



# THE CHALLENGES FACING INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS TODAY

2023 REPORT PREVIEW



**It's been a turbulent year, with the cost-of-living crisis, soaring utility bills and sky-high inflation continuing to squeeze budgets and take its toll on schools, staff, pupils and their parents. We've commissioned new research to understand how these challenges are impacting independent schools, their investment plans, technology choices and transport provision and how attitudes have changed since we last surveyed them in 2021.**

Building on our Technology and School Transport research last year, once again we've conducted a nationally representative survey with 250 decision makers across UK independent schools, state schools, free schools and Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) to understand the current transport and technology landscape within education.

Some of our key findings in the independent sector are highlighted in this preview. We're excited to be sharing the full report with you in early 2023.



**We've commissioned new research to understand how the challenges of a turbulent year are impacting schools**



## **INTRODUCTION** GODFREY RYAN, CEO, KURA



# ABOUT KURA

**Kura's purpose is to enable safer, greener, smarter travel for schools. Combining leading edge proprietary technology with the best vehicle operators nationwide, Kura enables organisations to maximise the safety, wellbeing, and productivity of their students, customers and staff, whilst driving down transport costs and CO2 emissions.**

The business manages a virtual fleet of 30,000 vehicles and works with schools across the UK on trips and transport tracking over 400 routes, providing safe home to school services for over 15,000 pupils every day. Kura's goal is to provide a more environmentally friendly way to transport children to and from school by taking cars off the road and replacing them with safe, efficient school transport services.

Kura harnesses powerful tracking and app technologies to provide a safer, greener and more intelligent school run service. By simplifying payment, analysing route efficiency and ensuring transport routes support schools' admissions strategies.



# UPGRADING TRANSPORT BENEFITS SCHOOLS

**Our new research highlighted that independent schools are under a significant amount of financial pressure, with two thirds in agreement that school running costs are causing a strain on finances. Staff shortages are also having an impact, and compared to last year, 66% feel it's harder to fill teaching positions, while 52% say it's more difficult to fill administrative positions.**

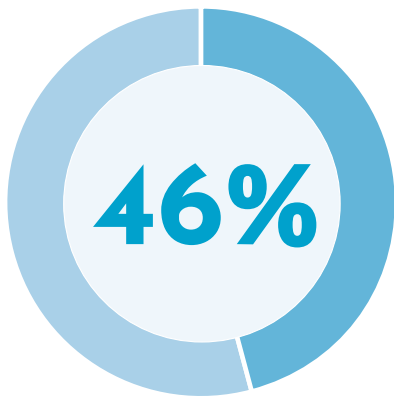
The combination of these challenges is understandably limiting how much resource, budget and consideration schools can give to their transport provision. Yet, when survey respondents were asked

where they've invested in the past year, just 7% had invested in school transport, compared to 55% in classroom teaching, 41% in remote learning, and 38% in school buildings. Considering that almost half (48%) of independent schools surveyed last year said they were planning to invest in lower-emission transport, it's clear that recent challenges have somewhat redirected priorities.

Our research identified that 30% of independent schools currently offer a daily home-to-school transport service for pupils, yet they are experiencing difficulties in finding drivers and vehicles for both school trips (29%) and

home-to-school journeys (23%).

Staff are also spending longer than ever managing the school run, with 44% spending over 11 hours each week – a significant increase on the 30% of independent schools in last year's research. It's clear that there are challenges to be addressed with current school transport provision and processes, and while investing in this area may not seem like a priority today, smarter, safer, greener travel can bring a wide range of benefits for all stakeholders and help to address many of the pain points independent schools are currently experiencing.



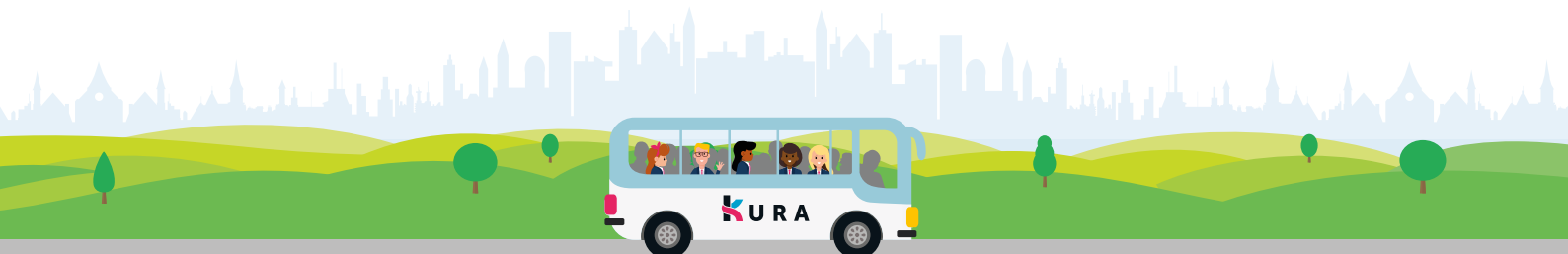
**believe effective school transport is vital for pupil wellbeing and academic achievement**

but



**of independent schools offer a home-to-school service**

Transport is suffering...but the future is brighter



The coach and minibus market was hit hard by the pandemic, with a mass exodus of drivers moving to HGV and other jobs.

This, along with increased fuel costs, has resulted in lower availability and the potential for higher prices. However, the nature of fluctuating availability also means schools can find good prices if they shop around or plan trip transport outside of usual home-to-school service hours.



To save up to 200% on transport costs organise trips to avoid the hours of 0630-0815 and 1515-1730



Just **7%** invested in improving transport

**23%** agreed it is harder to recruit vehicles/drivers year on year for the school run



this rose to **29%** for school trips



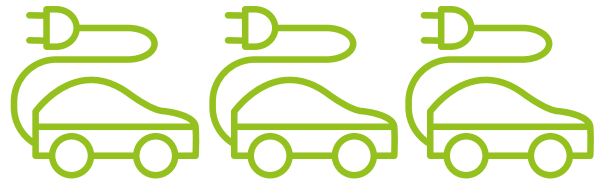


Neglecting green school run opportunities could mean losing out on new admissions





**12%** plan to invest in electric vehicles over the next year



down from **21%** last year

## Sustainability appears to be taking a backseat

**Despite ongoing challenges, it's positive to see that sustainability remains important for many. Yet while 39% of independent schools agreed that reducing their carbon footprint still remains a priority, they sit slightly behind other school types in this area (50% of free schools, 41% of state schools, and 40% of MATs).**

According to a report by UNICEF, 'The Toxic School Run', one in three children in the UK are growing up in areas with toxic air, the majority of which is coming from vehicle emissions. And, with estimates that a quarter of cars on the road

during peak hours are on the school run, travel to and from school is responsible for a huge amount of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions – and damage to young people's health - each week.

Independent schools agree that the level of pollution and congestion at the school gate should be reduced (61% - over a 40% increase on last year's survey), as should the number of parents driving their children to school each day (57%), and the number of parents dropping children off at the school gate or parking nearby (57%). Yet just 21% said the area around their school is part of a scheme to reduce traffic.

This compares to 60% of free schools, 36% of state schools, and 35% of MATs.

Although schools are undoubtedly under financial strain, they can ill afford to put the brakes on when it comes to lowering CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and introducing measures to reduce local traffic. Not only can sustainable transport options save money and reduce the impact of travel on the environment, but it's also increasingly becoming a key differentiator for parents when choosing where to educate their children. Neglecting this responsibility could mean losing out on new admissions.

## THE SUSTAINABILTY DILEMMA

There are a number of wider challenges impacting independent education too

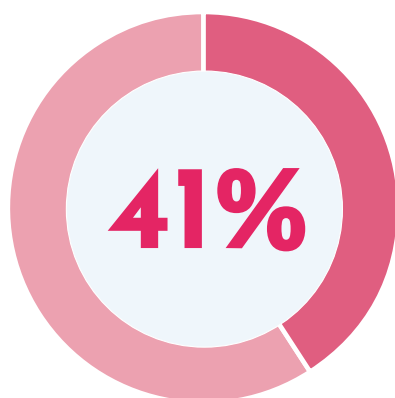


**expect staff workload to be a challenge**

**Our research also identified the key role transport plays in student wellbeing and safeguarding, with 47% of independent school respondents in agreement that an effective school transport strategy is vital for pupil health, wellbeing and academic achievement.**

The post-pandemic return to 'normality' has been difficult for many school staff and pupils, with student behaviour, attainment and social skills all reportedly suffering. Our survey shows that schools aren't expecting these issues to ease any time soon, with half of respondents expecting student wellbeing and 39% expecting safeguarding to pose a significant challenge over the next 12 months.

Not only does upgrading school transport and software to log boarding and journey data improve pupils' safeguarding during the school run, it also ensures pupils get to school on time and stand a better chance of achieving. A school shuttle could also be an important differentiator for parents when choosing where to send their children and given that 41% of independent schools are finding it harder to meet admissions targets than last year, providing safe school transport is another way to expand your catchment area and show that you go above and beyond for pupil safety and wellbeing.



**agreed that meeting new pupil admission targets is harder year on year**



Upgrading school transport improves pupils' safeguarding during the school run

## STUDENT HEALTH & WELLBEING





# DRIVING TRANSPORT EFFICIENCIES

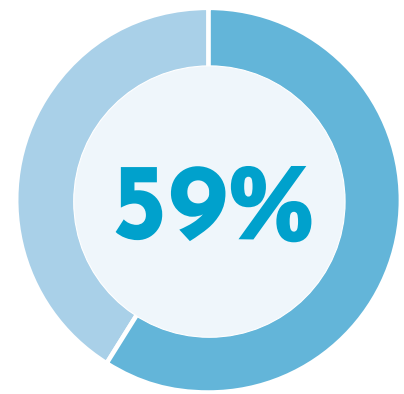
**Technology plays a crucial role in improving home-to-school transport services, enabling greater pupil safeguarding and parent communication, plus better data, insight and reporting for school staff.**

With this in mind, it's perhaps not surprising that 59% of independent school respondents also feel greater investment in technology can improve staff productivity and efficiency (compared to just 30% last year), allowing them to free up time to be reallocated to more strategic and fulfilling activities. And, with staff workload (75%) and staff wellbeing (71%) expected to pose a significant challenge over the next 12 months, technology can be invaluable in helping to relieve the burden and can go some way to improving job satisfaction and staff motivation.

Over a third (39%) of independent school respondents said that investing in pupil and vehicle tracking makes school run communication with parents easier. Yet, of those currently offering a home-to-school service, 47% said they were still using paper registers to track which pupils were using the transport (same as a year ago), and 53% said they used online spreadsheets. Just 6% said they use tracking technology via an app, and 6% said they rely on the teacher escorting the trip, adding to workloads further.

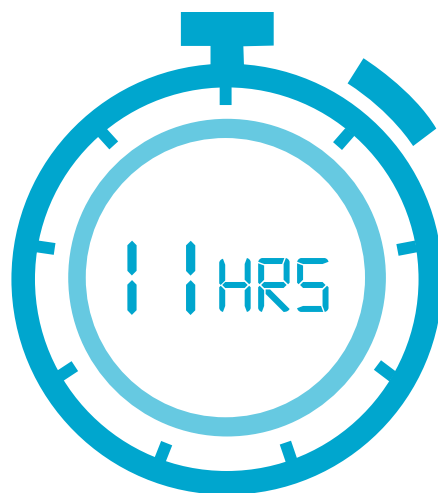
Not only can smart tracking greatly improve pupil safeguarding and reassure parents, but it can also be vital in improving staff wellbeing, satisfaction and retention, as well as supporting data security.

Technology is key to drive transport improvements, yet the investment is often lacking



**believe greater investment in tech would boost staff productivity**

**44%**  
of independent schools spend more than



compared to  
**30%** last year

**each week managing the school run**





There are positive signs for the future of the school run



# THE FUTURE OF TRANSPORT

**Despite ongoing challenges, it's positive to see that sustainability remains important for many. Yet while 39% of independent schools agreed that reducing their carbon footprint still remains a priority, they sit slightly behind other school types in this area (50% of free schools, 41% of state schools, and 40% of MATs).**

While financial pressures aren't expected to ease any time soon, there are positive signs for the future of the school run amongst independent schools.

Those that offer a home-to-school service are still planning to invest in school trips (41%), tracking technology (18%), booking technology (35%) and new vehicle operators and drivers (41%) over the next year, leading other school types in the latter two areas.

When respondents were asked how they think transport will change over the next three years, 43% predict we'll see more electric vehicles (EVs), 41% said better walking and cycling infrastructure, and a quarter said more shared transport (coaches and minibuses) will be used, painting a much more sustainable and less polluting picture.

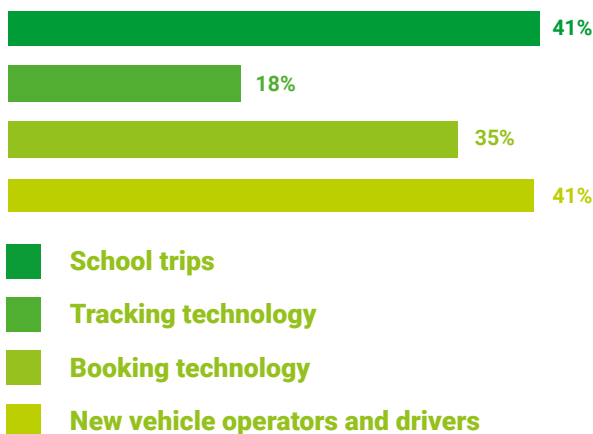
Yet, despite predictions for higher numbers of EVs, just 12% of those offering a home-to-school service said they were planning to invest in EVs next year, suggesting that many either don't have immediate plans to change, or that the high cost of EVs and lack of infrastructure is currently making going electric unfeasible.

Our survey identified a clear desire for a greener future, yet without government policy

change or parental support, this is unlikely to become a reality at the required scale and pace.

While it's great to see a largely positive outlook on the future of school transport, it's clear that there still needs to be more awareness and education around the benefits that safer, smarter and greener travel can bring to schools, their staff, pupils and parents. Adequate funding is vital to support real, impactful change, and in time, the wider benefits are likely to outweigh the initial investment. Not only can reducing the amount of time spent on managing transport boost staff efficiency, productivity and morale, it also frees up more resource to help schools address the crucial 2023 priority areas, including managing finances, new admissions, staff recruitment and academic results.

## How schools with a home to school service are planning to invest



Our survey identified a clear desire for a greener future





**SAFER, GREENER SMARTER TRAVEL**

Call: 020 3397 8405

Email: [hello@ridekura.com](mailto:hello@ridekura.com)

For more information visit: [ridekura.com](http://ridekura.com)

© KURA 2022. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED