

Hollycombe School Walking Bus Anybody?

Josie Dew

Would anyone with children at (or an interest in) Hollycombe School be keen to use or help with a school WALKING-BUS scheme that I would like to set up?

I've been a Hollycombe School parent for 12 years. During that time, I've tried to come up with ideas to help reduce the ever-growing drop-off and pick-up car queues. Fortunately, the car queue is something I've never had to use as I love cycling and live only 2.5 miles from school.

Hollycombe is a lovely tall-chimney house of a village school sitting on the edge of a sheep field at Wardley Green. School expansion, success and reputation means there are now many more children (around 100) than when my mum taught music there 50 years ago. In those days, most of the children walked or cycled from the village. But times have changed. The majority of children, both Milland children and those from surrounding areas, now arrive by car.

This means the queue to drive into the school has grown hugely. Most of the playground is shut off to allow for the parking and movement of cars. School staff operate a generous Ritz Hotel-like door attendant service chaperoning the children in and out of their cars. Rain often doubles the queue length, stretching it to the main road. During this time the car queue staff can get very wet.

With enough support, I'd like to establish a drop-off system using the layby at the bottom of the lane and/or the Rising Sun or Milland crossroads bus stop shelter, with a supervised walking bus to get the children to school. And I'd like to encourage more walking, cycling or scooting for those close enough to do so.

So here are my reasons why I think it's a good idea to lessen the queue:

1. It puts the children's health before convenience of the car queue, reducing their exposure to fumes outside as well as in classrooms through Covid-induced open windows. See www.asthma.org.uk for more on this. Engines are often idling for long periods, raising pollution to unpleasant and potentially dangerous levels. Cleaner air is, of course, better for the children's health and the environment.
2. Studies have shown that even a short amount of exercise is beneficial for a child's health and improves classroom concentration. (A recent survey showed that 74% of children spend less time exercising outdoors than prison inmates.)

3. If there are no cars driving into school the children can have their whole playground back to play in. They will no longer need to be corralled behind the drive-through barriers. They can make use of the new Playzone equipment and play again in a fume-free space.
4. Fewer cars improves safety, for both those in the area outside the school and those cycling to school faced with cars trying to manoeuvre past each other in the narrow lane.
5. The removal of car queues improves life for locals, who often have to time exit/entrance from/to their homes to avoid the congestion.
6. No car queue means a huge time-saving for car queue school staff who each spend around 30 minutes per day helping the children into and out of cars. This calculates as around 1 1½ full days per year per car queue staff member simply opening and shutting car doors. As 4 or more staff members usually manage the car queue (2 outside and 2 inside finding the right child for the right car, that's potentially 40-plus days of staff time spent sorting children for the car queue.

And here are my not so good reasons to lessen the car queue:

1. Inconvenience for parents who need to drive for getting to work as fast as possible. (Although layby parking and a **two-minute walk up the path is still quick and easy and perhaps often quicker than queuing.**) However, we could set up a layby drop-off system with volunteers walking the children to the school to help.
2. I can't think of any others!

Last term I discussed with the school a possible trial for a Fume-Free Friday, whereby the queue would not operate on a Friday morning or afternoon with parents encouraged to park further afield and walk or cycle with their children to school. If that was not possible then they would park at the end of the lane. For ill children or drivers with a Blue Badge car, they could continue to use the school car park. But then this idea was put on hold because of concerns raised about road safety at the end of the lane.

I feel there is definitely a way to get around this perceived risk.

A **drop-off layby system** and/or a **Hollycombe walking bus from the Milland crossroads** (along with walking, cycling or scooting, instead of driving, for those able to do so) could make it possible to have not just a **Fume-Free Friday** but a **Fume-Free School – every day.**

With enough volunteers, we can provide supervision of the children from the layby to the school. Parents particularly pressed for time could drop their children at the Milland crossroads for 8:15 for an adult to gather up the yellow-jacket'ed children and walk them to school. And we can establish a rota, so that a parent volunteer, or local volunteer who might like a walk, may only need to walk in one day a week or fortnight.

A FUME-FREE SCHOOL IS POSSIBLE SO, IN THE NAME OF OUR CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND THE EARTH'S AIR, LET'S DO IT!

I am willing to co-ordinate the initiative. If you want to get involved and help to make it happen, please let me know!

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For more info:

SUSTRANS SCHOOL STREETS is a programme run by the sustainable transport charity Sustrans to improve air quality and make it safer outside the school gates during the school run.

<https://www.sustrans.org.uk/our-blog/projects/2019/uk-wide/sustrans-school-streets/>

For 10 tips to help you cycle to school along with lots more help and ideas with cycling see: www.cyclinguk.org - <https://www.cyclinguk.org/article/10-tips-help-you-cycle-school>