

Air pollution: only 40 schools (0.4%) ban cars in streets around schools despite long-term damage to young lungs

- **FOI requests from UK100 shows only 0.4% of primary schools have introduced “school streets”- where cars are banned during drop off and pick up, despite calls for them to be introduced by the Health Secretary, Matt Hancock**
- **Nearly half of all primary school children are driven to school, a figure which has increased in the last decade**
- **Call for changes to the law as study shows councils outside London are unable to enforce school streets without ability to fine drivers**

As pupils return to school this week, research conducted by UK100, a network of local leaders that campaigns on clean air, has found that schools and councils are struggling to deter parents from driving their children to school despite the significant impact on children’s health.

Despite calls from the Health Secretary, Matt Hancock, to ban polluting vehicles outside schools, (1) FOI responses from 132 councils in England found that just 40 schools (0.4% of primary schools and 0.1% of secondary schools) have set up “school streets” where the area is closed to cars during morning and afternoon drop off times. There are 24,323 schools in England – including 16,769 state primary and 3,448 state secondary schools. (2) The areas currently with the most school streets are Islington, Birmingham, Hackney, Greenwich, Camden, Croydon, Bristol and Lambeth.

The figure is due to rise over the next 3 years: councils are planning to introduce 255 school streets by 2022, this still only represents around 4% of primary schools and 0.3% of secondary schools. The areas planning to introduce the most school streets include North Tyneside, Islington, Tower Hamlets, Hackney, Lambeth, Hounslow, Camden and Bristol.

There are currently only 8 school streets outside London - 2 in Bristol and 6 in Birmingham.

There is growing evidence of the impact of traffic on children’s health. According to analysis of government figures by Sustrans, the walking and cycling charity, an estimated one-quarter of traffic at rush hour is estimated to be linked to the school run. (3) At the same time, pollution from vehicles can cause long term damage to children’s lungs (4) and cut their life expectancy by up to seven months.

80% of councils who responded cited financing or resources to be a challenge for their area.

Estimates of the costs involved are around £20,000 per year for a camera system to include set up and maintenance, but these costs can often be recovered through fines. (5)

However, access to such financing may require a change in the law - which UK100 are calling for as part of the planned Environment Bill. One of the main challenges to school streets outside London is that local councils do not have the resources and powers to enforce a ban on parents driving to school, by a lack of access to ANPR cameras to prosecute moving traffic offences, which is the responsibility of the police.

According to official statistics from the Department for Transport, nearly half (45%) of all primary school children are driven in a car or van, a figure that has increased in the last decade (40% in 2009). (6)

Polly Billington, Director of UK100, a network of local leaders that campaigns on clean air, said: *“One of the biggest barriers to more children walking and cycling to school ironically is fear of traffic. By having a calm, quiet environment around school it will send an important message to encourage parents not to drive during the school run. But Government needs to support councils by giving them the powers and resources to enforce school streets, as well as investing in public transport and measures to encourage walking and cycling.”*

Measures to tackle the issue have public support. A recent survey from Global Action Plan via Opinium shows that a majority of parents (47%) support plans to ban cars from driving directly outside schools during school hours, while only a quarter (26%) oppose. (7)

At the same time, walking or cycling to school has a benefit to children's health and wellbeing, not just in terms of tackling obesity but evidence suggests pupils who walk or cycle arrive at school more alert, happier and ready to work.

Henrietta Rooney, a parent involved in setting up a school street at Bessemer Grange Primary in Southwark, South London, said:

"The school street has had a huge and positive impact on the environment around the school. It's more enjoyable to walk to school now that the traffic risks have been removed, parents have commented on how different and relaxed it is. One of the biggest differences is that you no longer hear parents shouting at their children to stay out of the road. Personally, the change that I have noticed the most is the increase in the number of older children walking to school by themselves."

Jacqueline Graves, deputy headteacher of Haimo Primary School in Greenwich, which was listed as one of London's 50 most polluted primary schools (8), said:

"We have seen a 54% reduction in the number of children being driven to school, with a big increase in those cycling, walking and scooting. Our street is quiet and peaceful at both ends of the day and children are safer which wasn't always the case before. Our parents are happy with the School Street - saying 'it's like it was when we came to school' and even local residents in the road who had concerns at the beginning now acknowledge the benefits."

Dom Jacques, a parent in Leeds and member of Moortown Living Streets Group set up a temporary car-free zone outside his school. Dom said:

"Moortown is very dominated by cars; as a parent this frustrates me a lot. If we seriously want to tackle big problems like air pollution, rising obesity and mental health issues, we need to build healthy environments where our young people can thrive and not be forced to inhale unnecessary levels of pollution or be subservient to rat-runners and pavement parkers."

"We successfully trialled a car-free zone outside the school, reducing traffic and encouraging more families to walk to school. We would like to see this arrangement formalised and implemented for the long-term."

Jenni Wiggle, Senior Director, Living Streets, said:

"The majority of parents we work with say they're put off walking their child to school because of chaos around the school gates. When you remove cars, you remove the issues of unsafe parking, traffic danger and dirty air - helping encourage more families to choose healthier and cleaner ways to travel."

"Government, local authorities and schools need to work together to support families to swap the school run for a school walk. 20mph limits, behaviour change schemes and School Streets can all help families to choose to walk."

Rachel White, Head of Public Affairs at Sustrans, added:

"Earlier this year Sustrans organised 40 school streets across the UK, working with local authorities, schools and parents. The UK Government now needs to show leadership by making it easier for local authorities outside London to enforce school streets during drop off and pick up times and to prioritise walking and cycling paths."

According to Sustrans, children in the UK now lag far behind their peers in other nations for active travel. Only around 2-3% of UK children cycle to school compared to 49% of all Dutch primary school children.

School streets can be established in a number of ways adapted to local circumstances. These include:

- **ANPR numberplate recognition cameras** to enforce. This will ensure that access is maintained for residents, blue badge holders, local buses etc. Non-exempted vehicles entering the zone will be automatically issued a Penalty Charge Notice.
- **Physical closure of a street.** This can be using folding bollards or removable 'concertina' barriers that are put up just during drop off and pick up times.

In a Freedom of Information response, **Surrey County Council** told UK100 that:

"In London, in Hackney, the enforcement of vehicle bans on school streets is undertaken using ANPR cameras by the local authority, and the fines can be used to recover the cost of providing the enforcement. Outside of London Local Authorities do not have the power to enforce such moving traffic offences, and instead this is only within the gift of the police who are not allowed to recover their costs for providing any such enforcement. Therefore the police do not have the resources available to do this."

Knowsley Council in Liverpool City Region added:

"The enforcement of moving traffic offences by Merseyside Police is not generally undertaken and Knowsley Council has been subject to significant budgetary constraints imposed by government. However, should the enforcement of moving traffic become a civil offence, then the potential to provide the necessary resources could become more feasible and in doing so, make the introduction of School Streets a more realistic possibility."