



The Secretary
An Bord Pleanála
64 Marlborough Street
Dublin 2
February 14th, 2024
Ref: HA17.318573

The Board of Management of St. Patrick's National School, Collon Road, Slane, Co. Meath would like to support the new public realm enhancement scheme for Slane village, including a village road bypass, as proposed by Meath County Council and Transport Infrastructure Ireland.

St. Patrick's National School has 261 pupils, aged from 4 to 13 years, currently enrolled in 11 mainstream classes. The school also has a staff of 20. Our school is situated on the N2 primary road, known as the Collon Road, on the outskirts of Slane village. The lived experience of our school community is framed within the statistic of approximately 17,000 vehicles travelling through Slane village via the N51 and N2 on a daily basis. Resulting traffic congestion, noise and air pollution have a significant impact on everyone in the school community.

It is important to note that the opinions of the pupils in our school have been sought and are included as part of this submission.

The Board of Management of St. Patrick's National School believes that our school community will be positively impacted by the proposed N2 Slane Bypass and Public Realm Enhancement Scheme for the following reasons:

1. **Better Air Quality** – in autumn of this year, 4th class pupils in our school took part in an international air quality scientific investigation in conjunction with An Taisce and the Environmental Protection Agency. The purpose of the initiative was to study the amount of nitrogen dioxide (a gas emitted from motor vehicles) present in the air at 331 sites in over 160 primary and secondary schools across Ireland for a one-month period.

Test tubes were positioned at the front of our school to collect the data, given that this is where so many vehicles pass our school on a daily basis. At the end of the data collection phase the test tubes were then forwarded to a laboratory to analyse the data. Results extrapolated showed that nitrogen dioxide levels outside St. Patrick's National School, Slane were the 11th highest among all Irish primary schools in the study. However, all schools with higher nitrogen dioxide readings were located in cities and large towns. As a result, one of the sites at the front of St. Patrick's National School had very high nitrogen dioxide levels (16.58 ug/m³) in comparison to other Irish primary schools located in similar sized villages and exceeded the World Health Organization (WHO) air quality guidelines of 10 ug/m³.





Increased nitrogen dioxide levels in the air cause irritation and inflammation in the lung airways and lungs themselves, resulting in symptoms such as coughing, wheezing, asthma and other respiratory conditions. Data on particulate matter, which is also an air quality pollutant emitted from motor vehicles was not collected in this study but is commonly present along with nitrogen dioxide. 1,300 deaths per year in Ireland are attributed to exposure to particulate matter and 50 deaths per year are directly attributed to nitrogen dioxide (see link below).

We have had concerns about the health impact on children travelling to and from school, as well as playing outdoors at break times with this poor air quality in our local environment, especially on calm days. We have many pupils in our school with respiratory conditions, such as asthma (one in ten children in Ireland), as well as others with intermittent health problems, including irritation to eyes, noses and throats, coughing and other respiratory symptoms, impacting on attendance and capacity to engage in education. It is well recognised that vehicle traffic, and in particular diesel fumes (McCreanor et. al, 2007), cause worsening of the symptoms of asthma, and will miss on average five days of school a year due to flares in the disease. Therefore, the results of our study support our concerns.

As our school is located on the N2 national road, the proposed bypass of Slane village will directly reduce vehicle levels outside St. Patrick's N.S. Our hope and expectation is that, with a consequential reduction in nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter levels, pupil health will directly benefit. We hope to continue to participate in the study annually and look forward to seeing reduced levels of nitrogen dioxide after the Slane bypass completion.

- The Irish GLOBE school air quality study data 2023 is available <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1yYmqyYph5pNlqpLkuC-zjmdP6Ya-Bb17/edit#gid=879374859>
- Further information on the health effects of air pollution is available [here](#)
- World Health Organization (WHO) air quality guidelines are available here: <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/what-are-the-who-air-quality-guidelines>
- A study on the respiratory effects of exposure to diesel traffic in persons with asthma is available here: <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/nejmoa071535>

2. **A Safer Community for Children and Adults** – in the last six months alone there have been a number of dangerous road traffic incidents in the vicinity of St. Patrick's National School. In one instance, a van blew out a front tyre and crashed into the pedestrian railings at the traffic lights on front of the school. It was fortunate that it happened at 8.30am and not 30 minutes later when tens of pupils were crossing the road to begin school.





More recently, a vehicle sped through a red light at the same location as a pupil was crossing the road. The pupil had the presence of mind to run back to the footpath and avoid a collision with the car. These incidents are indicative of the threat of danger where 17,000 vehicles travel through a village such as Slane on a daily basis.

Some pupils say that they are afraid to walk to school and others that do, talk about concerns about the volume and speed of cars and lorries driving beside them. The risk of harm from vehicles to people in the school community means that an increasing number of parents and staff use vehicles to travel to and from school, which only exacerbates the situation.

184 people died on Irish roads in 2023. In addition, over 23 deaths and many more injuries have taken place on the roads in Slane village in recent times. We believe that it is reasonable to hypothesise that a bypass of the N2 will reduce the number of vehicles travelling to and from the village and consequently reduce the threat of potential accidents, serious injuries and deaths, not only for pupils, staff and parents of St. Patrick's National School but also for the wider Slane community.

- Statistics on deaths and serious injuries in Slane village are available [here](#)
- Statistics on road deaths in Ireland for 2023 are available [here](#)

3. Improved School Community Multi Modal Travel Opportunities

Due to the potential risk of harm from vehicles to pedestrians and cyclists, high numbers of adults in the St. Patrick's N.S. school community use vehicles as their mode of transport to and from school. This leads to additional traffic congestion in the vicinity of the school at school drop off times between 9am and 9.30am and collection times at 2pm and 3pm.

The result is more traffic congestion, increased nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter air pollution emissions and safety concerns for those who do use other modes of transport. As part of the air quality study referenced in point one, pupils collected data on vehicles passing the school in five-minute intervals. The average number of vehicles passing was 49 and on one morning 73 vehicles had passed the school in a five-minute period.

St. Patrick's National is a long-standing member of the An Taisce Green Schools programme. We undertake annual interventions to promote alternative to vehicle use to and from the school, including Bus, Bike or Walk on Wednesdays. While support for the initiatives is high, we are also realistic in terms of what is achievable with such a busy national route at the front of our school.

The plans for the Slane village bypass offer a glimpse of what is possible in this regard. The revised design for the village offers multi modal transport options, including dedicated cycle





lanes. With the reduction in the dominance of the vehicle as the primary transport mode through the village, the opportunity presents itself for many more in the school community to walk, cycle and use scooters to travel to and from school, increasing physical activity levels, as well as independence and pupil wellbeing.

- Vehicle data outside our school as part of the GLOBE Air Quality study is [here](#)

4. Improved Pupil Educational Experiences and Connection to Place – last month, second class went on a field trip, walking 600 metres from the school to observe the Georgian buildings at the square in the centre of Slane village. It became a large undertaking. Additional adult supervision was needed and what was a short walking trip took much longer than it should have. The reason was the threat from vehicles travelling adjacent to the pupils on the N2 road. The group had to stop regularly to ensure that everybody was in close proximity, pupils had to be reminded at regular intervals to stay close to the grass and not the road and there was constant noise, exhaust fumes and the threat of children being caught in the slipstream of passing vehicles.

The current primary school curriculum places a large emphasis on the local outdoor area as a fundamental learning environment for primary school children across a range of curricular subjects. We are incredibly fortunate in St. Patrick's National School to have, among other sites, the Hill of Slane, River Boyne, Slane Castle a local graveyard and church, a village garden space, a library, a playground and the forested area of Littlewood all within walking distance of the school.

However, as explained in the example above, these sites are not utilised for hands on, practical and experiential learning to the extent that they should, due to the safety threat of the high volume and speed of vehicles outside our school. Teachers are very resilient in St. Patrick's National School and, despite the challenges, continue to undertake such field trips and excursions with their pupils. We are not content to give up. However, a revised public realm enhancement scheme including a reduction in traffic numbers will allow for more educational learning experiences, embedding learning and further helping children to connect to their local place, Slane village.

- Further information on the importance of outdoor learning environment as part of the Primary Curriculum Framework is available on p.5 [here](#)

Conclusion

In summary, the Board of Management of St. Patrick's National School welcomes and supports the proposed road bypass of Slane village, as well as the enhancement scheme for the village. Members of the Board of Management, as well as the staff, parents and pupils in





St Patrick's National School

Coinnigh an solas ar lasadh

Collon Road, Slane, Co. Meath C15 NX78

(041) 982 4229

office@slanens.ie

www.slanens.ie

Roll No: 18040L

Principal:

Paul O'Donnell

the school, are available to appear at an oral hearing, if one is required as part of the planning process.

Kind regards,

Paul O'Donnell

Principal and Board of Management Secretary



Proud of our school's achievements