

Air Quality Case Study

Kids get active to beat air pollution at St Cuthbert's

Air pollution is now one of the biggest threats to the health of young people, with a growing volume of research pointing to the damaging effects that toxic air can have, from increasing levels of asthma to stunted growth.

As a result, more and more schools are starting to act, introducing projects and incentives to make the school run more active in order to make the roads safer and the air cleaner.

St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary School in Kenton sits just a short walk from the busy A1 dual carriageway into Newcastle city centre. Over the last few years the school has introduced a number of ways that have made it easier for parents to ditch the car.

The school of over 230 pupils has enjoyed a long-term partnership with the cycling and walking charity Sustrans, explains HLTA Suzanne Ramplin, and this has inspired staff to set up and run activities that encourage much healthier habits when it comes to the school run.

"We like to get the children on bikes as soon as possible," says Suzanne, "with nursery children on balance bikes from the age of four, and older children in years 4 and 5 progressing to Bikeability, when they learn how to cycle safely on the road."

There is also a travel to school policy, and every day staff record how each child travelled to school, with weekly certificates going to those classes with the most children who came to school on foot, by bike or on a scooter.

Those children whose parents need to drop them off on the way to work are encouraged to do so away from the school gates, continues Suzanne, and the pupils can then take part in a 'Park and Stride' scheme by completing a few laps of the playground, and still earn points for their class.

"We also run a popular Walking Bus, with parents dropping their children off a few streets away from school, where a member of staff will be waiting to walk them into school," she adds.

"This helps stop congestion and improves the air quality around the school because the cars aren't coming right up to the school gates."