

Traffic fumes 'could be making children less intelligent': Pupils in polluted areas scored worse in memory tests

- Scientists have linked air pollution to lower cognitive development
- Pupils in polluted areas developed less quickly than those in clean air
- They showed less improvement in working memory and attentiveness
- Pollution is linked to problems with breathing, heart and development

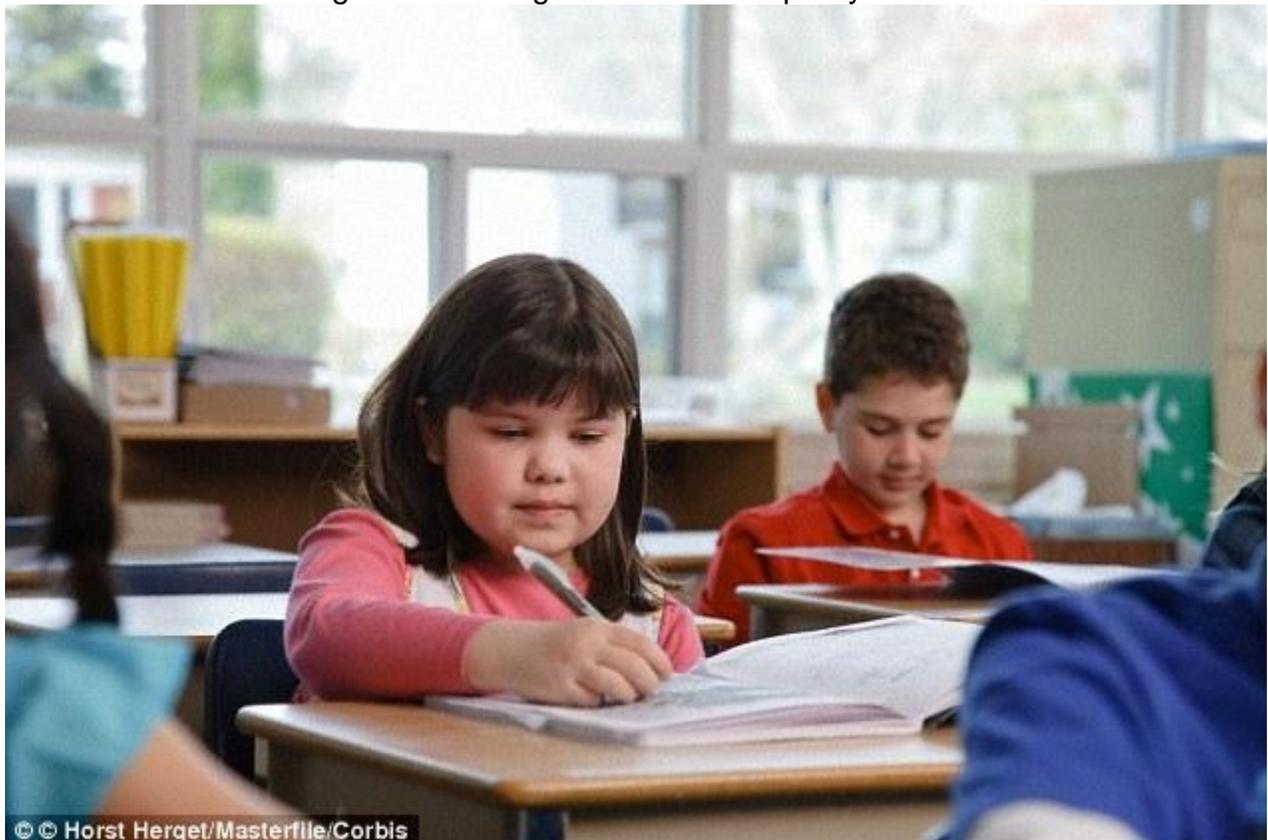
By Ben Spencer, Science Reporter for the Daily Mail

Exposure to traffic fumes could slow children's progress at school, a study suggests.

Scientists have linked pollution to lower cognitive development – a finding which raises serious questions about British schools.

Researchers found primary pupils exposed every day to car fumes developed less quickly than children whose schools enjoyed cleaner air.

The findings, published last night in an international medical journal, comes as the Government faces charges of breaking EU laws on air quality.



Exposure to traffic fumes could be slowing children's progress at school, researchers said today

'RAISES RISK OF SUICIDE IN MIDDLE AGED MEN'

Air pollution raises the risk of suicide among middle aged men, suggests new research.

A US study of more than 1,500 people who took their lives in Salt Lake County, Utah, U.S., found males aged between 36 and 64 were most prone after breathing in smog caused by factories and cars.

After exposure to increased levels of nitrogen dioxide in the two to three days before their deaths, they were in 25 per cent more danger than normal.

Exposure to air pollution particles raised the risk of suicide by six per cent.

And those exposed to pollution were more likely to use violent means to end their lives.

The findings published in the American Journal of Epidemiology are particularly alarming as middle aged men already have the highest risk for suicide.

While they do not show pollution causes people to kill themselves, they suggest it may interact with other factors, such as depression or pollen allergies, to make people more suicidal. Officials will be forced to explain in London's Supreme Court next month why air pollution is illegally high in 16 UK cities. MPs have also called for air filters to be installed in 1,000 British schools close to main roads.

The latest study, published in PLOS Medicine, details the results of a year-long investigation at 39 Spanish schools. Researchers monitored 2,715 children aged seven to ten, assessing their memory and attentiveness.

The team, from the Centre for Research in Environmental Epidemiology in Barcelona, found pupils at schools with clean air made far more progress over the 12 months than those at schools polluted with high levels of nitrogen dioxide and ultra-fine particles. For example, pupils at schools with clean air showed an average improvement in working memory of 11.5 per cent over the year, compared to 7.4 per cent at polluted schools.

The researchers wrote: 'The findings suggest that the developing brain may be vulnerable to traffic-related air pollution well into middle childhood.'

Sixteen cities – including London, Manchester and Glasgow – have been failing EU air quality targets since 2011. The European Court of Justice ruled in November that the UK was in breach of EU law and should have created plans to tackle air pollution in the 16 cities by last month.

The European court ruled that the UK's Supreme Court now has jurisdiction over the matter. The court is due to hear the case on April 16.

Alan Andrews, of Client Earth, which brought the Supreme Court case, said: 'Sadly, instead of protecting children the Government is fighting against its legal responsibilities.'

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said: 'Air quality has improved significantly in recent decades and we are investing heavily in measures across government to continue this, committing £2billion since 2011 in green transport initiatives.'



Children in schools with clean air showed significantly more progress on memory and attentiveness tests over a year than children in schools in polluted areas