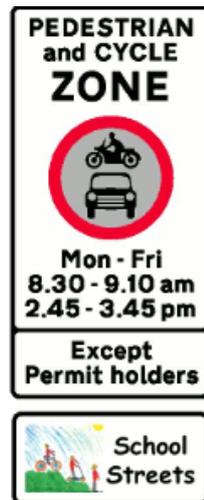


Briefing

Guide for local groups on School Streets

This briefing for Friends of the Earth local groups and activists outlines how to campaign for a School Street, with best practice examples and suggestions on how to get support from Friends of the Earth.

Please email your named Friends of the Earth contact or cleanair@foe.co.uk if you'd like further advice on School Streets. If you want to find out how you can campaign on air pollution more widely [check out our A-Z campaign guide](#).



1. What is a School Street?

A School Street is when the roads around the school are temporarily closed to vehicles on each school day, during set times at drop-off and pick-up.

2. Why campaign for a School Street?

The UK's illegally high levels of air pollution are dangerous to everyone's health, but children, whose lungs are still developing, are particularly vulnerable. Road traffic is the main source of the current illegal air pollution problem, resulting in more than 2,000 schools and nurseries close to roads experiencing damaging levels of air pollution.

Evidence has shown that some primary school children living in highly polluted urban areas have up to **5% less lung capacity than normal**, putting them at risk of lung disease in adult life and early death, according to Professor Chris Griffiths.

Children living in highly polluted areas are also four times more likely to have reduced lung function in adulthood. Thankfully, improving air quality for children has been shown to halt and reverse this effect. Read more in [Every breath we take: the lifelong impact of air pollution](#) (PDF), a report by the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Paediatric and Child Health.

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Recent research by Unicef reveals that during the school run and while at school, children are exposed to more than 60% of the air pollution they breathe in each day even though these periods account for only 40% of their day. Therefore it's clear that more must be done to protect children from dirty air at school.

But the benefits of Schools Streets go beyond air pollution. They transform hectic, congested school roads into a safer and more pleasant environment for all, paving the way for the positive visions we have for sustainable towns and cities.

We also know there must be a dramatic fall in the use of fossil-fueled diesel and petrol vehicles. In fact they must be phased out if we are to realise the ambition of the Paris Climate Agreement and its aim of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. So, restricting fossil-fuel vehicles and doing more to encourage walking, cycling, and using public transport, as the School Streets project does, is a great step to cutting harmful emissions, and to protecting both people and planet.

3. Top tips to get your campaign going:

- **Decide the right approach for you:** campaigning for a School Street in your area doesn't require working with schools directly. If you're struggling to establish school contacts or want the council to initiate a wider School Street pilot, it might make more sense for your local campaign to lobby the council directly.
- **Pick the right school:** if you're seeking to work with schools directly it's important to ensure they're engaged and endorse the idea of a School Street. Councils who have run pilots have referenced the necessity of having a supportive school community to persuade potentially resistant residents and businesses.
- **Pick suitable roads:** not all roads are able to be turned into School Streets – main roads may be particularly difficult to restrict. When picking a school to work with, bear in mind the type of road the school sits on and is connected to. Also be aware that councils may not have the power to restrict traffic on all roads.
- **Check air pollution hotspots:** when building your case for a School Street, it's useful to show any data you have on pollution levels around the school. You can find some data on the council's website, or check to see if your area is covered in [the Greenpeace and Guardian investigation](#), which found thousands of schools are close to roads with pollution above legal limits.
- **Demonstrate community support:** when trying to influence the council it's key to demonstrate the public support that exists for a School Street, particularly with the potential resistance from local businesses and residents. Often a local petition can help drum up and demonstrate support. We're on hand to help you set up local petitions using our online tool, Action Network. **If you're interested, please get in touch with your named Friends of the Earth contact or email cleanair@foe.co.uk.**

When redirecting traffic, councils have the power to use a [Traffic Regulation Order](#), which allows them to temporarily, experimentally or permanently restrict traffic.

4. How have councils picked the schools they worked with?

There seems to be considerable overlap of the criteria councils have used for their pilot schemes. **Camden** and **Hackney** councils searched for schools that:

- Were located in areas with high levels of pollution and would benefit from the closures as a result.
- Had high levels of active travel (walking and cycling) but a small portion of drivers that still caused an issue.
- Had an engaged and supportive school community.
- Had a wider network in the area that supported walking and cycling.

Camden Council also reviewed collision statistics on roads outside of schools. In **Solihull** the council used these criteria to decide their three pilot locations:

- The suitability of the existing road layout.
- Its usage including public transport requirements.
- The vicinity of other traffic generators including business, leisure facilities, health centres.
- A range of pupil data from school travel plans.
- The impact of any likely parking displacement.
- The ability of students to walk or cycle to school.

Southwark Council sought to work with schools who were accredited in the TfL STARS (Sustainable Travel: Active, Responsible, Safe) programme – which encourages schools to lead campaigns on projects which encourage active travel.

5. How have School Streets been enforced?

- **Camden Council's** pilot used folding bollards, which were put up and taken down each day by school staff. The council noted that a disadvantage of using folding bollards was that during times of high volumes of traffic they're at risk of being damaged and subsequently become unusable. For their second School Streets in 2018, the council has opted for ANPR cameras (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) as they felt it was the most appropriate method and in addition noted that it was "better to adopt a self-enforcing method that does not rely on individuals."

- **Solihull** Council use no physical barriers, but instead work with the police as the enforcing body, who can hand out a fixed penalty notice of £50 to anyone caught driving through the restriction.
- **Southwark** Council use turtle gate barriers that are put up and taken down by school staff.
- **Hackney** Council use ANPR cameras to enforce the School Street. Any car that isn't exempt from the restrictions is charged a penalty of £65, increasing to £130 if drivers fail to pay.

6. How much would a School Street cost?

Cost will differ from council to council, with the bulk of the cost stemming from enforcing the School Street. In **Camden** the pilot cost £8,000, with enforcement costing £5,500. In **Southwark** the pilot cost £5,000 in total. This included the Traffic Regulation Order which allowed them to restrict traffic, plus design and project management costs. In **Camden's** second School Street the estimated cost was £138,000 – which was covered by funding from TfL. We can assume that as their second School Street used ANPR cameras it cost much more to implement than their pilot. Similarly, **Hackney** Council's scheme used ANPR cameras, which could indicate a larger cost to run the project.

7. Who would be exempt from the School Streets restrictions?

There are different ways in which exemptions have worked. Here are some of the ways Councils have approached it:

- In **Hackney**, residents who live, and businesses that operate, on a School Street are added to a 'white list' and are then exempt from the restrictions. This doesn't include Blue Badge holders, who would have to apply for exemptions.
- In **Southwark's** pilot, residents were either restricted from using their cars or had to call the school in advance to make access arrangements.
- In **Solihull**, Blue Badge holders are exempt and do not need to apply for permits. Residents will get permits and schools get a limited number of permits to allocate to staff.
- **Edinburgh** Council's residents and local businesses need to apply for a permit, while Blue Badge holders do not. Roadside signs with flashing lights show when the scheme is in operation, and residents and local businesses with a permit are able to drive when the lights are flashing.



8. What difference have the School Streets schemes made?

The preliminary findings from councils all point to School Streets having a positive impact.

Camden's report outlines that:

- Data collected from a survey via Travel Tracker (a system where children record their daily travel) indicates that **the time involved in driving them to school has fallen dramatically**, despite the closure only covering some **200 metres of the street**.
- The number of driven trips to school fell by **43% (from 7% of all trips to 4.3%)** between January and July 2016.
- Air quality improved, with a **3.8% reduction in NO₂** levels overall on school days .

Early results from Hackney council also demonstrate positive outcomes as a result of School Streets. It found:

- Lower vehicle volumes on school streets.
- Children walking to school had increased.
- Children being driven to school had decreased.
- High levels of compliance.
- Improved perceptions around feelings of safety, motorist compliance, and inconvenience associated with the restrictions.

Further information on existing School Streets schemes:

- [BBC coverage on how parents and pupils in Camden feel about School Streets](#)
- [Southwark council's School Street pilot with Bessemer Grange Primary School](#) (PDF)
- [Video from Hackney on the impact of their School Streets pilot](#)
- [More information on Solihull council's School Streets](#)
- [More information on Greenwich council's School Streets pilot](#)
- [More information on Edinburgh council's School Streets](#)
- [More information on Islington council's School Streets](#)

Resource 1 – Template letter to local authorities from schools

You can share this template letter with schools to send to councils. Often the most appropriate person to email is the leader/executive Mayor of the local authority, but ward councillors for the school may also be good to contact.

Dear Cllr [name]

I am writing to you from [enter school name] to urge you to consider a School Street programme for our school – to turn connecting roads into a pedestrian- and cycle-only space at the start and end of each school day.

As you know, drop-off and pick-up times at schools can be very busy for teachers, pupils, parents and residents with lots of congested traffic potentially creating a stressful and unsafe environment.

The back-to-back flurry of cars further exposes our pupils to air pollution. As you may know this leaves children vulnerable to an array of health issues, with children who live in polluted areas having up to 5% less lung capacity and are four times more likely to have reduced lung function in adulthood .

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I also know that councils up and down the country, from Edinburgh to Hackney, have started piloting School Streets. The findings are incredibly encouraging – showing that once-hectic roads have been transformed into pleasant and enjoyable environments.

The evidence indicates that School Streets have promoted active travel, reduced driven journeys to school, and helped reduce exposure to air pollution – cleaning up the air the next generation breathes.

I find the evidence compelling and hope you do too. I would be very keen to meet and discuss this further with you over the coming weeks. If you would like to get in touch with me you can reach me on [enter phone number and email].

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,

[Name]

Resource 2 – Template letter to local authorities from local groups

You can use this template letter to write to councillors directly about School Streets.

Dear [Cllr Name],

I am writing from [Friends of the Earth group name] to ask you to implement a School Street pilot in [name of local authority].

School Streets transforms roads that schools sit on, and are connected to, into calmer, safer and healthier streets for all.

I hope the local authority can take inspiration from other councils such as Hackney and Solihull who have shown that Schools Streets can work and are supported by schools, parents and residents.

School Streets have many positive benefits including:

- Increasing walking and cycling to school by promoting active travel.
- Helping to combat obesity in children.
- Reducing traffic congestion and improving air quality.
- Presenting the local authority as a leading actor in protecting children's health.

The importance of reducing air pollution for children cannot be stressed enough. Though we're all at risk of developing health conditions as a result of poor air, children are particularly vulnerable.

Children living in polluted areas are four times more likely to have reduced lung function in adulthood, but evidence has shown that improving air quality can halt and reverse this.

We've got to do more to protect the health of the next generation – and with your help I'm certain we can.

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I'm therefore keen to arrange a meeting with you to discuss School Streets further. I'll contact your office in the coming weeks, but in the meantime if you need to get in contact with me you can do so at [enter phone number or email address]

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,

[NAME]