



Jessica Hill hits the bump

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ACTION: Chloe Regan refuels

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WOBBLER: Callum Hale masters balancing

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SPEEDY LEARNER: Adam Webb

Mini motorists are streets ahead

IT will be 13 years or more before they can sit behind the wheel of a car.

But these tots at a Chelmsford nursery school are already well on the way to learning the rules of the road.

The playground at Tanglewood Nursery School, Melbourn Avenue, has been laid out as a mini-street scene — complete with painted highway, pedestrian crossings, traffic lights and petrol pumps.

And the three and four year olds set a good example to their elders as they push

Story: Joy Baker

Pictures: Laura Johnson

and peddle a selection of bikes and trikes through one way systems, around roundabouts and over speed bumps.

The idea was conceived around five years ago. Tanglewood had already introduced bikeplay for pupils as part of an Essex healthy schools scheme, well in advance of Government programmes to tackle childhood obesity and lack of exercise.

Head teacher Ann Barker said: "We wanted something more structured, so that there was a learning progression for bikes in the same way as for anything else."

By the time they leave, many of the pre-schoolers can ride a two-wheel bike, without the need for stabilisers.

In fact, stabilisers are banned. Instead the children progress from trikes to an ingenious two wheeler without pedals which teaches them to balance.

The playground helps children learn reading and number skills too.

Sometimes they have maps to follow and have to park their bikes in a numbered space. Computer keyboards on top of petrol pumps allow them to role play by using swipe cards.

Recently, the playground featured in articles in *Nursery World* and *The Times*.

Mrs Barker said: "Last year we had 500 visitors from all over the world to the school, and none had ever seen anything like it. Parents are astonished and thrilled that their four-year-olds can learn to ride a bike. Parents are scared to

let their children ride out in parks and roads, and who has a big enough garden to allow for a proper stretch at bike riding?"

There are signs the school is creating a more considerate group of future road users. Though there is no speed camera, local beat officers did bring a mobile camera to the school and spoke to the children about it, said Mrs Barker.

"They were very impressed and afterwards they used it for role play, and were telling each other off for driving too fast."