

Pupils call for cleaner air in Edinburgh

Pupils from all over Edinburgh are coming together on Monday to demand tough new measures on air pollution to improve air quality in their communities and to call for a safe commute to school, free from the harmful effects of toxic gases.

At an event taking place in the City Chambers young people, parents and teachers will deliver a strong message to politicians asking for more School Zones, more space on the streets for cycling, walking, wheeling and scooting and free public transport for parents and carers travelling with children.

The event will be hosted by CBeebies presenter Rory Crawford.

Twenty schools recently took part in an Air Pollution Programme facilitated by charity Parents for Future Scotland, which encouraged them to learn about what causes air pollution, to research the effects it has on our health and wellbeing, and to come up with suggestions and changes that would improve air quality in Edinburgh.

One P7 pupil from St Peter's RC Primary School said: "Air pollution causes diseases and cancer. We must start taking action against air pollution and we have to put every ounce of energy into finding new ways to battle for our planet and the future of Scotland. Pupils at our primary school are striving

to make everyone's lives better. We have already laid out our strategies for success, and you should too."

Councillors, MPs and MSPs are being invited to hear first hand what children in their wards and constituencies have discovered and what changes they would like to see at legislative level. During the programme pupils and parents were asked to rank a number of policies in order of preference. The results showed that the three most popular choices were:

- School zones where vehicles are not allowed on roads outside school entrances during school hours, and have this enforced. Shutting off roads outside schools before, during and after the school day and having this monitored by traffic wardens and police to ensure that cars are not breaking the rules. This could be extended to a permanent closure where schools take over the streets and incorporate them into the playground area.
- Building on the alterations made through the Spaces for People scheme initiated over Covid-19 to dedicate more space on our roads for walking, cycling, wheeling & pushing a buggy. Looking at ways to widen pavements, give bikes and pedestrians priority over vehicles and generally make it safer for those choosing to travel to school without a car.
- Free public transport for carers travelling with children. While children can already travel for free with their bus card, this initiative would allow adults travelling with children to also access buses and trams free of charge, providing an incentive to use public transport rather than travelling by car.

Claire Larkin, Director of Parents for Future Scotland, said: "Air pollution just isn't talked about and yet it has been linked to heart disease, dementia and strokes. Children and parents in Edinburgh want a safe commute to school, but for this to be possible we need to cut our traffic emissions. We have engaged with one fifth of primary schools in Edinburgh and these are the legislative changes children and parents believe will be most effective at reducing emissions in their neighbourhoods. Communities have the solutions to their own problems and we are delighted to facilitate children and parents to ask for these changes from the council. We hope that they will be taken into serious consideration."