

# A healthy body means a healthy mind and St Ursula's Catholic Junior School is helping to make sure Katarzyna's children are getting on their bikes!



## Making the effort

Katarzyna had two main criteria for the school she and Rafal chose for their children, that it should be a Catholic school with a good Ofsted report, and she was glad to find that St Ursula's Catholic Junior School offered both of these. However, she is pleased that it also adheres to other principles which are close to her heart: "I have always been happy with the standard of education but, particularly in recent years, I have noticed a new and more positive attitude which I like very much. As a parent, I want to feel that my views are listened to and taken seriously and now I feel that they are."

As a child, Katarzyna and her school friends knew that if they missed the bus they would have no choice but to cycle to school and this they did on a regular basis. "Cycling was taken for granted where I lived in Poland and for many people it was

*Katarzyna and Rafal Cholewa live in Romford with their children Maciej, 10, Emilia, 7 and Zofia, 2.*



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part of the lifestyle," she explains. "It is something I believe we should all make more of an effort to do and so I was pleased when the Headteacher at St Ursula's backed my idea of erecting a bike shelter to encourage more children to cycle to school."

### Big Pedal, big benefits

St Ursula's has won several awards for its promotion of environmental awareness, healthy living and sustainable travel and is doing a great deal to urge children and their parents on to two wheels instead of four. The school regularly runs events through its Transport for London School Travel Plan, events like the Big Pedal competition, has seen the bike shelters overflowing and more children than ever enjoying a bracing ride to school. "I believe that having to get up a little earlier and making sure we are suitably dressed for the weather is well worth the benefits," says Katarzyna. "That bit of exercise in the morning might tire the body a little but it is well-known that it stimulates the brain a great deal, so children arrive at school refreshed and mentally receptive. I have definitely noticed that in my children, and the journey is thoroughly enjoyable, too."

### Inspiring new attitudes

As part of their campaign, St Ursula's subscribes to the Bikeability Scheme, where professional trainers come into the school to talk about cycling safety as well giving practical tuition in the playground. "Obviously, safety is a critical factor and the importance of equipment such as helmets and high-visibility clothing is stressed," Katarzyna explains. "The idea is to inspire children to cycle whenever practical, to make sure they can do so confidently and with the least possible risk."

Minimising risk, especially for younger children, means that Katarzyna always chooses the safest possible routes to school and avoids main roads, which she has not found it difficult to do. "If you are sensible it is perfectly possible to find a way round the busiest traffic areas and I have never been worried about my children's safety on our way to school and back. I have always found car drivers to be courteous and considerate and because there are now more and more of us cycling to school, drivers and cyclists recognise each other and we give each other a friendly wave when we pass each morning! An added bonus is that by cycling to school we save on time as we avoid the traffic and looking for a parking space, which can be challenging."

### Promoting a healthy and happy way to travel

Although Katarzyna is a dedicated cyclist herself even she will resort to the car or foot when necessary. "I wouldn't insist on cycling to school in really bad weather, partly because I have a seat for Zofia on my bike and she would get too cold and wet! On the other hand, with the proper clothing and the right attitude it is our preferred method of local travel so we do it as often as possible. Apart from going to school and back, cycling together as a family at the weekend is a lovely way to spend time together and I am really pleased that St Ursula's is helping to promote it to others."



### Children say:

Emilia: "I think that biking to school is very fun as it is good for you because you use a lot of your muscles and because of the muscles you use, you come to school energised and healthy."

Maciej: "Biking to school is fun, healthy and is a lot more ecological than driving a car. When you ride your bike to school you arrive a lot happier, energetic and ready to learn."



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