

Cleaner air for London's children as air filters to be rolled out to first 200 schools in the capital in ground-breaking initiative

1 year ago



The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, has announced bold plans to further protect the health of young Londoners by installing innovative new air filters into some of the London's most polluted schools.

PM_{2.5} filters will be fitted in every classroom in 200 London schools, spread across London, later this year. This pilot project, if successful, could then be expanded to cover every school in London.

The additional £2.7m funding forms part of the Mayor's 2024/25 budget which will be voted on by the London Assembly on Thursday. In addition to the air filters themselves, the funding will pay for school engagement, educational materials, monitoring the impact of the programme and maintenance of the filters.

Bold measures introduced by the Mayor have already helped cut the number of educational establishments with illegal levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) pollution by 94 per cent – from 793 schools in 2016 to 50 in 2019 (the most recent year for which data is available).

Due to ambitious air quality action by the Mayor, all educational establishments are estimated to be legally compliant with the NO₂ annual mean UK limit by 2025. (1). However, most schools in London still exceed the World Health Organization interim guideline for particulate matter pollution (PM_{2.5}) (2).

A City Hall research project is currently underway to ascertain the best type of air filter that will be used. This is due to be completed in May, with installation of filters in the first pilot schools to follow later in the

year.

These could include models which filter the air using fans and replaceable filter cartridges which trap the tiny toxic particles as the air circulates. The schools chosen for the pilot project will be selected based on pollution levels, as well as those in more deprived areas; ensuring that the chosen schools are spread evenly across London.

Today's proposed additional investment is possible due to the Mayor's prudent financial planning and because business rates returns from local authorities are higher than were forecast in the Mayor's draft Budget proposals last month.

Sadiq is determined to do more to tackle poor air quality in and around schools, which stunts the growth of children's lungs and worsens chronic illness, such as asthma, lung and heart disease.

Today's announcement builds on the Mayor's successful programme of air quality work with schools which includes delivering pollution audits and clean air measures at 50 schools and 20 nurseries across the capital's most polluted areas (3) and provision of the London Schools Pollution Helpdesk(4). The Helpdesk provides free support, advice, and practical guidance to help improve air quality at schools, particularly those schools which are in the most polluted areas of the city. Since its introduction, the Helpdesk has provided tailored support to over 100 schools and nurseries, across 26 boroughs. This includes providing schools with the tools needed to develop Clean Air Day action plans and completing the Clean Air for Schools framework.

Transport for London (TfL) has also provided funding and support to the London boroughs to increase the number of School Streets in the capital – where roads surrounding schools are closed to motor traffic at drop-off and pick-up times – to over 500. Analysis has shown average decreases of 23 per cent in Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) concentrations during School Streets closure periods (5).

These new measures, coupled with the Mayor's bold policies including the Ultra Low Emission Zone, cleaner buses and taxis and reduction in construction emissions, will further clean up the air that London's children breathe.

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, said: "I am doing everything in my power to stop Londoners breathing filthy poisonous air. We know that the impact of pollution on young people's health can be particularly acute, causing lasting damage to children's lungs.

"Since I first became Mayor, there has been a significant reduction in the number of schools in areas which exceed the legal limit for nitrogen dioxide, but we need to make progress even further and faster.

"Alongside parents and teachers, I want every single child to breathe clean air in and around their school. In those vital early years, the difference to young people's health and wellbeing can be lifechanging."

Daniel Kebede, General Secretary of the National Education Union, said: "This is a forward-thinking commitment from the Mayor of London which will be of massive benefit to pupils and staff in London schools and an example that should be taken up more widely across the country. High levels of pollution and bad air quality are severely impacting on the health of young people, often causing damage that will last throughout their lifetime. The introduction of air filters in classrooms across London will ensure that the air in our schools is healthy for children to breathe, and create an environment in which it is fit for

pupils to learn.”

Andrea Carneveli, Founder of Chiswick Oasis said: “In June 2019, we had the honour of giving Sadiq Khan a tour of our school, St Mary’s Catholic School in Chiswick, showcasing the remarkable impact of our newly installed air purifiers, which successfully reduced pollution levels by approximately 94 per cent. To see now how 200 schools will be able to follow in our footsteps and provide children with cleaner air to breathe brings immense joy as a parent and fills me with renewed optimism for our future.”

Rosamund Adoo-Kissi-Debrah CBE said: “As a London school teacher, I know the difference that having a safe and healthy environment in the classroom, can have on children’s learning and on their broader health.

“Children are most affected by breathing in air pollution, and the devastating effects on their health are not always shown. But the evidence tells us that breathing toxic air stunts their cognitive development, their hearts, lungs, brains and causes conditions such as asthma, which is still killing between eight and twelve children in London every year. We must do more to clean up the air for our children.

“All children regardless of where they live or what school they go to, have a right to breathe clean air and I hope all London’s schools will have similar filters fitted to the ones announced today.”

(1) Modelling from the [London Atmospheric Emissions Inventory \(LAEI\) 2016](#) and the [London Atmospheric Emissions Inventory \(LAEI\) 2019](#).

<https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/london-atmospheric-emissions-inventory-laei-2019>

(2) [London Atmospheric Emissions Inventory \(LAEI\) 2019](#):

<https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/london-atmospheric-emissions-inventory-laei-2019>

(3)

<https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-and-strategies/environment-and-climate-change/pollution-and-air-quality/mayors-nursery-air-quality-audit-programme>

(4) <https://www.pollutionhelpdesk.co.uk/>

(5)

<https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-and-strategies/environment-and-climate-change/environment-publications/school-streets-air-quality-study>