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Safer school journeys: a 'self-help' approach

Thousands of Devon pupils have traced their daily route to and from school, pinpointing perceived danger-points and personal accident sites, as part of a project to develop community awareness of road safety problems — and even to work out solutions to some of them.

The *Safer Journeys* questionnaire, part of a pack created by Devon County Council's Road Safety Unit, has been used to collect data about the young people's daily travel patterns, but its main purpose is to raise awareness about safety issues and to encourage action by pupils, parents, governors and school staff.

Perhaps not before time, the concept of road safety has jumped the forbidding 'rules and regulations' hurdle and acquired a more pragmatic flavour. A number of pupils might highlight the same crossing or junction as a danger-spot, or the staff might draw attention to dangerous congestion and blind spots near the school gates. These points can then be raised within a working group consisting of pupils, school staff, parents, governors, county engineers, police and road safety officers, crossing wardens and other relevant representatives.

The survey findings from the original pilot study are presented on page 3. Over 90% of all the pupils, as well as their parents — half of whom completed a special comment space on

the questionnaire — identified dangers and danger points on their journey to or from school. In the majority of cases the immediate vicinity of the school was cited as a danger point.

From facts to action

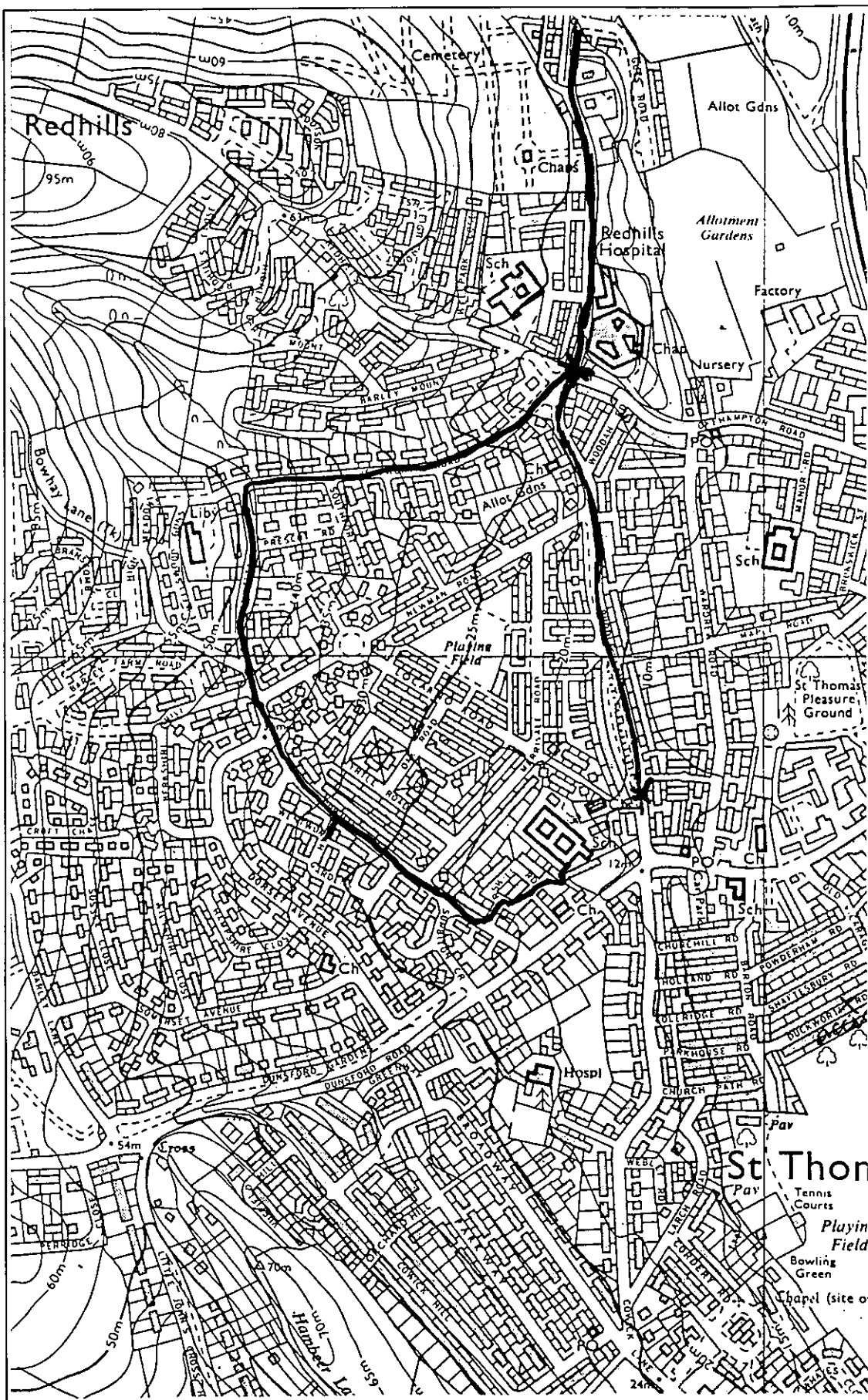
This is what may happen when schools have used the questionnaire.

- A summary of the survey data is examined by a small working group of staff, parents, governors and pupils.
- The group visits any problem sites identified by the pupils or their parents.
- They sit down and together work out a set of possible solutions.
- They also look critically at their own road safety practices, especially in the vicinity of the school.

Often, problems have been solved by the school communities themselves. Examples include advice to parents about parking, better cycling behaviour, safer bus manoeuvres, and procedures for crossing roads.

The project's watchword is 'self-help', but occasionally a school needs more specialist support, such as advice regarding the possibility of extending a pavement in the road near the school. However, bringing in the experts is ad-

Pupils completing the *Safer Journeys* questionnaire were asked to trace their route to and from school on a map of the neighbourhood. They also indicated the site of any road accident in which they had been involved.



Survey facts from the original pilot study carried out in 1991.

vocated as a 'last-resort' option to be pursued only when it can be shown that self-help methods were inadequate. This involves presenting a detailed case for presentation to the Response Team of professionals attached to the project.

The following examples of how schools reacted to their own 'Safer Journeys' survey, as well as the information and advice in the action pack, are just some that have been reported back from the current total of 360 primary and secondary schools that have expressed interest in the scheme.

Road safety in Social Education

One of the original pilot schools, Paignton College, created an action group to include a county planning officer, a school crossing warden, an expert in school transport and pupils

Number of pupils in survey: 3,269

Age range: 4-16

Method of travel

On foot: 59% to school, 65% back home

By bicycle: 7%

By bus: 16%

By car: 18%

Journey time

Under 15 minutes: 61%

15-30 minutes: 31%

30-45 minutes: 7%

More than 45 minutes: 1%

Accident facts

Involved in a road accident: 23%

Of these, 28% were pedestrians

35% were cyclists

31% were car passengers

6% were in a bus or other vehicle

12% of these accidents were on the way to school

19% were on the way home from school

52% claimed to have been injured and 32% had attended hospital

58% of all accidents had not been reported to the police

Danger points

Over 90% of all the pupils, as well as their parents — half of whom completed a special comment space on the questionnaire — identified dangers and danger points on their journey to or from school, and in the majority of cases the immediate vicinity of the school was cited as a danger point.

from the college. The group met twice a term, and Year 10 pupils, as part of their Social Education programme, wrote and conducted their own survey of all the pupils in the college. They drew recommended routes to school on a large-scale map of the area, canvassed parents for their views on local danger-spots via a letter and questionnaire, and used the information to inform new parents and pupils.

Hill start

At Ford Primary School, Plymouth, a number of minor engineering measures helped to ease traffic problems on the hill outside the school. Furthermore, the comments made by children during the survey were valuable in themselves as a stimulus for further discussion and understanding.

School-gate initiative

At Hayes Road Primary School, Paignton, the children's road safety awareness was raised both by completing the questionnaire and by seeing changes taking place in the environment and increased police presence as a direct result of their comments. A working group at the school met to discuss the survey findings and ways in which parents and children alike could become involved in adopting safer school-gate behaviour. A number of minor engineering works were undertaken on the basis of the survey findings.

Yellow feet

The Road Safety Unit has been promoting the use of yellow footprints painted on the pavement to guide youngsters and their parents to the safest crossing-point on roads near a school. Forches Cross Primary, Barnstaple, which has already benefited from the introduction of traffic-calming, is planning to use yellow footprints to lead pupils towards the school crossing patrol. It will conduct a small survey before and after the introduction of the scheme to try to measure its influence on their pupils' movements.

Walk, don't drive! (1)

Jane Edmund, Headteacher at Redhills Combined School, Exeter, in addition to promoting her 'Walk to School' idea (page 4), reports on how her school has made Safer Journeys a priority topic. Activities include a refresher minibus training course for teachers, road safety

Jane Edmund, Headteacher at Redhills Combined School Exeter, arrives at school on foot as part of her 'Walk to School' idea, which she hopes will be adopted by parents and pupils.



games and activities for the reception class, design of protective clothing and road signs, road accident statistics, and many other aspects across the curriculum.

A road safety week

Foxhole Infants School, Paignton, involved pupils and parents in this event. It included a visit from the local community policeman, a road safety drama, a tour around an ambulance by courtesy of the father of one of the children, and first aid procedures. A Response Team is now looking at the possibility of signing the roads around the school.

Walk, don't drive! (2)

Mike Sleeman, the Headteacher of Hazel-down Primary, Teignmouth, has been aware for a long time of the difficulties caused by parents parking outside a school of over 400 pupils with only six parking spaces for staff! He is going to try a 'Walk to School Day', hoping that more parents will walk their children to school, offering an opportunity for good road safety training and less congestion outside school.

Using the survey in school

The awareness raised by completing the questionnaire and any resulting safety schemes has given the topic of 'road safety' an increased

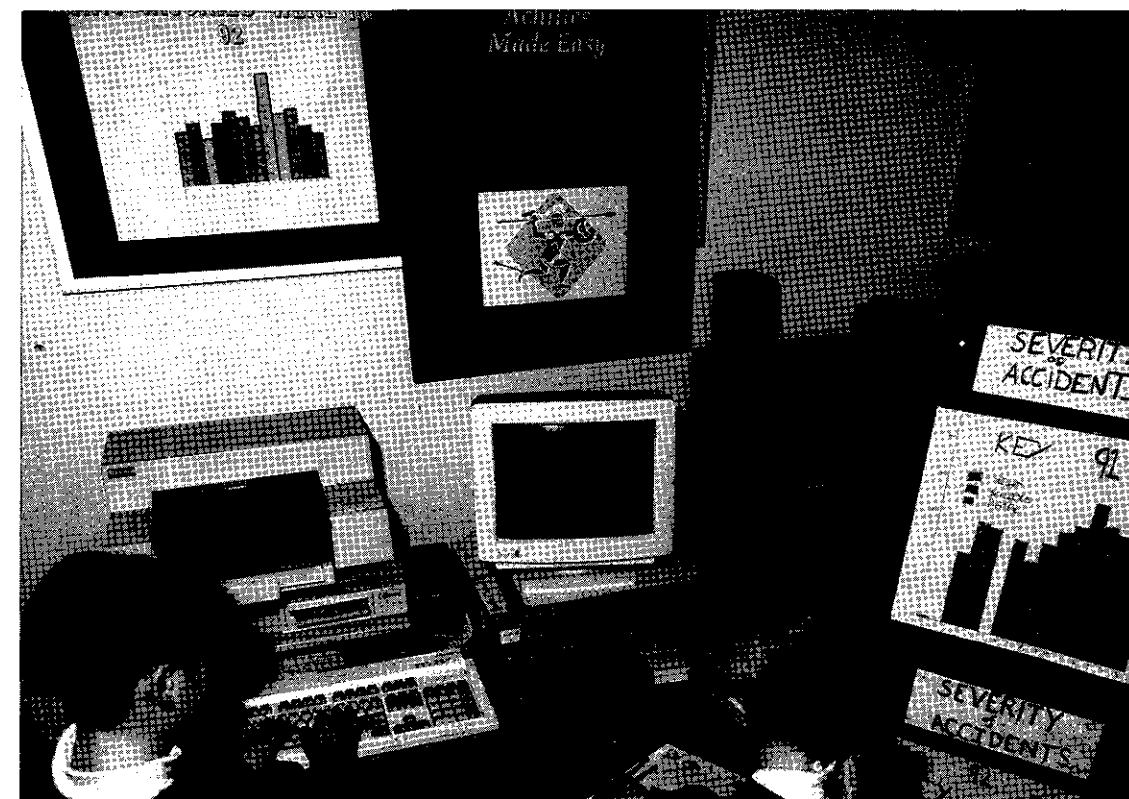
relevance and interest to pupils.

At Stoke Damerel Community College, Plymouth, road safety is an integral part of the PSE programme. The Year 7 pupils have been very enthusiastic about the topic, particularly when they have completed traffic surveys, accident reports and role-plays.

At St Thomas High School, Exeter, following the project — which led to several improvements in the busy road serving the school — staff decided to use these 'pupil-owned' road safety improvements to phase more structured road safety education into the curriculum. This was done in modular form through the Social, Physical and Community Education course. In Years 8 and 9 the pupils select a hypothesis which involves the study of traffic or related topics, for example pollution, car parking or public transport. In Year 10, pupils follow a road safety module based on *The Collector* accident video and a by-pass simulation which deals with more general issues of road building and its impact on the environment.

I hope that this brief account of our work and achievements so far will encourage readers in other parts of the country to take a more enlightened attitude towards this neglected but potentially very useful and important part of the curriculum in both primary and secondary schools.

Pupils at Redhills Combined School, Exeter, have used local accident data in their computer to strengthen work in Maths and Information Technology.



The *Safer Journeys* project can have useful spin-off in school. These aspects of road safety could support work across the curriculum.

Geography

- People who help us
- Road works survey
- Recognition of road signs
- Journey routes
- Temperature and climate
- Types of transport
- Busy & quiet roads
- Safe places to cross
- Local roads

History

- Development and location of towns and schools

Maths

- Plan a safe route
- Direction
- Comparison of speeds
- Probabilities, risks
- Graph of types of bicycles, cars, etc.

Technology

- Identify areas of poor vision and hazards
- Design a cycle helmet
- Design and make a 'safer journeys' game
- Design a vehicle

Science

- Traffic sounds
- Reflective and fluorescent materials
- Senses
- Study accident data
- Light & dark
- Wet & dry surfaces
- Grip and friction
- Experiments on restraints
- Properties of road materials

English

- Study emergency services
- Describe a bicycle ride
- Discussion on rules
- Discuss need for seatbelts
- Describe safe places to play in

Art

- Tyre and wheel patterns
- Safety posters

Health Education (Guidance 5)

- Green Cross Code
- Bicycle maintenance
- Simple first aid
- Peer pressure