
Are they Making Traffic Safer?

A Report of Children's Views to the Department of Transport

Submission to the government consultation on the DVSA fleet compliance measure

February 2015

Introduction

1. Pupils 2 Parliament is a new project, which gives pupils at school a say in decisions being made by Parliament, the Government and other national bodies. It works with schools to help pupils take part in public consultations, when these organisations ask what people think about decisions they are going to make for our country. Permission has been given by the Clerks of both Houses of Parliament for us to use the word 'Parliament' in our name.
2. Our reports set out what pupils have said, and nothing else. We don't leave out any views pupils gave us. We don't add anything, and we don't make comments on what the pupils have said. This report is pupil views and nothing but pupil views.
3. We know, from talking with children over many years, that pupils can and do think for themselves through the issues that go into major decisions. They come up with valuable challenges and ideas. Pupils bring the value of their own fresh thinking to problems. For the children themselves, we aim to give the experience of taking a real part in democracy by feeding their views and ideas into real decisions. What pupils say through our reports can make a real difference.
4. The Pupils 2 Parliament project started in July 2014. This is our fourteenth report. Our earlier reports gave children's views on the future rules for nurses, on the future of motoring, on rules for using driverless cars on the road, on the future use of biometric data like fingerprints and eye scanning, on the government's Heroism Bill, on the UK Space Plan, on the design of the new £1 coin, on the Government's plans to get more people cycling and walking, on the Regulations for those working or travelling on buses, on the idea of a New Magna Carta, on keeping records of people's messages, on monitoring the quality of the air, and on teaching skills.



About this report

5. The government is asking for people's views on the best way for the team of people at the country's Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency to keep a check on whether their work is making traffic safer. They are particularly interested in checking on whether bus and lorry fleets are getting safer. We asked school pupils for their views on this.
6. Based on the government's consultation document, we explained to the pupils that the Agency's job is to make sure drivers, people who run vehicles, and MOT testing garages, follow the safety rules they should follow. We explained that the government wants to know if we think they should use one of the three surveys they already do to see how well they are doing in making things safer on the roads, or



whether there is some other way they should check whether they are making things safer. We did explain that it is difficult of course to know whether what the team are doing is making it safer on the road, or whether other things like how much traffic there is and how safe the roads themselves are, might be making things safer or more dangerous.

7. This report gives views from two groups of pupils, aged 9 to 11, from Belle Vue Primary School, Wordsley, West Midlands. The school had been put forward by the UNICEF organisation of the United Nations as part of their work on their Rights Respecting Schools awards. Altogether, the views of 46 children went into this report.
8. We held two discussion and voting sessions with the pupils at school, each lasting an hour and a half. One person from Pupils 2 Parliament asked pupils for their views and votes on a series of questions. Members of the school staff took notes of what they said for this report. Pupils voted on some questions using voting tokens, and on others by a show of hands.
9. We didn't suggest any answers, and took care not to lead the pupils towards any particular views. We used the information in the government's consultation document to explain the issues and each question to the pupils.
10. All the points made by the pupils are in this report. As we find with all our Pupils 2 Parliament discussions, their views were sensible and thoughtful, there were no silly comments, the discussions kept going for the whole session, and nothing was raised which wasn't to do with the subject. These were serious discussions and the pupils' views deserve to be taken seriously into account.
11. I am grateful to the staff of Belle Vue Primary School for the chance to hold this discussion with their pupils. I am specially grateful to the members of staff who worked very hard taking detailed notes of the children's views. And I am very grateful to each of the pupils for their thinking, votes and views.



Which is the most important safety measurement?

12. The government wants to know which is the most important safety measurement, out of the three surveys it already does. These are doing spot checks on the safety of lorries and buses, doing spot checks to find out how many lorry drivers are driving more than their allowed number of driving hours, and checking how many garages are getting their MOT tests of cars and vans right.
13. We asked the pupils to vote on which of these three safety measurements are the most important to keep doing.



14. By a large majority the pupils voted that the most important of the three is checking how many garages are getting their MOT tests of cars right. 27 out of 46 pupils voted that this was the most important of the three safety measurements.
15. Pupils thought the next most important measurement is checking how many lorry drivers are driving more than their allowed number of driving hours. 13 of the 46 pupils voted that this was the most important.
16. Lastly, 6 pupils voted that doing spot safety checks on lorries and buses is the most important safety measurement.
17. Pupils thought each of the safety checks are important to road safety. Tired drivers could crash, and pupils listed many faults in vehicles that could cause accidents. Many told us how important they thought MOT tests were to make sure vehicles are safe on the road. One pupil told us of their family's personal experience of their car being passed as safe by an MOT garage, but then being found to be unroadworthy.
18. Pupils were concerned to hear (from the government's consultation document) that garage MOT tests are sometimes found to get the wrong result, and as one put it, "if MOTs are not valid it can cause crashes". A faulty MOT test could allow a dangerous car to stay on the road and kill a family. A garage found to be giving incorrect MOT test results should have to get new employees to do its testing.
19. Some pupils thought that big vehicles, such as lorries and buses, should be retested regularly to keep them safe. Others thought that MOT tests should check whether vehicles' clutches are working properly, as well as the usual things like steering and brakes, because a failed clutch can cause an accident. There was a proposal that car and van MOT tests were so important to road safety that they should be done twice a year rather than once.
20. Almost all the pupils thought that all three sorts of safety measurement surveys should keep being done. "All checks should continue to make people safe." A few though disagreed. One thought that random checks on drivers and how many hours they had been driving were not so important to keep doing.
21. Some thought that lorries should not be randomly stopped on the road for spot checks. This would make lorries miss deadlines for deliveries, and that could make people angry. One idea to deal with this was to give drivers who were stopped some paperwork explaining that they had been delayed and that this was not their fault. Companies should make allowances for random spot checks.
22. Some proposed that instead of randomly stopping and testing lorries on the roadside, the drivers should be told to call in to a testing centre within a period of time for a safety check. They could then carry on with their journey without losing

much time. Or letters could be sent to drivers at random asking them to call in for vehicle safety checks. This might save everyone time and money.

23. Many pupils said that spot checks on lorries and their drivers shouldn't just be about the lorry's safety and the driver's hours, but the load on the lorry should be checked as well. It is just as important to check for dangerous or illegal things being carried in lorries. The same went for vans. Spot checks should these days look for dangerous things like weapons being carried. Checks on loads should also look at how secure the load is on the lorry – shedding a load can cause an accident.
24. One point about lorry safety was that as well as avoiding accidents, keeping lorries safe helps to avoid supply chains being broken by deliveries not making it to where they are going. For example, an accident to a lorry carrying food can interrupt someone's food supplies, and food it is carrying can go off if it is delayed by a breakdown or accident.
25. Some pupils thought that there should be random spot checks on all vehicles on the road, not just lorries, at least to check vital things like steering and brakes. Drivers on motorways could be stopped and asked to pull in to a testing centre set up at a motorway service area. This would be good for road safety, and the government could see whether all sorts of vehicles were getting safer or not. At the same time, all vehicles could be randomly checked to see if they were carrying anything dangerous or illegal.
26. We had asked two different classes of children to vote on the most important safety measurement. They did not discuss the question together, so we had two separate votes. Both classes put the three safety measurements in the same order of importance.



Should surveys be done every year or every two years?

27. We asked the pupils to vote on whether the safety surveys should be done every year, or every two years. On balance, pupils voted in favour of safety check surveys being done every two years rather than every year.
28. The main reason for voting for every two years rather than every year was the cost – as one pupil put it “not worth every year – there's better things to be done”. But others thought surveys every year would be worth it to keep a close check on the proportions of vehicles, drivers and MOT tests that aren't safe.



Is it more important to check vehicles or drivers?

29. We asked the pupils to vote on whether it is more important to check vehicles or drivers for safety. Pupils voted strongly that it is more important to check that vehicles are safe than to check their drivers. 33 voted that vehicles should be checked, and 19 that drivers should be checked.



Which vehicles are more important to check for safety?

30. We asked the pupils which types of vehicle they thought it is more important to check for safety.
31. Pupils voted strongly, by 37 votes to 9, that it is more important to do safety checks on buses rather than lorries. A main reason for voting this way was that buses carry more passengers, so a dangerous bus is a danger to more people. Another reason was that, unlike other sorts of vehicle, buses do not all have seatbelts to help keep their passengers safe.
32. Pupils also voted strongly, this time by 38 votes to 7, that it is more important to do safety checks on big vehicles like lorries and buses, rather than on small vehicles like cars and vans. The main reason for voting this way was that if a bigger vehicle crashes, it can cause a much bigger accident and series of crashes than a smaller vehicle would.
33. We also asked pupils whether, if small vehicles are being safety checked, it is more important to test cars or vans. On balance, pupils voted, by 24 votes to 17, that it is more important to do safety tests on cars rather than vans.



Should bikes and cyclists be checked?

34. Although it wasn't one of the government's questions, many pupils use the roads as cyclists, and we asked them whether they thought safety checks should be done on cycles or cyclists.
35. The pupils voted strongly in favour of safety checks being done on cycling. Only 5 of the 46 pupils thought that there should be no cycling safety checks. One of these thought that cycling was a hobby which should not have checks done on it, and that if a cyclist fell off their bike they were 50/50 likely not to fall into the road in front of traffic. They would be just as likely to fall on the pavement.



36. But the majority, 26 pupils, voted that there should be safety checks on *both* bicycles and their riders. 8 voted that bicycles should be tested for safety, but not their riders. 7 voted that cycle riders should have safety checks, but not their bikes.
37. Some pupils thought it was not necessary to check cyclists themselves, because cyclists know very well how to ride a bike. One summed it up by saying “most people know how to ride a bike – also it’s a bit obvious. There is only one way to ride a bike!”.
38. Others though thought it is definitely important to check how people are riding their bikes, including safety awareness, knowing the law for using the road, use of helmets and reflective clothing, and knowing exactly where on the road you should be riding.
39. One proposal for cycling safety was that there should be an age limit for riding a bike on the road. Children younger than that limit should only be allowed to ride on the pavement or on a cycle track, but not on the road with other traffic.
40. Some said how important it is to check bikes themselves. People can have bikes that aren’t safe, things like loose chains or faulty gears can cause accidents. Some sorts of cycling can cause faults – for example, mountain biking can shake a bike’s bolts loose.
41. Another view on this was that cyclists ought to take responsibility themselves for checking that their bikes are safe before they ride them, and that they have things like a bell.



Other ways to check whether vehicles and drivers are getting safer

42. Finally, we asked pupils for any further thoughts about checks and tests to make us safer on the roads, or to tell the government whether vehicles and drivers are getting safer.
43. One view was that road safety was best checked by records of how many people died of accidents on the roads.
44. One thought was that taxis should be regularly checked, as there are lots of them in towns and cities, and they carry very many passengers around so should be checked more than private cars are.



45. Another proposal was that the police should be asked to tell drivers picked at random to call in to a test centre for a safety and load check. This linked to the idea of having test check centres at motorway service areas.
46. To monitor drivers, rather than just looking for lorry drivers who had gone beyond their allowed driving hours, the police could do more spot checks on driving licences.
47. It was also proposed that owners of all types of vehicles should be picked out at random and sent letters telling them to take their vehicles in for a retest to check vehicle safety levels.
48. Some pupils thought that more attention should be given to tests and checks on motorbikes and their riders, as motorbikes are involved in a lot of accidents.
49. There was also a proposal that even talking on handsfree mobile phones should not be allowed while someone is driving, because a conversation and actions like laughing can distract a driver from driving safely.
50. Another general safety proposal was that traffic lights should not change very quickly, as this encourages drivers to jump the lights dangerously.
51. Another general suggestion was for more 'slow down' signs where traffic needed to be slowed down – with speed cameras there to check how many people did that.
52. A general leaflet on main safety points could be produced – and followed up to see how people were keeping to it.
53. Some were concerned about safety in car parks – the speed of traffic in car parks, and whether they were going the right way round car parks, could be monitored.
54. Most pupils were in favour of traffic cameras. These should keep records of speeds so that this could be used to measure safety. Some thought there should be more hidden cameras, cameras in unmarked police vehicles, and more mobile cameras, to check traffic safety, rather than cameras with notices saying where they are. This would give a more realistic check on vehicle speeds. Some others said that it was important that all the cameras should actually work and have film in them. Many didn't. Cameras not working takes away the effect of having cameras.
55. It was proposed that because most cars nowadays have indicators of faults, in future it should be possible to develop safety scanning cameras that can 'read' vehicles' own indicators of faults. If this could be developed, it would mean that faults and vehicle safety could be monitored automatically.

56. Many pupils thought there should be more safety monitoring by traffic cameras of what drivers are actually doing while they are driving. As well as checking for speeding or stolen cars, traffic cameras could be used to check how many drivers are speaking on the phone, texting, eating, smoking, or turning round to talk to passengers. This could be used as a measure of what proportion of drivers are driving safely or unsafely.



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Pupils 2 Parliament

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