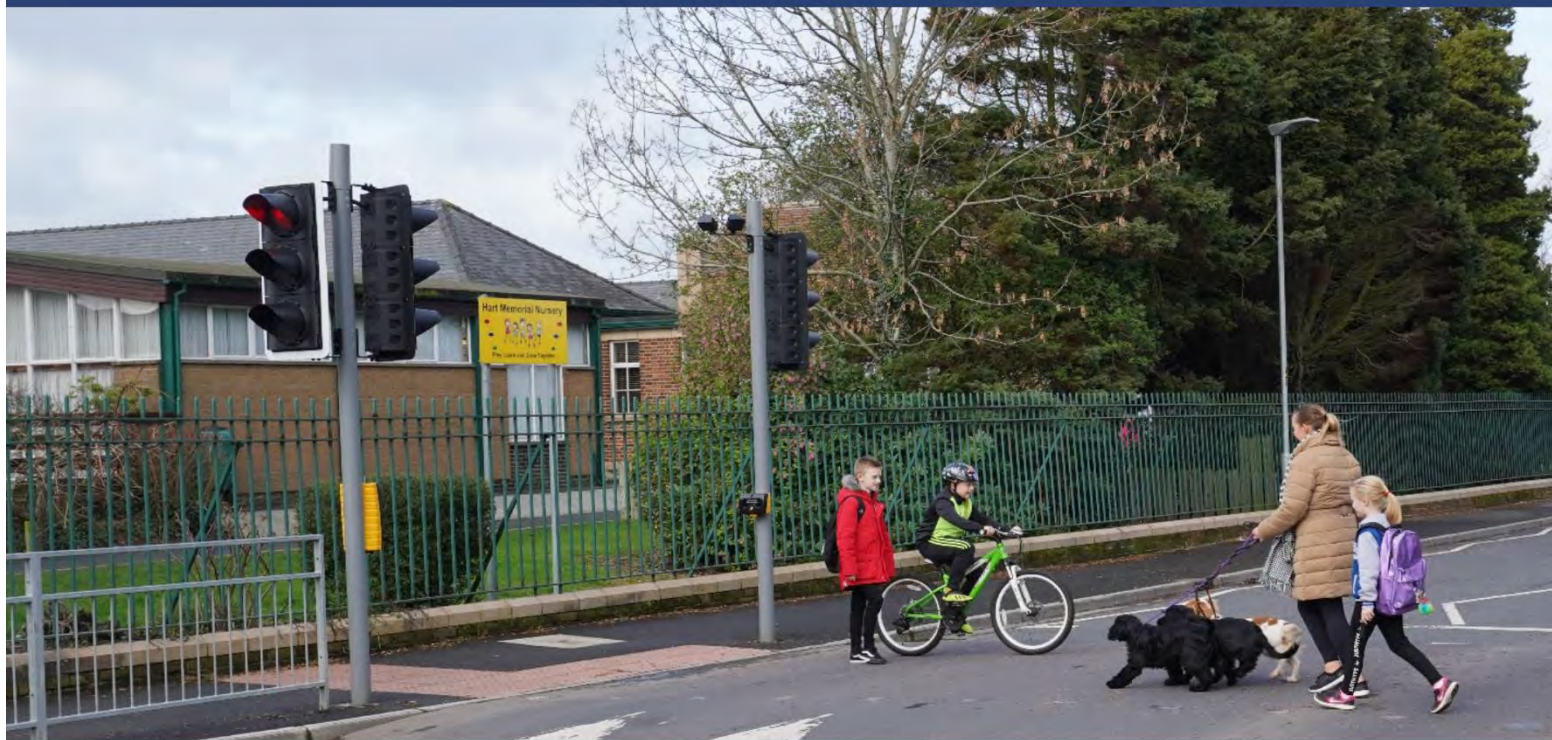


Travel to and from School by Pupils in Northern Ireland 2019/2020

Findings from the Continuous Household Survey 2019/2020



An Official Statistics Publication

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Gníomhaireacht Thuaisceart Éireann
um Staitisticí agus Taighde

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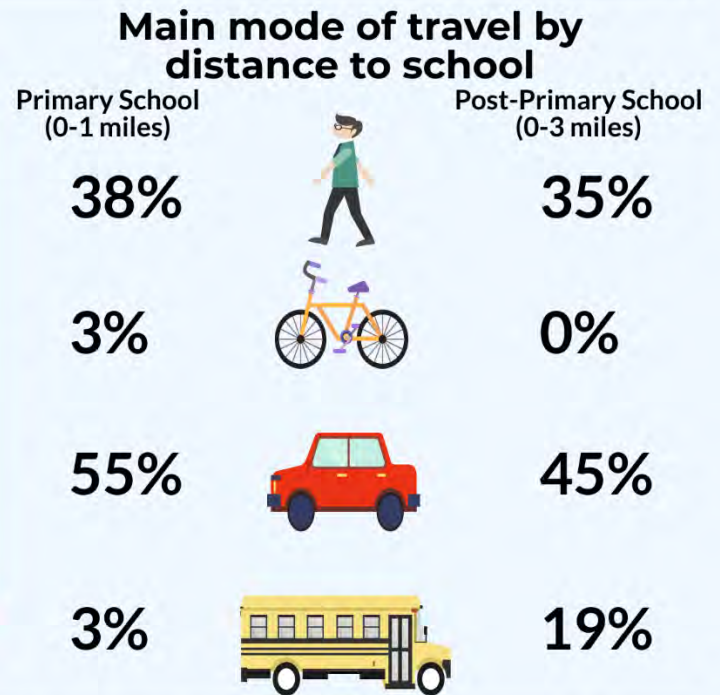
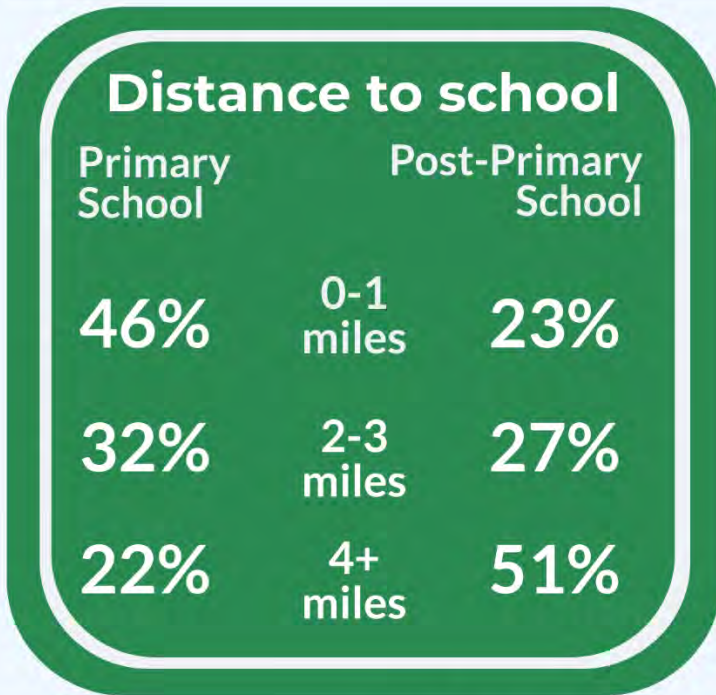
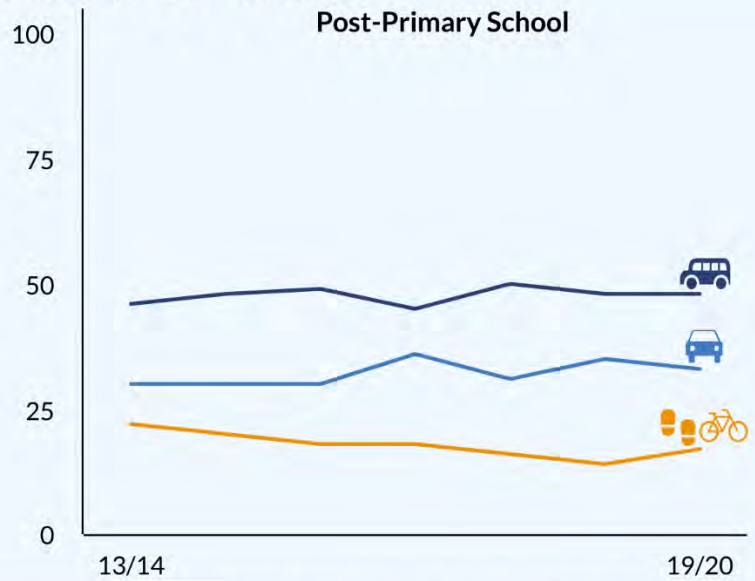
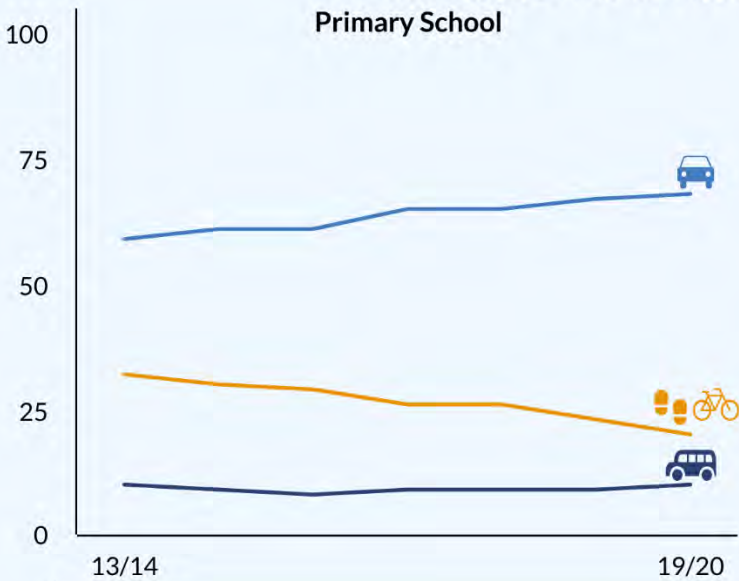
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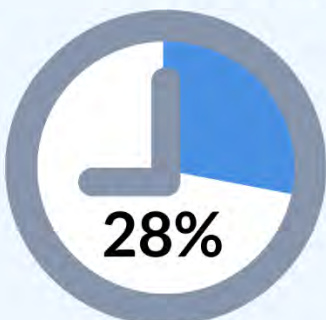
Findings from the NI Continuous Household Survey

Trends in main mode of travel

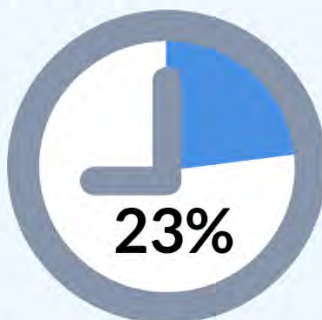


Walking to and from school

Walk 10 minutes or less

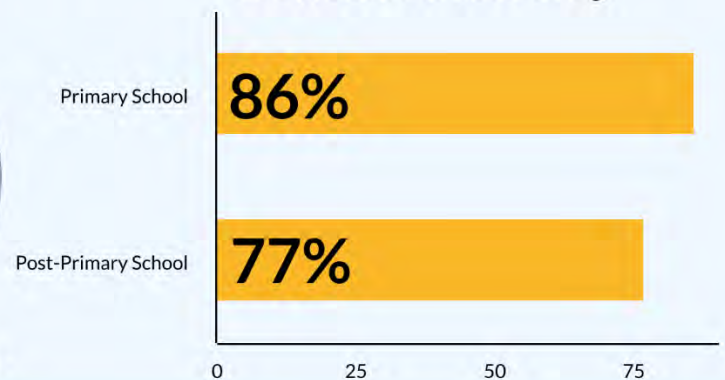


Primary School



Post-Primary School

Walk all of the way



KEY POINTS

- For main mode of travel for primary school pupils, more than two thirds (68%) were driven to/from school by car and 19% usually walked. A further 10% took a bus, and 1% cycled to and/or from school. These results are similar to 2018/19.
- When compared to results from 2013/14, there has been a decrease in walking among primary pupils from 31% to 19%, and conversely, the proportion travelling by car has increased from 59% to 68%.
- Amongst post-primary school pupils, almost half (48%) travelled to/from school by bus as their main mode of travel, and a further 33% travelled to/from school by car. Less than one in five (17%) pupils walked to/from school, while a small proportion took the train (1%).
- Since 2013/14, there has been no real change in how post-primary pupils travel to school.

Walking to and from School

Of the pupils who normally walked to/from school;

- 86% of primary school pupils and 77% of post-primary school pupils walked all of the way to/from school.
- 28% of primary school pupils spent 10 minutes or less walking to and from school and over a third (36%) spent 11-20 minutes.
- Almost a quarter (23%) of post-primary school pupils spent 10 minutes or less walking to and from school, and a similar proportion (24%) spent 11-20 minutes.
- More than three-quarters of primary school pupils (76%) walk **to** school five days per week. A similar proportion of post-primary school pupils walk **to** school (74%) five days per week.

Distance from home to school

- Less than half (46%) of primary school pupils lived 0-1 miles from the school. More than half (55%) of these pupils were driven by car and 38% walked to school.
- For post-primary school pupils, 49% lived between 0-3 miles from their school. Of these pupils, almost half (45%) were driven by car, 35% walked and 19% travelled by bus.

INTRODUCTION

How we travel has a really important impact upon our physical and mental health and wellbeing – whether through social exclusion, poor air quality or the fact that we are not active enough. Increasing the percentage of journeys that are made by walking, cycling and public transport can contribute to a range of the outcomes – including health, infrastructure and the environment. By increasing activity and reducing reliance on the private car, walking and cycling can contribute to sustainability, provide children with a better and healthier start in life, cultivate better active travel habits, improve air quality and contribute to longer healthier lives.

The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) has responsibility for the development of sustainable travel throughout Northern Ireland and there is significant potential to increase the number of children walking or cycling to school. The Department aims to create safer conditions that allow children to replace the daily school run by an active and sustainable method of travel where possible.

DfI supports various initiatives that help support parents, teachers and children to make a healthier choice for their mode of travel to school, such as the Active School Travel Programme, the Cycling Proficiency Scheme and the Practical Child Pedestrian Safety Training and Walk/Cycle to School week (usually late May each year).

Uses of the data

This report provides annual statistics on the main method of travel to/from school and, in particular, on the proportion of primary school and post primary school pupils who walk and cycle to school. This information can be used to monitor the overall effect of the initiatives that are aimed at increasing the proportion of children who travel actively to school.

As the data presented in this report are calculated from a representative sample of the Northern Ireland population, confidence intervals must be calculated to estimate the level of uncertainty in the sample estimate. These confidence intervals can be found in [Appendix 3](#) of this report.

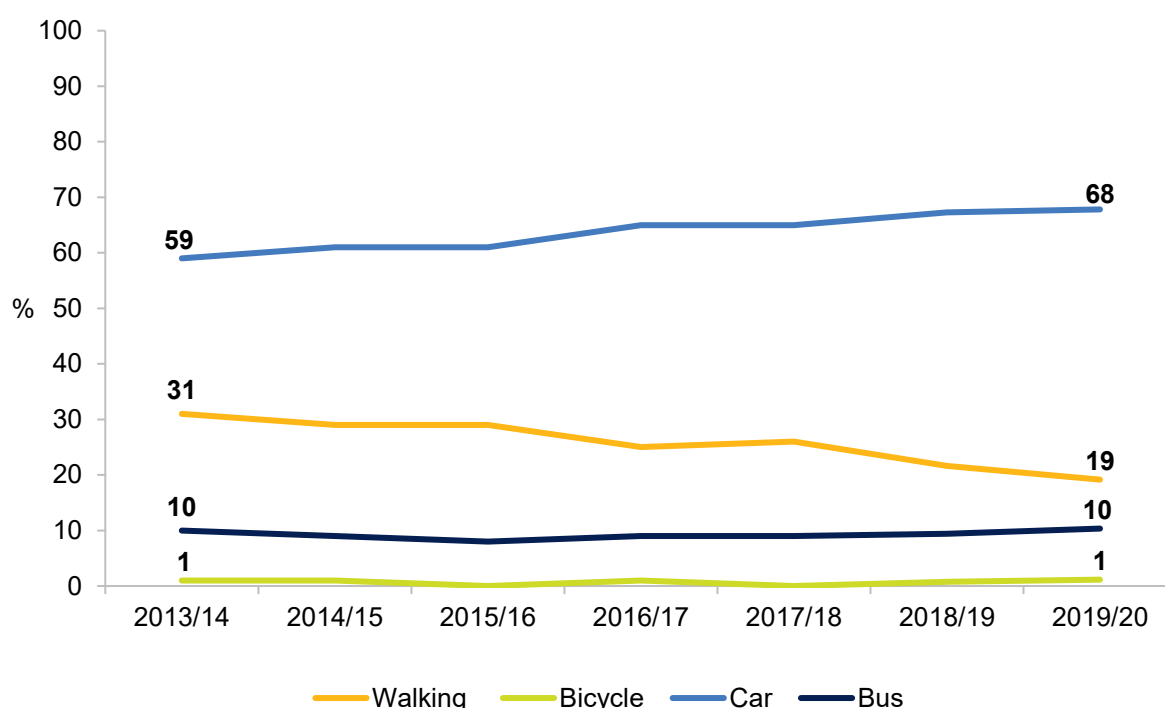
Part 1: MAIN MODES OF TRAVEL TO AND FROM SCHOOL

Respondents to the Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey (CHS) were asked if children in the household attended primary school or post primary school. Parents¹ were then asked a set of questions on behalf of their children. Of the 968 children whose parents were surveyed in 2019/20, 523 children attended primary school, 445 attended post-primary school. The results of these questions are presented in this report.

Respondents were asked to consider the **main** mode of travel their child used to travel to and from school, that is, the mode of travel used for the longest part of the journey.

a. Primary School

Figure 1: Main mode of travel to/from primary school (%)



Base: 2019/20= 522

In 2019/20, more than two-thirds (68%) of primary school pupils travelled to/from school by car². as their main mode of travel, a similar proportion to 2018/19 (67%). Almost one in five (19%) primary school pupils walked to/from school as their main mode. A further 10% of primary school pupils travelled by bus with 1% having travelled to school by bicycle and by equal modes³. A full breakdown is available in Table 1.

¹ Throughout the report 'parent' is used to refer to parent, guardian or caregiver.

² Throughout the report 'car' is used to refer to travel by car, van or taxi.

³ Equal modes: parents cannot distinguish which mode was used for the longest part of the journey

Looking at the longer term trend since 2013/14, car travel as main mode of travel has increased from 59% to 68% and conversely, the proportion of primary school pupils walking to and from school as main mode of travel has decreased from 31% to 19% (Table 1).

Table 1: Main mode of travel to and from primary school 2013/14 – 2019/20

	13/14 (%)	14/15 (%)	15/16 (%)	16/17 (%)	17/18 (%)	18/19 (%)	19/20 (%)	Change since 2013/14
Walking	31	29	29	25	26	22	19	↓
Bicycle	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	↔
Car	59	61	61	65	65	67	68	↑
Bus	10	9	8	9	9	9	10	↔
Train	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-
Equal*	0	0	2	0	0	1	1	-
Base	642	622	564	583	486	541	522	

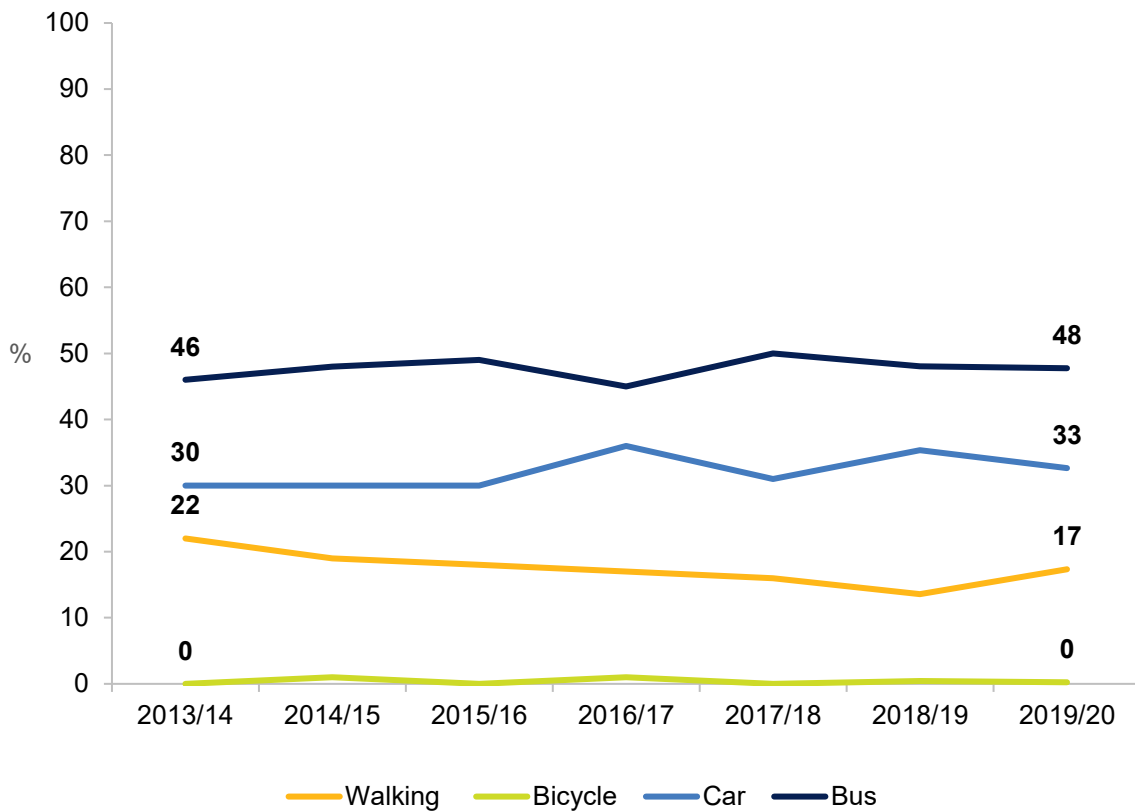
*Equal refers to those who use different modes of travel to/from school for equal amounts of time/distance

Urban/Rural

As main mode of travel, primary school pupils living in urban areas (27%) were more likely to walk to and/or from school than those living in rural areas (9%). Conversely, as main mode of travel three-quarters (75%) of primary school pupils living in rural areas were driven to/from school by car and 14% by bus, which is higher than those living in urban areas (62% by car; 7% by bus).

b. Post-Primary School

Figure 2: Main mode of travel to/from post-primary school (%)



Base: 2019/20, 444

Almost half (48%) of post-primary school pupils travelled to/from school by bus as their main mode of travel in 2019/20, around the same as in 2018/19. A third (33%) travelled to/from school by car as their main mode of travel. Less than one in five (17%) pupils walked to/from school, while a small proportion took the train (1%).

A small proportion of parents (1%) said they could not distinguish the main mode of travel (i.e. equal time and/or distance travelled by different modes).

Looking at the longer term trend since 2013/14, there has been no real change in main mode of travel for how post primary school pupils travel to school (table 2).

Table 2: Main mode of travel to and from post-primary school 2013/14 – 2019/20

	13/14 (%)	14/15 (%)	15/16 (%)	16/17 (%)	17/18 (%)	18/19 (%)	19/20 (%)	Change since 2013/14
Walking	22	19	18	17	16	14	17	↔
Bicycle	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	↔
Car	30	30	30	36	31	35	33	↔
Bus	46	48	49	45	50	48	48	↔
Train	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	-
Equal*	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	-
Base	613	550	576	550	411	464	444	

*Equal refers to those who use different modes of travel to/from school for equal amounts of time/distance

Urban/Rural

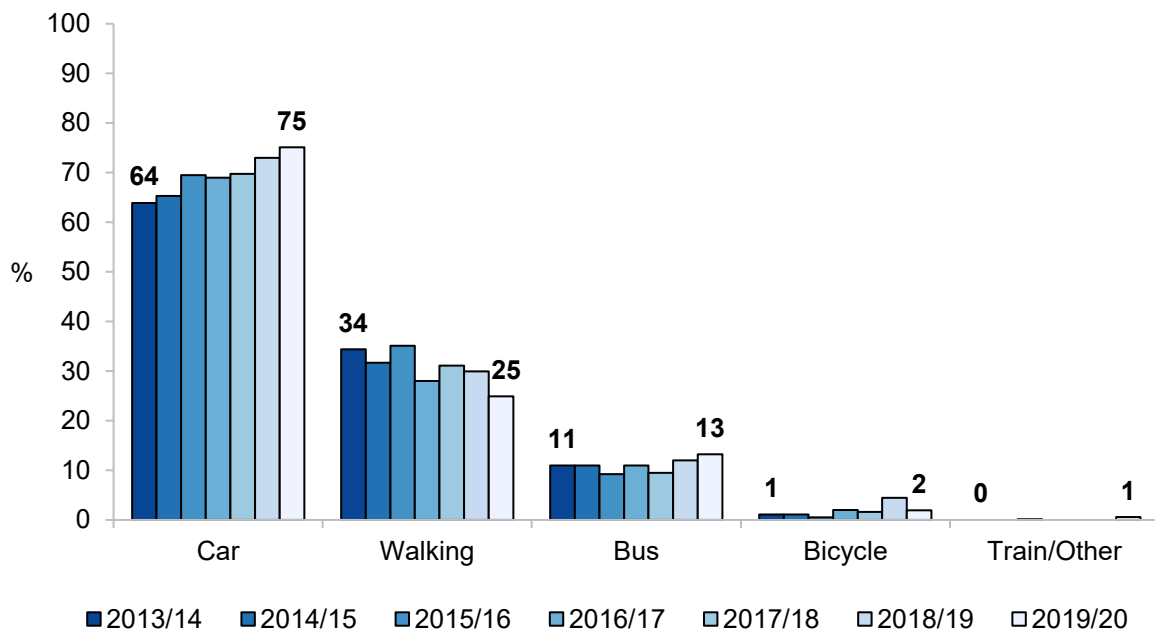
In 2019/20, post-primary school pupils living in urban areas (28%) were more likely to walk to/from school as main mode of travel than those from rural areas (4%). Post-primary pupils living in rural areas (66%) were more likely to travel to/from school by bus as main mode of travel than those living in urban areas (33%).

Part 2: ALL MODES OF TRAVEL TO AND FROM SCHOOL

Part one of this report considers responses to the question asking what was the child’s main mode of travel to school. Respondents were also asked to indicate **all** modes of travel their children normally used to travel to and from school (respondents could select more than one option) and this part reports on that broader question.

a. Primary School

Figure 3: All modes of travel to/from primary school (%)



Base: 2019/20, 522

*percentages may sum to more than 100 due to multiple responses

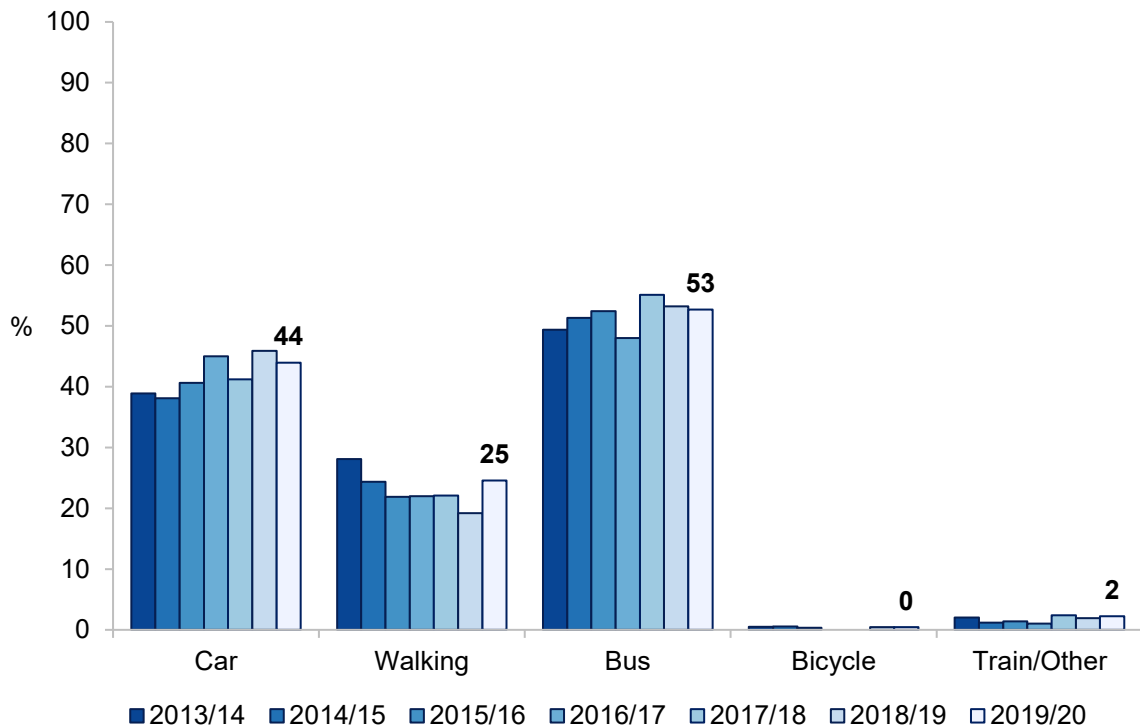
Amongst primary school pupils, three quarters (75%) used the car as part of their journey to/from school. A quarter (25%) walked all or part of the way to/from school, 13% used a bus, and 2% cycled all or part of the way.

Urban/Rural

In 2019/20, a higher proportion of primary school pupils living in rural areas (80%) used a car as part of their travel to/from school than those living in urban areas (71%). Similarly, a higher proportion of those living in rural areas (19%) took the bus to/from school, compared to urban areas (8%). Those living in urban areas (34%) were more likely to walk as part of their journey than those living in rural areas (14%).

b. Post-Primary School

Figure 4: All modes of travel to/from post-primary school (%)



Base: 2019/20, 444

*percentages may sum to more than 100 due to multiple responses

In 2019/20, over half (53%) of post-primary school pupils used the bus as part of their travel to and from school, a similar proportion to 2018/19 (53%). Over two fifths (44%) used a car as part of their journey, and a quarter (25%) walked all or part of the way to or from school.

Urban/Rural

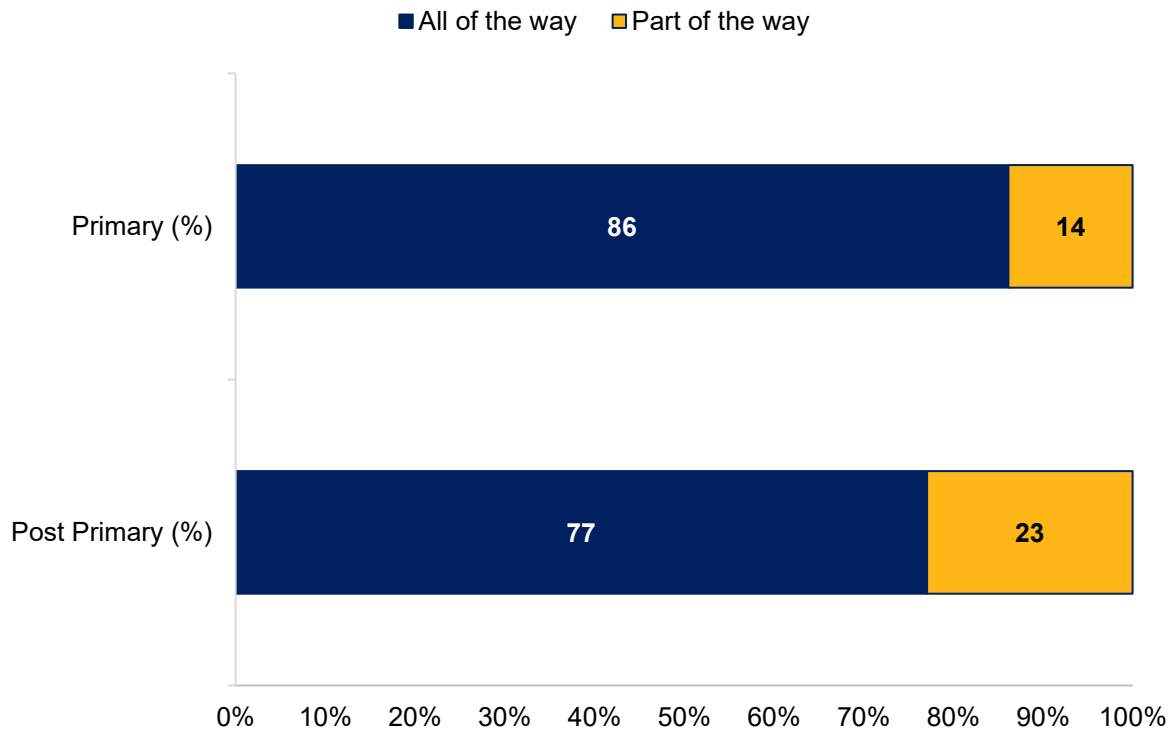
In 2019/20, post-primary school pupils living in urban areas (39%) were more likely to walk as part of their travel to/from school than those living in rural areas (5%). Those living in rural areas (69%) were more likely to take the bus as part of their journey than those living in urban areas (40%).

Part 3: WALKING

Those who indicated that their child normally walked as part of their journey to/from school (130 primary school; 109 post-primary), were subsequently asked whether their child walked all or part of the way, how long they spent walking, and how many days per week that they walked.

Walking all or part of the way to/from school

Figure 5: Proportion of pupils who walk all of the way to/from school (%)



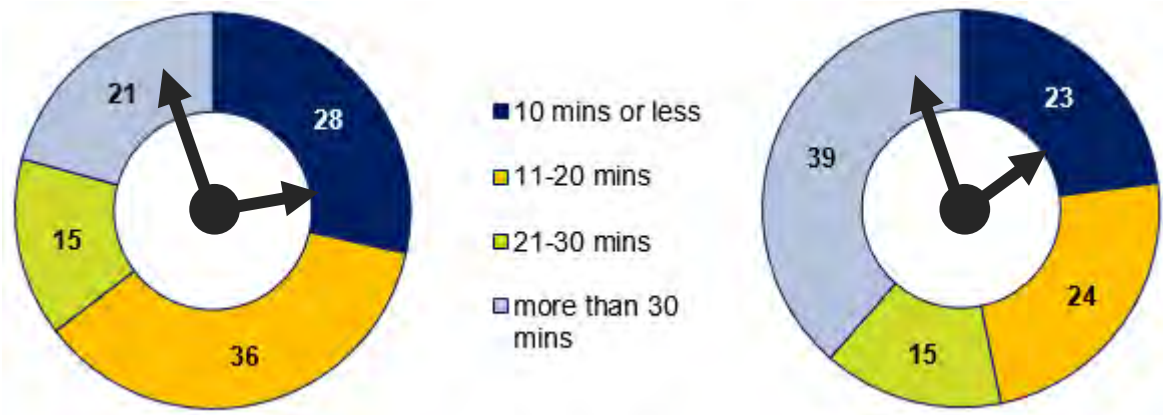
Base: Primary, 130; Post-Primary, 109

Of the 130 primary school pupils who normally walked to school, 86% of these walked *all of the way*, which is similar to the proportion who walked *all of the way* to school in 2018/19 (85%).

In 2019/20, 77% of the 109 post-primary school pupils walked *all of the way* to/from school. Comparison with 2018/19 is not available for post-primary pupils due to small sample size.

Time spent walking to/from school

Figure 6: Time spent walking to and from school per day



Primary School (Base: 130)

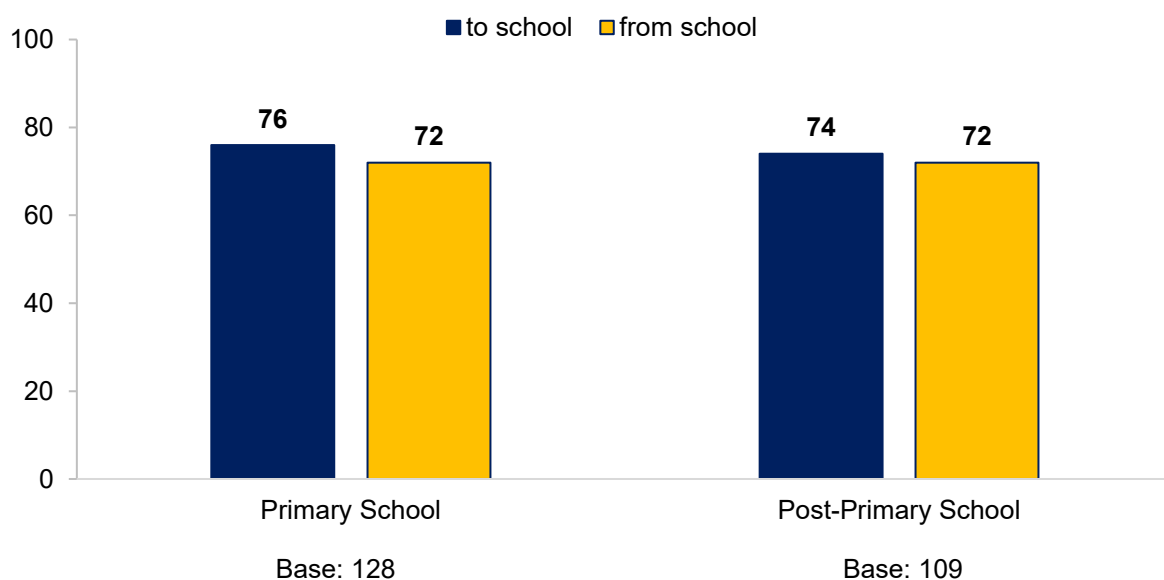
Post-Primary School (Base: 109)

Over a quarter (28%) of primary school pupils spent 10 minutes or less walking to and from school, 36% spent 11-20 minutes, 15% spent 21-30 minutes and 21% spent more than 30 minutes walking to and from school on a daily basis.

Almost a quarter (23%) of post-primary school pupils spent 10 minutes or less walking to and from school, and a similar proportion (24%) spent 11-20 minutes, 15% spent 21-30 minutes, and almost two-fifths (39%) spent more than 30 minutes walking to and from school.

Days per week walking to/from school

Figure 7: Proportion of pupils who walked to and from school who do so 5 days per week (%)

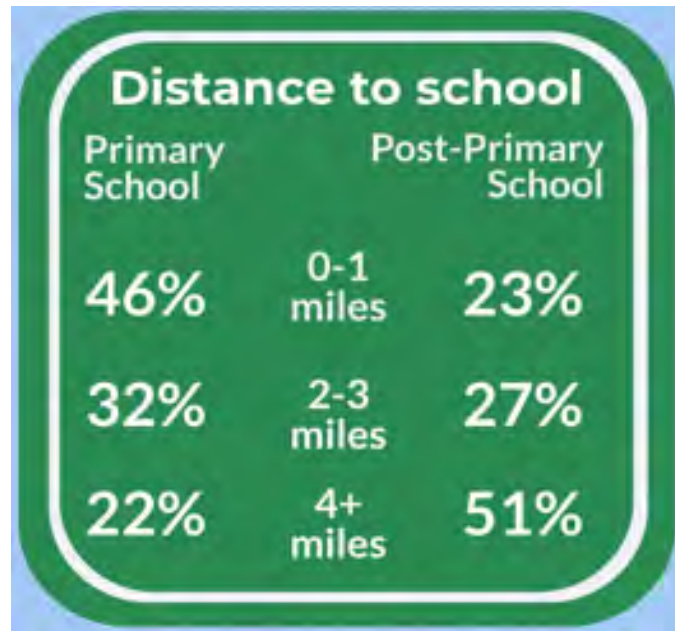


Of primary school pupils who walk to/from school, more than three-quarters of these (76%) walk to school five days per week, while over 7 in 10 (72%) walk home from school 5 days per week. Similar proportions of post-primary school pupils walk to school (74%) and from school (72%) 5 days per week.

Part 4: DISTANCE FROM HOME TO SCHOOL

All parents and guardians were asked to estimate the distance from their home to their child's school (to the nearest whole mile*).

Figure 8: Distance from pupils home to school (to the nearest whole mile)



Base: 522

Base: 444

*0 mile = less than half a mile, 1 miles = ½ mile to less than 1 ½ miles, etc.

46% of primary school pupils lived 0-1 mile from their school, 32% lived between 2-3 miles and 22% lived 4 or more miles from their school. For post primary school pupils, almost a quarter (23%) lived between 0-1 miles from their school, 27% lived between 2-3 miles and the remaining 51% lived 4 or more miles away from their school (Figure 8).

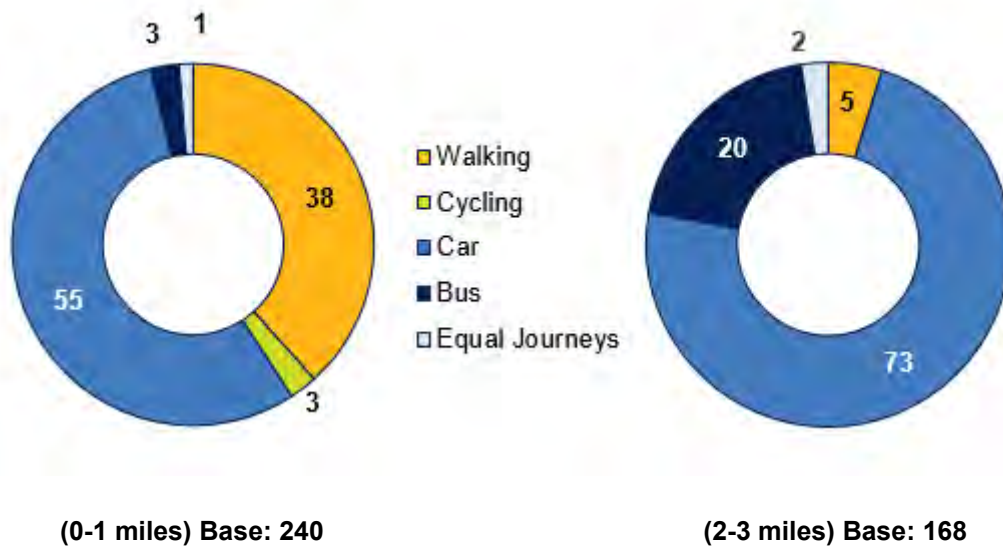
In 2019/2020, there were 806 primary schools and 193 post-primary schools in Northern Ireland⁴. Therefore, it is likely that children will live closer to primary schools than post-primary schools and these results are not unexpected. Older children may also be more likely to travel further to attend a post-primary school of their choice.

⁴ [Dept. of Education website \(opens in new window\)](#)

Main Mode of travel to and from school (by distance)

a. Primary School

Figure 9: Main mode of transport used by distance from pupils' home to primary school (%)



Over half (55%) of primary school pupils who lived between 0-1 miles from their school were taken to school by car. 38% of those who lived 1 mile or less from their school walked. A small proportion of these travelled by bus (3%), or by cycling (3%).

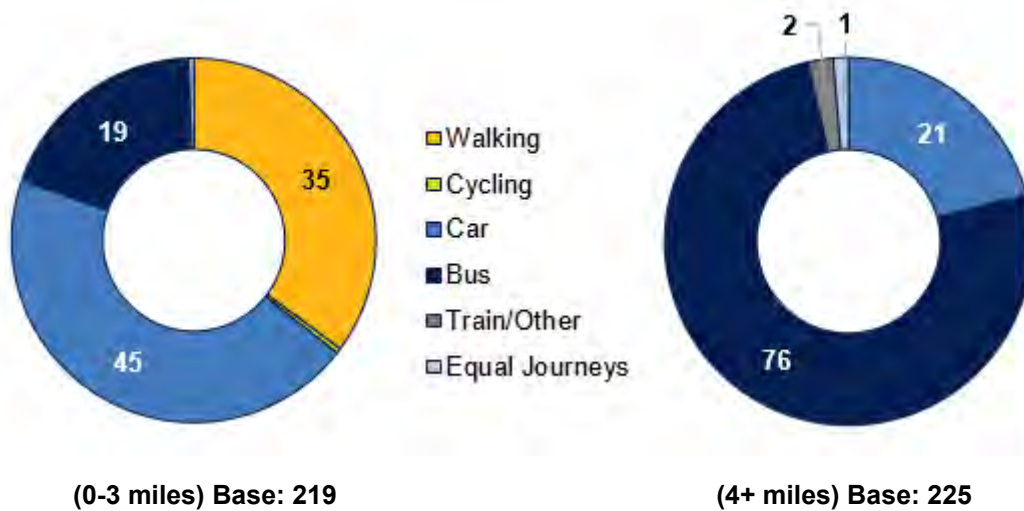
Of those who lived between 2-3 miles from their school, the majority travelled by car (73%), while 20% travelled by bus. A small proportion who lived between 2-3 miles from their school walked (5%).

As expected, almost all of those who lived 4 miles or more from their school travelled by car (87%), or by bus (13%).

Since 2013/14, the proportion of primary school children who live within 0-1 miles from their school and travel by car has increased (43% in 2013/14) while those who walk or cycle (53% in 2013/14) to and from school has decreased. There have been no significant changes for those who live between 2-3 miles of their primary school.

b. Post-Primary School

Figure 10: Main mode of transport used by distance from pupils' home to post-primary school (%)



Over two fifths (45%) of post-primary pupils who lived between 0 and 3 miles⁵ from their school, were driven to and from school by car. Just over one third (35%) who lived between 0 and 3 miles from their school, walked.

Of post-primary school pupils who lived 4 or more miles from their school, around a fifth travelled by car (21%), and around three-quarters (76%) travelled by bus (Figure 10).

It is worth noting that, for post-primary school pupils who lived 0-1 miles from school, almost six in ten (59%) walked or cycled to/from school.

⁵ Categories combined due to sample size

Part 5: CYCLING

In 2019/20, only 1% of primary school pupils cycled to school while less than 0.5% of post-primary school pupils cycled.

Due to the small numbers of pupils cycling, it is not possible to present any further analysis or breakdown of cycling to school.

This is similar to previous reports regarding cycling to school. If number or sample increases allow, further analysis on cycling will be included in future reports.

Appendix 1: Technical Notes

Data collection

The information presented in this publication derives from the Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey (CHS), a Northern Ireland wide household survey administered by Central Survey Unit (CSU), Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

It is based on a sample of the general population resident in private households and has been running since 1983. The Survey is designed to provide a regular source of information on a wide range of social and economic issues relevant to Northern Ireland. The nature and aims of CHS are similar to those of the General Household Survey (GHS), which is carried out by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in Great Britain.

Questions related to method of travel to/from school were commissioned for the first time in 2013/14 and have been included in the CHS every year since then. Therefore this is the seventh time that they have been asked.

The 2019/20 survey was based on a random sample of 9,000 domestic addresses drawn from the Land and Property Services list of addresses and interviews were sought with all adults aged 16 and over in these households. The questions relating to school travel are included in Appendix 4 of this publication.

The dataset contains the records for 968 children who attended a primary or post-primary level school at the time of interview and whose parents provided a response. These records are based on the responses to the DfI Household Module answered by the Household Reference Person or Spouse.

Data quality

Data were collected by CSU and various validation checks were carried out as part of the processing. CSU is the leading social survey research organisation in Northern Ireland and is one of the main business areas of NISRA, an Agency within the Department of Finance. CSU has a long track record and a wealth of experience in the design, management and analysis of behavioural and attitude surveys in the context of a wide range of social policy issues. CSU procedures are consistent with the Official Statistics Code of Practice⁶.

The CHS sample was assessed and considered to be a representative sample of the Northern Ireland population at the household level.

Whilst data quality is considered to be very good, note that all survey estimates are subject to a degree of error and this must be taken account of when considering results (see notes on sampling error on page 21). This error will be reasonably small for the majority of Northern Ireland level results but care should be taken when looking at results based on smaller breakdowns.

⁶ [Code of Practice for Statistics \(opens in new window\)](#)

Multiple response questions

Multiple response questions are those for which respondents can give more than one response if they wish. For example, in the first question in this report, parents were asked to list all of the modes of transport their child used to travel to or from school. In such questions, when individual percentages are summed they may add to more than 100%. Therefore, the footnote “Percentages may sum to more than 100% due to multiple responses” has been included under the relevant charts within the main body of this publication and under the appropriate data tables in Appendix 2.

Rounding conventions




Percentages have been rounded to whole numbers and as a consequence some percentages may not sum to 100. 0% may reflect rounding down of values under 0.5.

Significant difference

Significance tests were carried out to determine if there were differences in responses given by various respondent groups. The significance tests were carried out at 5% significance level (range = -1.96 to +1.96) and only differences which were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) are included in this report. This means that there is at least a 95% probability that there is a genuine difference between responses given by, for example, those living in urban and rural areas and the differences between the two groups cannot simply explained by random chance or sample error. When a significant difference is noted among survey respondents, it is likely that this same difference applies to the Northern Ireland pupil population.

Where the term ‘similar’, ‘no real difference’ or ‘around the same’ has been used when comparing results (including year-on-year) it means that there is no significant difference between the results being compared.

The following symbols have been used in the report to denote significant change:

Symbol	Meaning
	Increase is significant
	No real change
	Decrease is significant

The following respondent groups were considered:

Urban and rural areas

Urban and rural areas have been classified using the statistical classification of settlements defined by the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group.

- Bands A to E are classified as Urban. This includes Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area (Band A), Derry Urban Area (Band B) and large, medium and small towns (Bands C-E) with populations greater than or equal to 5,000 people.
- Bands F to H are classified as rural. This includes intermediate settlements (Band F), villages (Band G) and small villages, hamlets and open countryside (Band H) with populations of less than 5,000 people and including open countryside.

Sampling error

No sample is likely to precisely mirror the characteristics of the population it is drawn from due to both sampling and non-sampling errors. An estimate of the amount of error due to the sampling process can be calculated. For a simple random sample design, the sampling error (s.e.) of any percentage, p, can be calculated by the formula:

$$\text{s.e. } (p) = \sqrt{(p*(100-p)/n)}$$

where n is the number of respondents on which the percentage is based.

Confidence interval

A 95% confidence interval for the population percentage can be calculated using the formula:

$$95\% \text{ confidence interval} = p \pm 1.96 * \text{s.e. } (p)$$

This means that if 100 similar, independent samples were chosen from the same population, 95 of them would yield an estimate for the percentage, p, within this range of values.

The absence of design effects in the survey means that standard statistical tests of significance can be applied directly to the data. 95% confidence intervals were calculated for the headline figures as detailed in Appendix 3 on page 21.

Other notes

The following should be noted when interpreting figures and tables:

- Detailed tabulations are not provided where the number of respondents is too small to allow meaningful analysis.
- The base number of responses to each question, which is shown in each table, is the unweighted count. The base may vary due to some respondents not answering certain questions.

Appendix 2: Comparison data

Table 3: Comparison¹ with Travel Survey for Northern Ireland and Census 2011 Travel to School Results

Primary School Children (aged 4-11)

	Census	TSNI^{2,3}	CHS
	2011 (%)	2016-2018 (%)	2019/2020 (%)
Walk/On Foot	24	23	19
Bicycle	0	2	1
Bus, Minibus or Coach	14	12	10
Car ⁴	61	62	68
Other or 'cannot distinguish' ³	0	0	2
Number of persons in sample aged 4-11	154,062	470	522

Table 4: Comparison¹ with Travel Survey for Northern Ireland and Census 2011 Travel to School Results

Post Primary School Children (aged 12-18)

	Census	TSNI	CHS
	2011 (%)	2016-2018 (%)	2019/2020 (%)
Walk/On Foot	17	17	17
Bicycle	0	0	0
Bus, Minibus or Coach	49	46	48
Car ⁴	32	36	33
Other or 'cannot distinguish' ⁵⁺	0	1	1
Number of persons in sample aged 12-18	145,608	368	444

Notes:

Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding

¹ Caution should be used when interpreting and comparing these figures due to differing methodologies and questions used to derive methods of travel to school.

²Main mode of travel: Journeys can consist of stages e.g. walk to bus stop and take the bus to school. The main mode of travel is the form of transport used for the greatest length of the journey.

²Main mode of travel: Journeys can consist of stages e.g. walk to bus stop and take the bus to school. The main mode of travel is the form of transport used for the greatest length of the journey.

³Based on journeys where the journey purpose was education. Journey purpose is governed by what the person did at the end of the journey but for journeys home the purposes is governed by the start of the journey. Therefore a journey home from school is classified as an education journey as well as any journey to school.

⁴ Car includes Car, van and taxi.

⁵ 'Cannot distinguish' was not an option in the Census or the TSNI.

⁵⁺ 'Other' includes those who travelled by train

Appendix 3: Confidence Intervals

A confidence interval represents the range of values in which the true population value is likely to lie. It is based on the sample estimate and the confidence level.

As the percentages are calculated from a representative sample of the Northern Ireland population, a confidence interval can be calculated to estimate the level of uncertainty in the sample estimate.

95% confidence intervals were calculated for the headline figures for walking and cycling to school. Table 5 below summarizes the confidence intervals for Main Method of Travel to/from School in NI.

Table 5: Confidence Intervals for Main Method of Travel to/from School 2019/2020: Walking and Cycling

	Estimate	95% Confidence Range +/-	Confidence Interval
Primary School Pupils who walk or cycle to school	20%	3	17% - 23%
Post primary School Pupils who walk or cycle to school	18%	4	14% - 22%

- 20% of primary school pupils walked or cycled to/from school in Northern Ireland. Calculating a 95% confidence interval from the results of the survey, it can be estimated that between 17% and 23% of the Northern Ireland primary school population walked or cycled to/from school.
- 18% of post primary school pupils walked or cycled to/from school in Northern Ireland. Calculating a 95% confidence interval from the results of the survey, it can be estimated that between 14% and 22% of the Northern Ireland post primary population walked or cycled to/from school.

Appendix 4: Questionnaire

CHILDREN TRAVEL TO SCHOOL

[CINTRO] I would now like to ask some questions about the children in this household.

ASKED OF EACH PERSON IN THE HOUSEHOLD AGED 4-19

[C1] Is CHILD at a primary or post-primary school?

1. Primary school -> [MODE]
2. Post-primary school -> [MODE]
3. No longer at school -> [DEintro]
4. Not started school -> [ENVIRON]

[MODE] SHOWCARD 9 (MODES OF TRANSPORT)

Which of the modes of transport listed does CHILD normally use to get to and from school? Please consider both journeys and include all modes of transport.

If CHILD walks PART of the way in conjunction with some other form of transport (e.g. walks to or from a bus stop or after being dropped off) only include walking if CHILD has to walk for 10 minutes or more.

CODE ALL THAT APPLY

1. Walking (all or part of the way)
2. Bicycle
3. Car/van
4. Bus
5. Train
6. Taxi
7. Other -> [MODEOTH]

[MODEOTH] Please specify the other mode of transport

[MAIN] SHOWCARD 9 (MODES OF TRANSPORT)

And which of these do you consider is CHILD's main mode of transport to and from school?

(IF MORE THAN ONE MODE SELECT THE MODE WITH THE LONGEST JOURNEY)

1. Walking (all or part of the way)
2. Bicycle
3. Car/van
4. Bus
5. Train
6. Taxi
7. Other
8. Cannot distinguish - equal number of journeys made with different modes (e.g. car lift to school 5 days a week, walk home from school 5 days a week) -> [MAINB]

[MAINB] Which modes have equal journeys made?

1. Walking (all or part of the way)
2. Bicycle
3. Car/van
4. Bus
5. Train
6. Taxi
7. Other

ASKED IF WALKING IS MENTIONED AT MODE OF TRANSPORT TO SCHOOL

[C2] You mentioned previously that CHILD normally walks either to or from school. Can I just check, is that walking all or part of the way to or from school?

1. All of the way
2. Part of the way

[C3] About how many days per week does CHILD walk (all or part of the way) to school? 0..5

[C3a] How many days per week does CHILD walk (all or part of the way) home from school? 0..5

[C5] How long (in minutes) does CHILD spend in total walking to and from school on a daily basis? 1..180

ASKED IF CYCLING IS MENTIONED AT MODE OF TRANSPORT TO SCHOOL

[C4] About how many days per week does CHILD cycle to school? 0..5

[C4a] How many days per week does CHILD cycle home from school? 0..5

[C6] How long (in minutes) does CHILD spend in total cycling to and from school on a daily basis? 1..120

ASKED ABOUT PERSON IN THE HOUSEHOLD WHO IS ATTENDING SCHOOL

[C7] How far is CHILD 's school (to the nearest whole mile) from your home? 0..90