

Imperial Road Safety Safe Scholar programme



Launched in partnership with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in 2015, as an extension of Imperial's Scholar Patrol Improvement Project, Safe Scholars aims to create a platform for further education around road safety, aimed at those less fortunate young pedestrians who walk for long distances every day to and from school.

In fact, it's been reported that each year children travel to and from school almost 200 times - exposing them to potential road danger. As a result, we have partnered with the Department of Basic Education who have not only endorsed the programme but have ensured that the reflective sashes the children received through this programme is mandatory and have even incorporated these as part of the school uniform in some of the schools we have visited.

This is to ensure that the children wear the reflective sash when they are walking to and from school - making them more visible while walking to and from school.

How does the project work?

We host a Safe Scholars event to introduce the children to the concept of road safety and to teach them the basics of road safety in a fun and entertaining manner - one which they can remember and relate to.

We then work very closely with the principal and the teachers to ensure that they continue to re-inforce road safety messages long after the event, at their respective schools. We do this by providing the teachers with worksheets and posters, and then also stickers for positive re-enforcement if the children answer the questions correctly.

We have noticed that the stickers work particularly well because children then become "ambassadors for road safety", and share the information they learn at these Safe Scholars events with their parents and grandparents - which ultimately helps drive the message even further.



Our ultimate goal for the Safe Scholars project is that road safety education becomes an integral part of the school curriculum and is embraced by learners, teachers and parents.

Imperial Road Safety, Safe Scholars and Bongie

Imperial Road Safety has recently introduced a road safety character called Bongie to assist in spreading the important road safety messages to our young scholars. We approached Imperial to gain more insights to this initiative:

What was the motivation behind the development of the Road Safety Character Bongie? How did you decide on what the best name might be?

We decided to create Bongie after launching our Safe Scholars programme towards the end of 2015 in partnership with the Department of Basic Education. The key focus area of the Safe Scholars programme is to reach children at a grass root level, which is imperative in developing responsible road safety behaviour that will last a lifetime. However, to do this, it is important to speak to children on a level that they understand and can relate to - hence our decision to use a road safety mascot to translate our key messages around road safety to children.

When deciding on a name, we were looking for something short, catchy and easy to remember for children. The Safe Scholars programme travels all across South Africa, reaching children in the most rural areas of the country hence our decision to name our road safety mascot Bongie - a popular Nguni nickname that's relatable and familiar for the children – one that reflects our rich diversity.

What age group do you believe is best focus area for the interaction with Bongie?

Safe Scholars is a programme that targets children in primary schools within the 6 – 13 year old age bracket.



What are the most important messages that Bongie likes to share with our young scholars?

Bongie works with the Safe Scholars facilitators to teach children through song and dance about what to do first before crossing a road. Bongie’s message is simple – *“look right, left and right again and then you cross”*.

How does Bongie express himself - are there assistants? Are there any tools and devices used and will Bongie also be active in future in the social media space?

Yes – as mentioned above, Bongie works with our great facilitators kicking off the Safe Scholars events by engaging with the children and teaching them some important road safety skills such as how to fasten their seatbelts. What’s even better is that the facilitators use practical examples that children can relate to when addressing the issue of road safety. Very often they will ask the children about the day-to-day behaviours that they observe from their parents on the roads. Once the events are over, the children go home and share some of the knowledge that they have learnt with their parents, which assists us greatly in spreading the road safety message with all South Africans.

Once they have gone through the road safety talks with the children, they bring Bongie out – which is always so heart-warming to witness as the children jump and scream with so much excitement when they see him. Bongie then begins to dance and take the children through the road safety song they were taught earlier before handing out stickers and road safety sashes to the children.

From a social media perspective, we have already started introducing our followers to Bongie and providing them with insight into where he is appearing and some of the videos of the activations he has been present at. Of course, as he grows in popularity so too will his social media presence.



How has the interaction been thus far between Bongie and the young road users?

Having worked on road safety campaigns for a few years, what I've come to realise is that it's important to support our campaigns with something else apart from the talks that can resonate with your audience, long after you have left, and Bongie is the perfect example of that. Never have I witnessed children get so excited about learning about road safety than since we launched Bongie. They scream, laugh and try beat each other to give Bongie a hug – which is exactly what we had in mind when creating him. It is those moments that they will remember when they think about road safety.

How can schools approach Bongie to come and visit them?

We are actually working on an exciting campaign with one of South Africa's leading radio stations during the lead up to Mandela Day on the 18th of July this year that will encourage children to motivate to us why Bongie should visit their schools. Of course, we have something similar lined up for the Imperial staff where we will be sending out a mailer encouraging them to also motivate why Bongie should visit their children's school. In the interim however, should schools want Bongie to visit their learners they can contact mmaisa@ih.co.za.



Any other important info on the objectives with this campaign that we need to know?

Yes, our ultimate goal for the Safe Scholars project is that road safety education becomes an integral part of the school curriculum and is embraced by learners, teachers and parents.

To date the campaign has achieved the following:

- Purchased 45 000 reflective sashes
- Visited 870 schools as at March 2016
- Given road safety talks to 807 672 learners
- Distributed 22 500 sashes

We also aim to achieve the following:

- Give less fortunate learner pedestrians access to reflective clothing
- Make reflective clothing a mandatory part of a child’s school uniform
- To reach a quarter of a million young students over the next year
- Educate learners around the rules of the roads and being a pedestrian

Also view:

[Imperial and Road Safety in South Africa](#)

[Scholar Patrol and Road Safety](#)



