey, in the form of a six point plan.



Part One

Ysgol Hamadryad's Active Travel Journey Wales' First Active Travel School ... by design

Introduction

This section is developed from a presentation to the Cross Party Active Travel Group at the Senedd in February 2019. The message of our experience is clear; with the right blend of vision and hard work any school can and should become an active travel school.

The Welsh Education Minister, Kirsty Williams, responded to the presentation by praising the 'exceptional leadership' at Ysgol Hamadryad. This 'journey' would not have been possible without the leadership of the Head Teacher (and staff), the vision of the Governing Body and the wholehearted support of the parents and pupils.



Establishing Ysgol Hamadryad

The past decades have seen a significant growth in Welsh Medium (WM) education in Cardiff. With both Ysgol Treganna (Canton) and Ysgol Pwll Coch (Leckwith) bursting at the seams, parents in the Grangetown and Butetown areas of Cardiff began actively campaigning for a new Welsh language school some 10 years ago. While there was clearly a demand for Welsh medium education locally, there was a shortage of suitable Council owned land where a Primary School (to cater for 468 pupils could be built). Some of the sites identified as potential locations were either controversial (e.g. near Channel View Leisure Centre in Grangetown) or inconvenient for the majority of potential parents (e.g. land to the North of County Hall¹).

Finally, after significant campaigning by Ymgyrch TAG – a community campaign group set up to campaign for a new WM school, a suitable site was identified for Ysgol Hamadryad (close to the Hamadryad Hospital and at one end of Hamadryad Park). 'Suitable' may be somewhat of an exaggeration – the site was relatively small for a two form entry school, the building would

¹ This land was eventually disposed of by the Council in a land swap with developers for the land which became the site of Ysgol Hamadryad.



require some encroachment on parkland, and the area surrounding the school was already prone to significant traffic problems with numerous resident complaints about commuters using residential streets for parking and general over-development. (A block of flats had been built at the Northern end of Hamadryad Park despite a significant campaign by local residents against over-development).

Ysgol Hamadryad was part of Cardiff Council's successful application for Band A 21st Century Schools funding from Welsh Government and the school was established in September 2016. Starting in portacabins in the yard of Ninian Park School, 17 pupils began school at Ysgol Hamdryad in 2016.

Despite the promise of a new school building and initial intention for the school to be at Ninian Park as a temporary measure for 12 months, detailed planning permission had yet to be granted at the Hamadryad site. There was considerable concern in the immediate vicinity of the school about the impact on additional traffic etc and these concerns were shared by some Cardiff councillors.

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Meanwhile, Ysgol Hamadryad's Governing Body had been formed and work had begun on developing the school's policies. There was a general consensus amongst the Governors that active travel should be a key part of the school's sustainable transport policy.

The Governing Body was also fortunate to be able to draw on the experience and expertise of both the Chair of Governors, Dr Dafydd Trystan and Local Authority Governor Rachel Maycock. Trystan was a founding member of the Sustrans Cymru Board for Wales (Sustrans is a charity dedicated to making it easier for people to walk and cycle) and served for a decade as a member of the board – he also Chairs a Cycle Training company. Maycock was Director of Living Streets in Wales and sat on the Welsh Government Active Travel Board. Living Streets is a charity dedicated to making walking 'the natural choice' promoting active journeys, such as the walk to school.

Initial discussions amongst the Governors and Head Teacher led to a draft policy being agreed that included ALL children travelling actively to the school.

As the Governors and staff were formulating active travel plans, consideration was given at Cardiff Council to the planning process. The Planning Committee was due to make a decision in March 2017, but local government elections meant there was a pause in the planning process due to unresolved transport concerns raised by local residents. This delay provoked some disappointment at the school, particularly as Hamadryad was part of a three school 21st Century Schools Band A programme, all scheduled for completion initially by September 2017.



Following the local election in May 2017 the Governors identified the need for early interaction with the newly elected local councillors and residents on the

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topic of planning and transport to the school. Rachel Maycock led the work of liaising with local councillors – particularly Cllr Ebrahim following his election to the Butetown Ward and Cllr Lister, newly elected to the Grangetown ward. Dafydd Trystan along with Mair Parry Jones

(Deputy Chair of Governors) held a public meeting with local residents in a hall on one of the streets near the proposed site of the school. The meeting was challenging yet rewarding, allowing opinions to be shared and questions answered. Residents feared a significant increase in traffic, poor traffic management from Cardiff Council and that they would be ignored as the school developed and grew. Most residents engaged with the developments and while some were (very) sceptical that parents could be persuaded out of their cars – the meeting and subsequent correspondence emphasised that the school was keen to be proactive, and listen to and engage with local residents. Correspondence at times during the next two years would be at least weekly if not more regularly! The challenge for some local residents was that they could point to numerous examples of traffic chaos at local schools. We only had our vision as set out in our draft policies and the sincerity of our commitment to active travel. Some residents were more persuaded than others that we could pull it off.

As the school was beginning the work of planning policies and engagement, detailed plans were being drawn up by the Council's appointed contractors Morgan Sindall.

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The first element that came as a surprise to the school was the absence of any guidance to 21st Century Schools on Active Travel. Despite the Welsh Government legislation on active travel there was no incentive or expectation for 21st Century Schools to promote it, and instead presumed 20th Century transport methods would be used².

This lack of focus on sustainability was highlighted on a number of occasions during the process and two vignettes illustrate the paucity of guidance.

² We understand that the Band B programme for 21st Century Schools has been adapted to include some guidance on Active Travel, but we return to this issue in our reflections section towards the end of this part of the document.



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Firstly, the initial designs for the school were presented to the Governing Body. The school design looked quite stunning, but a question was raised as to why there was so much car parking identified and no bike / scooter parking. The response was that these were 'concept designs' and detail would be added later. We found this illustrative –

concept designs include cars but not space for bikes and scooters or designated walking routes. Secondly, once discussions had begun on bike / scooter parking we were informed that there would be space for 40 bikes/scooters to be parked at the school. Once again, the Governors asked why this number was so small – to be told that the school was being built to the BREAAAM excellent sustainability standard and this is what was required. For a school of 468 pupils, it was disappointing that parking for 40 bikes and scooters was deemed excellent. We had much higher ambitions for the number of children who would travel actively to the school. Plans were eventually changed to meet our ambitions, but only after a robust and detailed response from Governors and with the complete support of the Head Teacher.

Therefore by May 2017, a vision had been agreed by the Governing Body, considerable design work had been undertaken on the school site and initial engagement with local residents had begun.

Furthermore, as part of the planning process, work had begun on identifying issues with the active travel infrastructure around the school. However we discovered from regular contact with councillors and officers that different parts of Cardiff Council were not always working together as effectively as they might have. Plans were published to enhance the safety of a particular junction, to reconfigure some junctions a little further away and to introduce more residents' parking in the immediate vicinity of the school. The school at an initial stage was unaware of the plans being developed, and the Project Manager at the Council and Governing Body was only alerted to the plans when a governor on her bike spotted the statutory planning notices with a consultation deadline within the week! The upgrades and designs of these junctions would be vital for people travelling to the school by bike, scooter or walking and the school wanted to feed in ideas for improvement. As key stakeholders it was overlooked that the school and parents should be made aware and proactively consulted on the plans. The Council agreed to extend the deadline for comment – and the school was able to provide considerable comment based on the active travel plans of individual parents and pupils.



Initially the Council dismissed most of the concerns put forward by parents, but following liaison with local Councillors some of these issues were addressed³.

It was made clear at this early stage that active travel to the new school would not be the exception, but the standard expected for all journeys.

One of the key aspects of successful modal shift is when individuals have a clear plan and understanding of their active travel journey. This is particularly important for children, where safety is paramount. Led by Rachel Maycock and supported by the school staff, every parent was engaged from an early point

– including being set a half-term task of travelling ‘actively’ to the new school site. Six months before the school opened parents were asked to submit a description of their active travel journey to the new school site along with any specific challenges or difficulties that they encountered en route. It was made clear at this early stage that active travel to the new school would not be the exception, but the standard expected for all journeys.

This exercise was exceptionally valuable. It set the clear expectation of active travel for all pupils, it communicated our intention as a school to support the active travel choices of pupils and identified problems / challenges along the way. We complemented this information from parents / pupils with a heat-map analysis – where the home of every pupil in Grangetown and Butetown was mapped – and active travel routes / corridors considered for each area.

To support parents and pupils to develop their confidence to make the choice of active travel we also worked with Cardiff Council to provide free scooting and biking training to the children – aged four and five. The confidence with which they responded to this training was a joy to behold and a turning point for many sceptical parents!

By mid-2017 we were a considerable way along our active travel preparations – but planning permission had yet to be granted for the school. The Planning Committee finally considered the school in June 2017 and stringent conditions were attached to the planning permission including significant bike / scooter parking and the deposit of a Sustainable Transport Plan with the Council. The school welcomed these conditions and further refined the sustainable transport plan to reflect our growing understanding of parental / pupil choices.

³ Since the completion of the Ysgol Hamadryad project, Cardiff Council has increased resources in the Transport team working on schools. This includes dedicated officers who work with the Education department to identify active travel infrastructure and facilities, in and around schools. In addition, School Active Travel officers are in place to support behaviour change and increase active travel for the school journey.



As part of our active travel planning process we had identified a number of parents who were intending to walk / scoot / bike to school every day, but there was a significant minority who assessed the practicalities of these options to be a challenge. Some for example had more than one child to get to nursery or school each morning, others had working patterns that would make a half an hour walk each morning impractical.

We wanted to make active travel an option for everyone. Our plan therefore was to introduce a walking bus provision to address this identified need. The Head Teacher

worked with Council officials to identify suitable locations – with sufficient car parking and a safe route to walk to the school for children from the age of 4.

Two potential locations were identified – Channel View Leisure Centre in Grangetown and Havannah St Car Park in Butetown.

Further discussions were held with officers responsible for these facilities.



Once again there was a disconnect between different parts of the Council, with officials and Cllrs formally supporting the school's goals but coming up against officials in other departments who would obstruct the plans. In the first location, there was significant resistance and a negative response to the proposal, because the car park was 'too busy' at the requisite times for parents to park and walk their children to the school. Following this response, a request was made for a formal traffic survey (after governors had conducted an informal traffic survey of the area!). The survey demonstrated ample capacity for parents to park and participate in a walking bus. However in parallel discussions there was a very positive response from the second location, so the first location was ruled out.

The second location could not have been more helpful or supportive of the idea, not only working pro-actively with the school but also creating special drop-off passes with the school's logo so that parents could drop-off without fear of being issued with a parking ticket. The walking bus was planned and delivered at the Havannah St car park and has run every day since the school opened on its new site in January 2019. At the induction of the new school parents were informed about the walking bus option and how to arrange a drop-off pass and there has been good take-up.



As 2018 progressed, and the school building works came towards a conclusion – parents were again encouraged to travel to the school site – both to see the construction but also to consider their active travel plans. By now some of the junction modifications and some resurfacing work had been completed (e.g. Clarence Road Bridge).

A number of practical decisions were also considered by Governors e.g. what time would the walking bus depart? Should it link in to the Breakfast Club? How should the walking bus be staffed? We decided that the only way to ensure the success of the walking bus

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was to have a number of responsible individuals who were known to the children and employed to facilitate the walking bus. Accordingly we decided to offer extra hours to two Teaching Assistants to facilitate the walking bus every morning and afternoon and have a rota of all other staff to cover a third member of the walking bus team each morning. This is a cost to the school, but our view was that in order for the walking bus to gain and maintain the confidence of pupils and parents alike it needed to be reliable and safe. Our aim was to make our walking bus more reliable than local public transport and a better option than using resident parking in the school vicinity.

In November 2018 we corresponded again with parents reminding them that driving to the school site and parking in resident spaces was not permitted and those who did so would be fined. We received one query as to the precise status of the public highways, but a full explanation of the waiting and parking restrictions served to reinforce the implementation plan for the school area. We were in contact with parking enforcement officers in the Council, who were aware of the expectations of local residents for enforcement.

The immediate vicinity of the school is crucial to the success of our policy – in two inter-related ways. Firstly, the roads need to feel safe for parents and their children to walk / cycle / scoot. Secondly, the opportunity to park and drop off needs to be as restricted as possible – thus reducing traffic and increasing road safety. In terms of restrictions there is a school safety zone outside the school where no waiting is permitted, and the vast majority of roads close by are either double yellow lined or residents parking. The ‘cost’ and inconvenience therefore of driving to school is significantly increased. We have worked with both the Council and residents to ensure effective traffic management and parking enforcement in the area (i.e. no practical possibility for parents or visitors to park in the locality of the school).



Theory into Practice

After two years and more of planning the school finally opened in January 2019. The walking bus attracted 15 pupils on its first day. Some 20 pupils from a total of over 100 regularly use the bus. The pupils did express some disappointment on the first day ... 'Where is the bus?' ... 'You are the bus ...' but this soon passed and every day since whatever the weather the bus has run. The walk to school is a moment of fun and learning for the children, who get to socialize with their friends or spend some extra time with their parents, as well as learn about road safety. These experiences were shared when pupils visited the Senedd to talk about their journey including their enjoyment of talking to friends and their love of finding out about nature along the way.

A large number of parents walk, cycle and scoot with their children to school, and not one parent drove to the school site in the first month of operation January, 2019. The success of the travel plan was evident to one particularly sceptical local resident, who joined the Chair of Governors and Council parking enforcement officers at the school Gates on the first day. He turned to the Chair of Governors and asked: 'so when will the children be arriving?' to be told that they had already arrived by foot! We like to think that even the sceptics amongst the local residents are being won over by the actions we have taken to minimise car use to the school.



The policy still requires active support from the local council, local community and parents along with some vigilance. Towards the end of the first term we received reports that some parents were using the residents' parking bays to park and then drop off their children at the school. We contacted the council and secured the presence of enforcement officers that same week. The officers identified three illegally parked cars and duly issued fines. We believe at least one car belonged to a parent and we subsequently corresponded with all parents reminding them of the school's sustainable transport policy and the consequences of non-compliance. Furthermore, the residents' parking zone in nearby streets has been significantly extended with the active support of the school.

New parents (September 2019 intake) were informed about the active travel policy and encouraged to undertake their own active travel personalised planning, and as the school expands (over 150 pupils by September 2019) the commitment to active travel remains a core feature of our prospectus.



During 2019-20 the school is taking steps to further encourage teachers and other school staff to travel actively to the site, and to work with other contractors and delivery drivers who may visit the site to further reduce traffic to the school. The school is also actively reviewing the walking bus provision in order to ensure that the range of activities around the school day – breakfast clubs, pre-school provision, nursery provision, after school activities and clubs can all be accommodated within the ‘active travel journey’.

Conclusion

In the early days of planning the permanent home for Ysgol Hamadryad the vision of an active travel school was seen, by some, as an unrealistic goal. By developing a suite of measures and working closely with pupils, families, local residents and the local authority that very bold vision set out originally has now become a normal part of the school day and ethos. The designed active travel journey is, for most children, now their normal daily routine as they travel to school.



Part Two

1. Map the Landscape

The first task facing governors, staff or parents is to develop a clear picture of the current situation i.e. map the landscape. What is the school site like? How easy is access by foot, bike, scooter or public transport? What are the current patterns of pupil transportation to the school? Are there particularly good safer routes to school? Or are there particular issues for access by bike and foot? What are the facilities like for storage for bikes at the School? How far do the pupils generally travel to school? It is also useful to identify at this stage whether there are officers or councillors in the local authority who may be able to help / support.

Hint: This 'map' doesn't need to be hugely detailed and worked out – but you need an understanding of the potential active travel landscape

2. Define the Vision

The next step is to move towards defining an active travel vision for the school. This should be informed by the 'map' and the initial findings of investigations into the potential for active travel. The vision needs to be bold – a large proportion of pupils and parents will be supportive – and therefore this is an ideal opportunity to set out a bold vision for the school. However, the vision also needs to reflect the school's particular situation. School A may be able to stop all parents from driving to school, but in School B increasing cycling to school from 10% to 30% may be the bold but realistic vision. The vision needs to be agreed by Governors and Senior Staff.

Hint: Listen very carefully to feedback at the governors' meeting – some of the practical concerns will very likely mirror the concerns of parents in due course

3. Plan the Active Travel Journeys

The next stage is crucial – communicating and engaging with parents and pupils. The aim here is to have an open conversation with parents about their potential active travel journey to the school. The best way to do this is to ask all parents / pupils to try out an active travel journey to the school. Parents can then submit feedback to the Governors (a survey – paper or online is a good way to do this). This feedback is crucial in identifying barriers to active travel – there may be a lack of facilities at the school, there may be dangerous junctions nearby, or pupils may not feel confident cycling.

Hint: The more feedback here the better – in order to build a plan for your school that will work and be supported you need as much granular input as possible.



4. Create the Active Travel Plan

The next step builds on the significant planning and evidence gathering that you will have already undertaken. Building on your vision (defined at step two), the time has come to outline specific actions to support active travel to the school. Some of these may be directly within the control of the School / Governing Body – others may need support from the local authority (and in some cases legal changes e.g. to speed limits). There are a wide range of options here including but not limited to:

- i) ensure 20 mph zones on all key routes to the school;
- ii) work with the local council to reconfigure local junctions to enhance safety;
- iii) introduce an 'exclusion zone' around the school gates e.g. no waiting within 100 yards;
- iv) consider parking restrictions in the immediate vicinity of the school beyond the no waiting zone;
- v) provide scooting and cycling lessons to the pupils from year one onwards;
- vi) enhance bike parking facilities at the school;
- vii) introduce a walking bus;
- viii) provide encouragement / rewards in some form for pupils who cycle / scoot / walk;
- ix) collect data on numbers walking / cycling;
- x) consider ways to ensure poorer families can have access to a bike / scooter.

This list isn't exhaustive – and each school will have an optimal blend of measures to ensure success – however, considering the different options and introducing a range of measures to both support active travel, and discourage car driving is key to long term success.

Hint: Be ready to work closely with the local authority. There'll be some aspects that the school can address – but others will need the active support (and resources) of the local council.

5. Communicate the Plan

Once the plan is in place you will need a communication plan to ensure that all families (and prospective families) at the school are aware of the active travel expectations of the school. Here you need to be ready to return to the overall agreed vision and work with parents who are concerned – or even potentially hostile – to ensure their support, or at least acquiescence. This is best done both face to face and by letter / email from the school. If you've planned properly – and have a bold and realistic vision in place – you are now ready to begin your active travel journey. Pick a date to introduce the new policy – the start of a term can be a good time to choose here – and in those first few weeks continue to reinforce the successes and challenge any problematic behaviour.



Hint: Be ready for some grumbles early on – given that you will be changing patterns of travel, families may feel unhappy – but working with them and using the school community as a whole that sees the benefit of the approach will help to cement success.

6. Review Regularly

Circumstances change, demographics change, opportunities change. Be ready to regularly review the active travel plan – with a particular view to how new initiatives impact on the plan. Your school may have half-day nursery provision, breakfast clubs or after-school clubs – the active travel plan needs to be flexible enough to adopt and support active travel to the school all year round and throughout the day.

Hint: Try and consider the range of pupils and their timetables that attend your school and build solutions that will work for all.

