Please find below draft text which you can use as the basis for your letter, although it does require significant editing to ensure it is as relevant as possible to the school you are writing to. Sections in red need to be edited or removed, although depending on the school policy in question, other sections may all need to be removed and/or added. Sections 4 and 5 are sample arguments as opposed to drafts, which should be used for inspiration as opposed to being copied directly.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

I am/We are writing to you as a parent/group of parents in relation to **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** School’s **“\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** policy” regarding pupils cycling to school.

Explain here how you found out about the policy – was it through a letter from the school, in local media etc.

While I/we appreciate that this policy has been implemented/proposed with the best intentions, I am/we are extremely concerned about the potential unintended consequences it may have.

1. **For all policies which are likely to diminish cycle usage:**

The reason why measures requiring certain clothing or equipment/cycle tests/maintenance checks etc. concern us is because widely accepted evidence shows that whenever policies are introduced to regulate cycling, they trigger a drastic reduction in cycling levels, particularly amongst teenagers, and therefore pose a significant risk to public health.

By way of example, countries, states and cities which have introduced compulsory helmet laws have typically witnessed a 30% to 40% reduction in levels of cycling, but far higher reductions amongst certain groups, with a 90% reduction in the number of teenage girls cycling in Sydney. Given that one in three Year Six pupils in the UK are reported to be overweight or obese, and that only 20% of girls of that age meet the Government’s physical activity recommendations, **(links to relevant stats for age group & region can be accessed via https://www.cyclinguk.org/article/draft-letter-schools-anti-cycling-policies)** I/we would argue that measures to regulate cycling, however well intentioned, need to take into account these potential unintended consequences.

Conversely, girls who cycle to school regularly are seven times more likely than girls who don’t to meet recommended physical activity levels. We are therefore concerned that the policies you are proposing will lead to a significant reduction in the number of children cycling to school, portray cycling as an inherently dangerous activity, and have an adverse health impact.

Furthermore, evidence also shows that where more cyclists are present in a specific area, cycling becomes safer within that area. If your new policy were to reduce cycle use, as similar policies have done elsewhere, this would in turn make cycling less safe for those individuals who did continue to cycle to school (be they pupils, teachers or parents).

1. **For policies which threaten to ban children from cycling if e.g. they do not pass a certain test, do not wear helmets/high viz etc:**

With regards to the banning of children cycling to school unless they **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**, respectfully, schools have no power or authority of any kind to ban a child from cycling to school, or the right to dictate the means by which they travel to school. The Department for Education has repeatedly made it clear that schools are not liable for children travelling independently to school, and it is ultimately a matter of parental choice whether a child walks, cycles or is driven to school.

As supporters/a supporter of active travel, I/we would always encourage \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ School, and all schools, to implement school travel plans which seek to increase the modal share of pupils walking and cycling to school, but ultimately schools have no greater power to ban a child from cycling to school than they do to ban them from walking or insist that they travel by car or bus.

If you are determined to frustrate active travel I/we concede that the school is able to prevent children from bringing their bicycles onto school premises, but how a child gets to the gates is not within your gift or control, and you should not be suggesting otherwise to parents or pupils. While you are entitled to force children to lock up their bikes outside the school gates, we suggest that this might not appear particularly enlightened or forward thinking.

1. **For policies which require the wearing of helmets and/or Hi-Viz clothing:**

While I/we accept that misbehaviour by children in school uniform travelling to and from school can be included within a school’s disciplinary code, whether a child wears a helmet and/or Hi-Viz clothing is not an issue of misbehaviour, criminal or otherwise, but one of parental choice. If there are specific behavioural issue with individual pupils, the school should deal with those through its disciplinary policy, without punishing all children at this school. (**This is only worth including if the school has already identified specific misbehaviour on bicycles that does fall within its remit)**

It is the policy of Cycling UK, the national cycling charity/I believe/We believe that decisions about wearing helmets and/or certain clothing whilst cycling are matters of personal choice, and for children, questions of parental choice and responsibility. I am/We are neither pro nor against helmets and Hi-Viz clothing, principally because for decades studies by numerous experts have produced some counter intuitive results – with some scientific, academic research finding that helmets actually have a negative impact on the safety of cycling.

I/we do not seek to convince you of the merits of the opposing arguments, however I/we would respectfully suggest that if an informed parent carefully evaluates the arguments and determine that they will not insist that their child wears either a helmet or Hi-Viz jacket when cycling to school, that falls within the remit of parental rather than school responsibility. The Department for Education has repeatedly made it clear that schools have no legal liability for or in respect of children travelling independently to school.

1. **A note on ‘School Travel Plans’**

**Many schools have ‘School Travel Plans’, which can be useful in convincing schools to reconsider their cycling regulations. Given that every plan will be different, we cannot provide an effective draft letter in response to these, but below are some examples of how reference to a travel plan may strengthen your arguments, especially by highlighting that schools should address the root causes of specific cycle safety issues.**

**Example 1 - If you cannot find their travel plan, you could say the following:**

I/we did try and find a copy of your school travel plan online, but I was/we were unable to locate it, so if you were able to forward on a copy that would be extremely helpful.

**Example 2 – a travel plan supportive of cycling but concerned about specific safety issues:**

Your school travel plan acknowledged that there was significant interest from both children and their parents in students cycling to school, that the school wanted to encourage this and should look at incentives to do so. The same document also referred to parents and residents parking on the road outside the school, blocking the cycling lanes, but that the school was wholly reliant on their goodwill to comply with parking restrictions.

To address those issues, and fulfil the stated objective of encouraging cycling, instead of implementing this policy which risks seriously impacting on cycling levels and poses a risk to public health, as outlined above, it might be more productive to liaise with the local authority about parking restrictions and enforcement, so that children cycling to school do not have to negotiate parked cars on both sides of the road with both oncoming and following traffic.

**Example 3 – a travel plan with clear, specific objectives to increase cycling to school**

Having looked at your School Travel Plan (STP), it indicates that

1. Only three per cent of children cycle to school, despite 91% of pupils living within three miles of the school;
2. A large majority of pupils are resistant to wearing a helmet when cycling, with only 16.6% saying they would do so
3. The 20mph limit outside the school is not well adhered to, with few signs to warn drivers of the speed limit
4. Parking in front of the school at busy times in terms of student safety

The aims of the STP are stated to include:

1. Reducing the number of children travelling by car;
2. Increasing the number of children cycling to school safely;
3. Promoting healthy lifestyle and increasing student safety by reducing the number of vehicles depositing and collecting pupils, and increasing the number of children walking or cycling to school.

I am concerned that your new policy will have the opposite effect, discouraging pupils from active travel because barriers to cycling are put in place. You already know that the majority of pupils are reluctant to wear helmets, so the unintended consequence of helmet compulsion is likely to be a reduction in numbers cycling. This is what the evidence suggests, and we know that this has wider health consequences.

I would invite you to consider whether it might be more productive for the school to focus on the source of danger to pupils walking or cycling to school, rather than whether pupils should be forced to wear protective equipment.

Can I therefore ask whether you have:

1. Contacted the local authority (LA) to discuss the possibility of traffic calming measures (speed bumps etc) being installed outside the school;
2. Contacted the LA about the measures that might be implemented to improve pupils’ cycle or walking journeys to school;
3. Spoken to the police about enforcement of the 20mph speed limit, especially close to opening and closing time.
4. **A note on the evidential basis of the policy, risk assessments and cost benefit analyses**

As with travel plans, the motivations and justifications for the policy in question will be varied from school to school. It could be that there has been a specific incident which has raised cause for concern, such as an accident or a complaint. Equally, it could simply a general misunderstanding of the dangers of cycling forcing a panicked and ill thought out reaction.

If no clear justifications or evidence to back up the policy and how it will achieve its stated aims, we would suggest something along the lines of the following:

I/We note that no evidence, risk assessment, cost/benefit analysis or consultation has been provided or carried out to justify the need for the policy or to assess its potential benefits and consequences, or whether alternative approaches may be more effective.

I/we would therefore request that should any such assessment have been carried out, this be made available to all pupils and parents. If no such action has been taken, the policy ought to be suspended until an assessment and consultation is carried out, with the full input of parents and pupils where relevant.

If the school has already provided evidence you will have to make your own arguments in response to these, although feel free to email us if you are unsure, or take a look at the briefings section of our website for information on a wide range of specific topics.

If the policy has been triggered by a specific incident, such as an accident, naturally you will have to ensure you are considerate of this, especially if serious injury occurred. Nonetheless, the arguments elsewhere in this letter still apply, possibly all the more so where the accident involved a motor vehicle: an accident in which a cyclist was injured by a motorist, even where no liability is proven or legal action taken, is surely as much a motivator for a ban on driving to school as for cycling to school.

**6. Draft Conclusion**

I/We have summarised our concerns above because I/we wanted to provide some context as to why, as a parent/parents who is/are naturally concerned about road safety but also supportive of cycling, we strongly advocate personal and parental choice on these issues rather than compulsion. I/We would be delighted to expand on this further if you are willing to meet with me/us**. (it is obviously up to you if you want to suggest this, although a one-to-one meeting will be a good opportunity to put forward your case).**

I/we do not want to burden you with paperwork, but I have attached some briefings and information from Cycling UK, the national cycling charity, which you might find interesting, and which explain some of the things schools can do to encourage both active and safe travel, making cycling or walking to school the natural choice for the majority of pupils.

The briefings also refer to the evidence that informs our views:

1. Cycling UK briefing on cycling to school;
2. Cycling UK briefing on cycle-friendly school;
3. Cycling UK briefing on health and cycling;
4. Cycling UK briefing on cycle helmets.

If you include these briefings, make sure to print them off and attach them to your letter. Alternatively, provide links to the briefings, which are on our website:

1. <https://www.cyclinguk.org/article/cycling-guide/school-run-cycling>
2. <https://www.cyclinguk.org/campaigning/views-and-briefings/cycle-friendly-schools-and-colleges-ctc-views>
3. <https://www.cyclinguk.org/campaigning/views-and-briefings/health-and-cycling>
4. <https://www.cyclinguk.org/campaigning/views-and-briefings/cycle-helmets>

Yours Sincerely,