School Streets campaign

Background

In London, more than 9,500 people a year die prematurely as a result of exposure to unsafe levels of pollution. Children are the most affected. According to the British Lung Foundation 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. The UK has one of the highest childhood asthma rates in the world and London children are growing up with stunted lung capacity.

We are Mums for Lungs, a South London based group of parents, who are concerned about the impact of air pollution on children. We are campaigning for School Streets to be implemented across London, by reaching out to schools that are situated in areas of London that are illegally polluted and might be suitable for Schools and encouraging parents to lobby their schools for this scheme.

School Streets are being implemented by councils across London. They 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 have been found to reduce exposure to air pollution as well as increase road safety.

Hackney has introduced nine School Streets, and there is a good two minute film about how it works here. In 2019 they produced a toolkit with a wealth of advice on how to implement School Streets, which can be found here. Other boroughs across London and the UK are now following this example.

How does pollution affect children?

To find out exactly how polluted the area around your child’s school is, check the spreadsheet here. The two types of pollution which are most relevant are particulate matter (PM), tiny particles which can be inhaled by the lungs, causing breathing and heart problems, and nitrogen dioxide (NO2). No levels of pollution are safe, as it also causes respiratory problems and inflames the lungs’ lining, but anything above 40mg NO2 per m3 is exceeding the legal limit and unhealthy.

How does reducing traffic around schools help?

A 2018 study 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 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 School Streets. It also increases road safety. In 2013 (according to the most recent data available) one child a week was killed, and 37 were seriously injured on UK roads. Other data from 2017 shows that 37% of these deaths happened on the journey either to or from school.

A group of parents seriously concerned about the dangerous impact air pollution is having on children’s health.

mumsforlungs.org  mumsforlungs@gmail.com

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How School Streets work

- During term time, at school drop off and pick up, streets around schools temporarily become pedestrian and cycle only. Vehicles are not allowed to enter unless they have an exemption, normally issued to residents, people working in a School Street zone, businesses based there, or blue badge holders.
- Signs inform drivers of the restriction before entering the closed zones.
- Non-registered vehicles entering the street during the times of operation will be identified by camera and issued a fixed penalty notice.
- While there are costs associated with School Streets, most importantly the ANPR camera, information from Croydon Council, for example, highlights that the council believes the scheme will break even over time.

Where are School Streets happening?

As of May 2020 in London, 20 boroughs including Brent, Camden, Croydon, Greenwich, Hackney, Islington, Lambeth and Southwark have successfully implemented varying types of School Streets.
- Islington have thirteen School Streets, you can read more about them [here](#).
- Hackney have nine School Streets, four of which are now permanent.
- Croydon has five School Streets, which are enforced by cameras and charge offending drivers with a £130 fine.
- Camden reported that its Gospel Oak Primary School [Healthy School Street trial](#) resulted in minimal impact on residents and businesses but a noticeably calmer and safer street.
- Southwark council trialed its first School Street at Bessemer Grange Primary School in 2018. It was made permanent the following year.


- Drum up support. Speak to friends, fellow parents, contact the PTA, your head teacher and governors. The more ‘official’ your support, the better.
- It’s best that the request for a School Street comes from the head teacher, who is often very supportive of the scheme. Ask them to write an email to the local council - many have councillors for clean air - to request a School Street.
- They can mention elements of the street which mean closing it is a good idea, for example, it’s a rat run, narrow pavements, speeding cars, high level of congestion etc.
- Contact your local ward councillors as well, the more councillors are aware there is support for School Streets around a specific school, the better!
- Information in this briefing can be used to substantiate your request.

We can also provide you with flyers to raise awareness of School Streets, air pollution generally or the harmful impacts of idling, that some schools are already handing out in book bags.

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 mumsforlungs@gmail.com. Thank you.

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