Author's response to reviews

Title: Protocol for systematic review of the effects of schools and school-environment interventions on health: evidence mapping and syntheses

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Author's response to reviews:

Dear Editor

We have responded to the reviewer's comments (detailed below) and also taken the opportunity to reduce the word length of the paper.

Overall, the design of the review seems sound.
- We are pleased the reviewer judges this.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field.
- We are pleased the reviewer judges this.

Quality of written English: Acceptable
- We are pleased the reviewer judges this.

The title needs to reflect that this is a protocol of a systematic review. It can be easily be confused as a report of the review – which is what I also thought it was in reading the title.
- Amended – see p. 1, 2 and 5

The background seems rather long and can be broken down to include
“objectives”. The objectives need to be separated into primary and secondary objectives.

- Amended. We have several objectives but have not differentiated these into primary and secondary objectives because they have equal weight in our protocol – see p.3.

Replace “and/or” with “or”. Note that that “or” is a logical term that includes “and” in it. This needs to be corrected throughout the paper.

- Amended.

Abstract: state the key databases searched.

- Added – see p. 4.

Abstract: state if the review involved any plan to perform meta-analysis and if so, how issues of pooling across studies would be handled including assessment of heterogeneity.

- The previous draft did address this matter but we have no amended the text to clarify this further – see p. 5.

Abstract: consider adding another section on “Discussion/Conclusions” – which provide a brief discussion of the expected results.

- Added.

Overall, there are a few other elements missing in the abstract. This reviewer suggests following the PRISMA statement in framing the abstract. It recommends providing “a structured summary including, as applicable: background; objectives; data sources; study eligibility criteria, participants, and interventions; study appraisal and synthesis methods; results; limitations; conclusions and implications of key findings; systematic review registration number” (http://www.prisma-statement.org/)

- Amended, not including ‘results;’ ‘limitations’, ‘conclusions and implications of key findings’ or ‘systematic review registration number’ (the last since our review protocol is instead registered with the National Institute of Health Research) – see p. 3-5.

Background: consider having a separate section on “objectives” or “research questions”, see comment 1(a) above. As recommended by the PRISMA statement, it is important for the objectives or research questions to be framed explicitly “with reference to participants, interventions, comparisons, outcomes, and study design (PICOS)” as applicable.
Methods: Consider defining “school-environment intervention”.

Methods: it is unclear what the comparators are for evaluating the effects of the interventions.

Methods: specify the time frame for the search for each database.

Methods: state how inter-rater reliability will be assessed.

Methods: For subgroup analyses or meta-regression, specify the subgroups/variables, corresponding hypotheses and rationale.

Methods: specify how missing data will be handled for quantitative analyses.

Methods: This reviewer thinks it would be useful to include the data abstraction forms so that readers can have a full picture of the design plans. This will also help the authors to ensure that they are capturing the information on all key variables.

Methods: This reviewer has not added this - there are four distinct and quite lengthy data extraction forms for stage 2 each of which is currently being developed. We do not want the published protocol to be encumbered or delayed by the addition of these.