

SMOTS - ONLINE INITIATIVES CASE STUDY

Following the lockdown, although a limited return to schools was possible in June 2020, due to social distancing and the need to maintain safety bubbles, the Active & Travel Team was unable to visit primary schools to deliver the usual road safety initiatives.

An innovative solution was required and this involved exploring the various online meeting software tools that were available and now coming into their own to enable work to continue despite challenging circumstances. Colleagues within Hertfordshire County Council, particularly the Driver Training team proved to be helpful in sharing their experiences of getting the Speed Awareness courses for the public into an online format.

With Microsoft Teams being the platform of choice within Hertfordshire County Council and staff at schools, initially the shorter storytelling options to Reception and Year 1 were developed first. Among the points of consideration were the reliance on the class teacher to utilise Microsoft Teams in their classroom and project the broadcast on the Interactive White Board and the need for the Sustainable Travel Officers who were delivering the activity being able to see the pupils, to ensure there was an engaging two way experience.

One thing noted during the trials that although a two-way audio visual communication was essential, classroom-based spontaneity would not be possible due to the time delays and technical cut-outs inherent in online transmission. Therefore, Sustainable Travel Officers would have the difficult balance of largely lecturing to pupils while maintaining an empathetic and reactive connection for listening opportunities to be maximised.

Reception and Year 1 initiative featured road safety messages via storytelling so this proved to be comparatively straightforward, despite anxieties with technology reliability and classes whose cameras or microphones were not working proving more challenging with delivery.

However, Year 3 which involved a lesson about safer places to cross was more involved, because a manageable method of two-way communication was required. This was because the lesson required pupils to identify potential hazards at safer crossing places, in order to reinforce established practices such as 'The Green Cross Code' and "Stop-Look-Listen-Think' which are required at all times.

The two-way communication was achieved pupils being asked to walk up by the class teacher to the master laptop computer camera to speak to the Sustainable Travel Officer to give their answers, before they returned to their desk and the class discussion continued. This worked well within the limitations and pupils enjoyed this quite different method of interaction and teachers reported that they were happy with this.

With the popularity of the online 'Zoom Quiz' during lockdown, as an interim measure, the Active & Safer Travel team took a leaf out of its book by running a Pedestrian Skills quiz for Year 4 and a Street Engineering quiz for Year 6. While the first half of both were as per familiar online quizzes that provided an element of competition to stimulate thinking and learning, the second half involved a

two way discussion of the answers with pupils, as with the Year 3 initiative, to reinforce good and safe practices when crossing the road.

With schools closed except to children of key workers in January 2021 and many pupils now learning from home, the Active & Safer Travel team considered the 'Zoom Quiz' concept further as a learning tool. As pupils' devices were not equipped with Microsoft Teams, a Year 4 Pedestrian Skills quiz was trialled using Zoom which was being used by many schools for registration. For safeguarding, the school acted as the host and the teacher was present throughout the session. As many pupils were at home, it was left by the school to parents to choose if their children showed their faces. Through all the trials, it was clear that initiative was more effective and enjoyable for both parties when a face-to-face visual was possible.

The Year 5 Distractions initiative highlighting the dangers of mobile device usage while walking near roads proved to be the biggest challenge to bring to the online environment. This was because video content previously used in the classroom variant was essential to apply effective messages into a real life context. Sharing content using Microsoft Teams direct from hosting services such as YouTube and Vimeo proved to be problematic and not very user friendly while also unreliable, possibly due to the number of internet hosts involved in the chain.

Having the video files saved on the Desktop and accessing it from there using Microsoft Teams was again not very user friendly but it was an improvement. There were reliability problems with videos prone to sticking in Windows Media Player, although it was later found using Windows 10 Photos to play video files that it was more stable and appeared to be an improvement in reliability.

However, to minimise anxiety in the delivery of the Distractions activity, YouTube and Vimeo links were emailed to class teachers in advance and operated by them as instructed remotely by the Sustainable Travel Officer when required. This proved to be a practical compromise although much was dependent on the class teacher's familiarity with the technology.

The trials conducted were very satisfactory with positive approval from the teachers involved. The initiatives were rolled out after the start of the 2020 Autumn Term. A total of 92 schools received Road Safety Initiatives, 224 sessions with Nursery, Reception, Year 1, Year 3, Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6 pupils were delivered, so 7846 pupils in Hertfordshire received Road Safety Education online.

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