## Making the case for clean air to school leaders

*This letter is a template for members of the school community to make the case for action to their school leaders.*

*How to use this letter:*

1. *Read the full letter & the briefing notes below*
2. *Identify the areas that are most relevant to your school*
3. *Edit the letter with location & school specific information (highlighted in yellow)*
4. *Delete the text in red and any sections you don’t wish to include*
5. *Send to the relevant person at your school!*

Dear XXX,

I am getting in touch as I want to bring to your attention the importance of tackling air pollution in and around name of school.

*Personalised section about the school*

I am concerned about the high level of air pollution in the area which often exceeds World Health Organisation legal limits. The school is near a major source of pollution such as XXX road (check out the [Air quality in England](https://www.airqualityengland.co.uk/) website or [London Air Quality Network](https://londonair.org.uk/LondonAir/Default.aspx) for information on pollution levels).

*Why do you want the school to take action? See suggestions in the briefing note.*

(example text) I want the school to take action to protect our children’s health.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has recently revised their air quality guidelines lowering them to levels that mean that 95% of schools in the UK are in breach. This is almost every child in the UK being educated in a location that is capable of harming their health.

Children are particularly at risk from air pollution as their bodies are still developing: air pollution can cause a range of health issues including irreversible effects on lung function development, worsening of asthma and can also affect children’s heart and brain functions. There is information on the health impacts of air pollution on the [Clean Air Hub](https://www.cleanairhub.org.uk/clean-air-information/air-pollution-health) if you wish to find out more.

*Tackling the climate crisis*

This is even more important given the climate crisis. The main activity that drives air pollution also drives climate change. The sectors that produce the vast majority of greenhouse gases are also the main sources of air pollutants. Reducing the activity that causes air pollution typically also reduces the activity that cause climate change.

*What do you believe the school should focus on? See suggestions in the briefing note.*

(example text) There are simple steps that you can take to improve air quality in and around your school and these can have a big impact on children’s health. The [Action for Clean Air website](https://www.actionforcleanair.org.uk/schools) offers a range of practical tools to help the school take action. In particular, I think the school should XXX.

Children’s health needs to be safeguarded from air pollution now, to help them achieve their best life chances and to ensure this generation is healthy and the environment they live in is protected.

Yours faithfully,

XXX

## Briefing Note

*This is designed to support a teacher, parent or concerned local stakeholder to raise the issue and the case for action with school leaders:*

**Why we need to protect children’s health from air pollution at school**

* Physical health: Children are particularly at risk from air pollution as their bodies are still developing: air pollution can cause a range of health issues including irreversible effects on lung function development, worsening of asthma can also affect children’s heart and brain functions. There is information on the health impacts of air pollution on the [Clean Air Hub](https://www.cleanairhub.org.uk/clean-air-information/air-pollution-health) if you wish to find out more.
* Learning impacts: research is beginning to point towards effects of air pollution on the developing brain, such as reduced memory function and children’s ability to learn. Recent modelling suggests that [cutting air pollution levels at schools that exceed](https://www.globalactionplan.org.uk/news/clean-air-day-2020reducing-air-pollution-levels-by-20could-improve-children-s-ability-to-learn-by-one-month-per-year-0) previous (2005) WHO guideline limits by 20% could improve children’s ability to learn by one month per year. Given that WHO guidelines have recently been lowered since this research, the impact is likely to be even more significant.
* 88% of schools in the UK have air pollution in breach of the new WHO nitrogen dioxide (NO2) guidelines, and 95% are in breach of the new WHO PM2.5 guideline. That is almost every child in the UK being educated in a location that is capable of harming their health. This is based on the [WHO guidelines](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240034228) set in September 2021.

**What we can do to protect children from air pollution at school**

* Cut pollution from school operations e.g. coordinating deliveries and improving ventilation (which can help manage COVID-19 too);
* Reduce children’s exposure to pollution e.g. encouraging parents and staff to walk/cycle to school, installing green screens;
* Educate children to help them and their families make cleaner air choices e.g. choosing
* active travel instead of travelling to school by car;
* Work with local authorities to implement suitable measures to reduce emissions around the school e.g. School Streets; and
* Recognise that the burden of responsibility for clean air does not just sit with schools, and utilise the student voice to work with local partners and ask national leaders for change.

**Resources available to help us tackle air pollution**

* The [Action for Clean Air website](https://www.actionforcleanair.org.uk/schools) offers a range of practical tools to help the school take action.
* The [Clean Air for Schools Framework](https://www.transform-our-world.org/programmes/clean-air-for-schools), is an online tool that will help you create a tailored Clean Air Action Plan, with the actions that are best suited to your school circumstances. It also links through to lots of free resources to then help implement the actions either through student, teacher and/or parent action.
* If you are in London, then get in touch with the [London Schools Pollution Helpdesk](https://www.pollutionhelpdesk.co.uk/) for free support and advice in taking action to improve air quality.