**School Streets Parent Briefing**

Updated May 2023

**Background**

The UK has one of the [highest childhood asthma](https://www.asthma.org.uk/about/media/facts-and-statistics/) rates in the world and children are growing up with [stunted lung capacity](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-50467700). In London, [over 4000 people](https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/new-imperial-study-on-mayors-aq-policies#:~:text=The%20new%20study%2C%20delivered%20through,to%20improve%20London's%20air%20quality.) a year die prematurely as a result of exposure to unsafe levels of pollution. Children are the most affected. According to the [Asthma and Lung UK](https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/signs-of-breathing-problems-in-children/air-pollution)  they breathe faster and more deeply than adults, spend more time outside and are closer to car exhausts, all of which leads to a higher exposure to toxic fumes.

We are [Mums for Lungs](https://mumsforlungs.org/), a network of parents who are concerned about the impact of air pollution on children. We are campaigning for **School Streets** to be implemented across London and the UK, by encouraging parents to lobby their schools and councils for this scheme, and giving them the tools, resources and advice on doing so successfully.

**School Streets** are a temporary closure of roads around a school at drop off and pick up times, when many children are clustered around the school gate. They are being implemented by councils across the UK, with most schemes currently being found in London, and have been found to [reduce exposure](https://www.london.gov.uk/WHAT-WE-DO/environment/environment-publications/school-streets-air-quality-study) to air pollution as well as increase road safety and learning outcomes.

During the Covid19 pandemic, the number of School Streets in London rose quickly, as they were used as a way of enabling social distancing outside schools, as well as a way to mitigate against a car-led recovery. Hackney Council made a good two minute film about how they work which can be viewed [here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kwVRosXefEg). In 2019 Hackney produced a toolkit with a wealth of advice on how to implement School Streets, subsequently updated in 2021, which can be found [here.](https://www.transportxtra.com/publications/parking-review/news/68587/hackney-school-streets-toolkit-d/) Other boroughs across London and the UK are now following this example. As of Summer 2022, there were over 500 School Streets in London and around 200 across England. Our [Mums for Lungs film](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enNpOlavRk8) details why we love School Streets.

**How does pollution affect children?**

The two types of pollution which are most relevant are [particulate matter](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/air-quality-statistics/concentrations-of-particulate-matter-pm10-and-pm25) (PM), tiny particles which are inhaled deep into the lungs, causing breathing and heart problems, and [nitrogen dioxide](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/air-quality-statistics/ntrogen-dioxide) (NO2) – primarily emitted by diesel vehicles. No levels of pollution are safe, as it causes respiratory problems and inflames the lungs’ lining, but anything above 40ug/m3 NO2 is exceeding the current legal limit. In fact, a recent [update](https://www.bmj.com/content/374/bmj.n2349) to the World Health Organisation air quality guidelines revised this limit down to 10ug/m3, to reflect the harm caused by air pollution even at lower levels. To find out how polluted the area around your child’s school is modelled to be, check this website [here](https://addresspollution.org/).

**How does reducing traffic around schools help?**

A [2018 study](https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/UUK-research-briefing-The-toxic-school-run-September-2018.pdf) reported by Unicef discovered that a child is exposed to 60% of the air pollution they take in each day on the journey to school and during the school day. [One in four cars](https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/who-we-are/press-media/top-3-most-annoying-things-about-the-school-run-cars-cars-and-more-cars) on the road at peak times is doing the school run, putting schools and children clustered at the school gate at the centre of a toxic nexus. By reducing traffic around the school, pollution decreases.

Reducing pollution isn’t the only benefit of a School Street. They also increase road safety. In 2020 there were 52 [child fatalities](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/reported-road-casualties-great-britain-provisional-results-2020/reported-road-casualties-great-britain-provisional-results-2020) on our roads. [Data](https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/who-we-are/press-media/top-3-most-annoying-things-about-the-school-run-cars-cars-and-more-cars) from 2017 shows that 37% of child deaths happened on the journey either to or from school.

**How School Streets work**

* During term time, at school drop-off and pick-up, streets around schools temporarily become pedestrian and cycle only. Motor vehicles are not allowed to enter unless they have an exemption, normally issued to residents, blue badge holders, people working in a School Street zone and businesses based there.
* Signs inform drivers of the restriction before entering the closed zones.
* There are various ways to enforce a School Street – some use manual barriers that school or parent volunteers put out twice a day, some use fold-up lockable bollards set into the road, and some use closed circuit (CCTV) cameras.
* If cameras are used, un-registered vehicles entering the street during the times of operation will be identified by the cameras and the drivers will be issued a fixed penalty notice.
* While there are costs associated with School Streets, [our recent research](https://www.mumsforlungs.org/news/school-streets-camera-costs-research) revealed that with a camera enforced system, the scheme will be self-funding within the first year of operation.

**Trials and Play Streets**

* School Streets are often introduced as a trial to start with – whether that’s a one-day trial or over a period of a few weeks. This can be a really useful way to start the process, especially if staff or residents are unsure about the scheme.
* Play Streets are short road closures after school, creating a safe space for children to play freely together. They can be a great way for staff, parents and pupils to experience what closing the road outside their school can be like, and are worth investigating as a starting point if you are finding it hard to gather support for a School Street at your school.

**Where are School Streets happening?**

As of July 2022, all but two London boroughs (Bexley and Hammersmith & Fulham) had successfully implemented varying types of School Streets, with over 500 schemes across the capital overall. There are approximately 200 School Streets outside London, with more being planned now that legislation has changed to enable the scheme to be enforced by local authorities outside London with CCTV cameras. To see a comparison of the London boroughs’ progress on School Streets, see the [Healthy Streets Scorecard website](https://www.healthystreetsscorecard.london/results/results_input_indicators/#ResultsSchool).

• 50% of schools in Islington have a School Street, the highest proportion of any borough in London. You can [read more about them here](https://www.islington.gov.uk/roads/people-friendly-streets/school-streets).

• [Hackney](https://hackney.gov.uk/school-streets) now have [42 permanent School Streets, and several other experimental schemes](https://hackney.gov.uk/school-streets).

• Camden reported that its Gospel Oak Primary School [Healthy School Street trial](https://consultations.wearecamden.org/supporting-communities/savernakeroad/) resulted in minimal impact on residents and businesses but a noticeably calmer and safer street.

**What can you do next? A step-by-step guide.**

Campaigning for a School Street usually involves registering your support not just with your school but with your council as well. The official request to the council should come from your head teacher, but it’s always worth contacting your ward councillors and the council as well.

* To gather support at your school, speak to fellow parents, contact the PTA, your head teacher and governors.
* Ask your headteacher to write an email to the local council to request a School Street. They can mention elements of the street which lend it to being restricted, for example, if it’s being used as a cut-through, has narrow pavements, speeding cars, a high level of congestion etc.

**Tips from those who have successfully implemented School Streets**

* Communication is key – especially with local residents who may have concerns about access to their property. The schemes that have been most smoothly introduced were those where the school and council actively engaged with the local community in advance of any scheme beginning, to hear their concerns, communicate potential changes and listen to the needs of parents and residents.
* Try to understand concerns and factor them in to plans if possible – for instance, by providing a park and stride arrangement with a local car park or supermarket.
* If it is difficult to engage your head teacher, try talking to another member of the Senior Leadership Team or a different teacher who may have an interest in the subject.
* Arrange a visit with your school contact to a School Street that is up and running, to get a good understanding of how it works, and to talk to staff at that school about the scheme.
* Spread the positivity of the scheme rather than frame it as a restriction – the aims are to improve the health, safety and learning outcomes of the children, which are all worth celebrating! The calmer drop-off and pick-up is often mentioned as a joyful experience for parents, and there is [evidence](https://www.napier.ac.uk/about-us/news/school-street-closures) that parents and residents’ support increases for the scheme after a trial period.
* [This really positive video](https://vimeo.com/729528458), created by the Mums for Lungs Redbridge group, shows the level of support for School Streets from teachers, residents and parents alike.

We offer one-to-one chats if you’d like more support with this, and can also provide you with [flyers](https://www.mumsforlungs.org/resources-and-downloads) to raise awareness of School Streets, air pollution generally or the harmful impacts of idling and wood burning, that schools can hand out in book bags or email out to parents.

We would be happy to support you and hear about your thoughts on or successes with regards to School Streets, so please get in touch with us at hello@mumsforlungs.org. Thank you.