

STUDENT COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE SAFE CYCLING PETITION TO THE COUNTY COUNCIL

For the 2023 -2024 school year, the focus of the Student Council Environment committee was the promotion of safe cycling to school, in conjunction with the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programme and Kerry County Council. The Environment Committee group met every week to work towards increasing the awareness of the benefits of cycling and walking to school. As part of their ongoing efforts they encouraged students and parents to contribute to their petition to the County Council to improve the cycling infrastructure for the school and the wider Tralee area. Our school community has a deep concern regarding the hazardous situations on the Caherslee and Bracker O'Regan roads. Students are unwilling to cycle due to the dangerous traffic situation along these locations.

The petition gathered over 1,300 signatures from students and parents and it was presented to the elected members and to the executive of the County Council at their meeting in March. The students made a formal presentation to the County Council during which they outlined their safe cycling and walking proposals, to include:

- Urgent meeting with the Active Travel team and the Safe Routes To School teams to begin to implement traffic calming measures at our school gates
- Raised surfaces
- Different coloured/textured surfaces
- Street 'furniture'
- Improved lighting at pedestrian crossings
- Installation of segregated cycle lanes on Caherslee Road
- Installation of segregated cycle lanes on Bracker O'Regan Road
- Installation of improved cycle entrance from Tralee Greenway into the back of the school grounds



By using before and after pictures from the SRTS programme, the students showed the Council members what the changes that they sought might look like.

Prior to the presentation of the petition, the school met with two engineers from the Active Travel group within the council to discuss the dangerous traffic situation and the associated hazards for cyclists and pedestrians. At these meetings the school students and teachers outlined some of the solutions they felt might work to segregate cars and trucks from the cycle lanes. The provision of Orcas or Armadillos (pictured) along the cycle lanes would be a cost effective way of ensuring the safety of everyone using those lanes.

Most recently the County Council has informed the school that plans have been drawn up for works to be carried out in and around the school to enhance the safety of those walking and traveling by bicycle. The school met with engineers on the 19th June to view these preliminary plans. It is hoped that work will begin in improving the cycling infrastructure during the next school year.

SUSTAINABILITY AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AND WORLDWISE GLOBAL SCHOOLS

For quite a number of years now we have partnered with WorldWise Global Schools (WWGS), and with them, together with funding from Irish Aid, we have promoted Global Citizenship Education and sustainability. Our students have undertaken self-directed learning and promoted projects across the Mounthawk community, covering topics such as Global food systems, Climate Justice, Child Labour and Fast Fashion to name but a few.

This year we engaged with Gortbrac Organic farm to deliver lessons on Sustainability and Global Food Systems, Climate Change and Climate Justice. Our Transition Year students got hands-on experience, learning what is necessary to sustain local food systems and how to grow their own produce in our school garden which had received funding to help establish it as an outdoor classroom for use by all.

Our cycle day this year was partially sponsored by WWGS. We will build on this event with the aim of increasing the numbers of staff and students cycling and walking to school every day. We aim to include the cycle initiative as part of our SUSTAINABILITY project for next year, beginning in September. This project will examine various aspects of sustainability

under the headings of climate change, transport, food, energy, child labour and clothing. We will endeavour to devise action projects under those headings and to then make links with what is happening on a global scale.

Our orchard, again sponsored by WWGS and Irish Aid, now bears a healthy crop of apples every autumn. This year we invited students and neighbours of the school to come and help us bring in the harvest. We left the apples outside our front door, sent a message to parents offering them to whoever wanted them and witnessed a steady stream of parents come and collect them over the following few hours.

We have a wonderful school site and take great pride in our school outdoor environment. Our caretaker, Declan, expertly and efficiently manages the grounds, ensuring that the biodiversity of our campus is maintained. We have wildflower areas, butterfly bushes (Budlia) and numerous tree species, with trees being planted each academic year. We have a school garden and polytunnel, our outdoor classrooms, where students learn about climate change, global food systems as well as receiving instruction on how to grow their own food.

