



# Racing into the big league

The annual Festival of Cycling and Walking wheeled its way back into Finsbury Park in June for a seventh year.

Over 1,500 residents took part in the tri-borough event run by Haringey, Hackney and Islington councils, for a day full of family fun which included inspired walks, vintage bikes and 5km and 100km cycle rides.

The festival is just one of many ways people in Haringey can get involved in cycling. Following the event, we spoke to the Haringey Schools' Cycling League to discover what they are doing to encourage primary school children to get on their bikes.

Set up in 2012 by parents and staff at North Harringay Primary School, and with the generous support of the council's Smarter Travel programme, the Haringey Schools Cycling League brings cycle racing to primary schools. Each month, the league organises races in local parks and green spaces. School children from years 4 to 6 race each other on grass, competing for points and the chance to win the annual League Trophy.

"The aim was to promote cycle racing as an exciting sport for schools," said Paul Wheeler, one of the league's organisers. "We set up the courses and provide the bikes. All the schools have to do is turn up with 10 riders — five girls and five boys — and we do the rest."

The fact that everyone rides on the same type of bike demonstrates the inclusive approach to the league. No racing experience is necessary, no expensive kit is required. Children just need to be able to ride safely. Every rider, whatever his or her level, gets to race in a final.

Cycle racing is a great way of building on the bike training that many children receive at school. Riders develop their bike skills, making them better, safer cyclists. "It helps me to improve my confidence whilst having fun," said year 4 pupil David from St. Mary's C.E. Primary School.

League races are competitive, but also fun. "Each event sees some amazing fights for the line," Paul said. "But it's not all about winning. We also love seeing how our riders enjoy the fun and freedom of being

on a bike with their schoolmates. Because, the more fun children have on a bike, the more likely they are going to want to keep on cycling."

As well as running races, the league organises trips throughout the year. Their most popular outing is to the iconic Hearne Hill velodrome. When the weather isn't so great in the winter they take part in indoor roller racing on static bikes against the clock.



## How to take part in the League

**When:** normally the first Friday of each month. About eight events a year.

**Where:** parks and green spaces around Haringey

**Who:** primary school children who can cycle competently, from years 4, 5 and 6

**Cost:** free to enter

**To find out how your school can take part in the Haringey Schools Cycling League, email [haringeycyclingleague@gmail.com](mailto:haringeycyclingleague@gmail.com) or visit [haringeycyclingleague.org](http://haringeycyclingleague.org)**