

Teachers 'undermined by classes of over 25'

By Graeme Paton, Education Editor

Last updated: 12:47 AM BST 16/05/2008

Large class sizes are undermining education standards, according to a major report.

Lessons containing more than 25 pupils fuel bad behaviour and put excess strains on teachers, it is claimed.

Young children are also at greater risk of under-achieving in the "three Rs" as they get less one-to-one attention.

The conclusions, in a study published by Cambridge University, will provide further ammunition for teachers who are threatening industrial action unless class sizes are capped at 20.

It comes as official figures reveal that class sizes for the youngest children in English schools are rising.

According to the Department for Children, Schools and Families, the average infant class increased from 25.6 to 25.7 this year. Some 24,820 children aged five to seven were placed in classes of 31 or more – an increase of 1,610 in a year.

A series of reports published as part of Cambridge's two-year review of primary education says the size of classes and the structure of school buildings have a significant effect on standards. In one study, by the Institute of Education and King's College London, it was claimed that the effect of class sizes was "most evident with the youngest pupils", particularly those who were falling behind.

Researchers analysed data from 10,000 pupils aged four and five in more than 300 schools and found "a clear effect of class size differences on children's academic attainment over the reception year, in both literacy and maths". Pupils did better in lessons with fewer than 25 children, with academics recommending they should remain in small classes throughout primary school.

"The smaller the class the more likelihood there is that a teacher will spend more time with individual pupils," said the study. "In smaller classes there also tends to be more teaching overall, and large classes present more challenges for classroom management, pupil control and marking, planning and assessment."

The National Union of Teachers recently launched a campaign to cut class sizes to 20 by 2020, threatening industrial action unless a new cap was imposed.

A spokesman for the Department for Children, Schools and Families said: "We know small class sizes in the early years are important, which is why the legal class size limit for five-, six- and seven-year-olds is no more than 30."

School buildings too hot and noisy

Researchers say pupils may be struggling at school because classrooms are too hot and noisy.

The poor state of many buildings has also been linked to illness among children and teachers.

A study by the Institute of Education — published as part of Cambridge University's Primary Review — warned that lack of temperature control, ventilation and poor acoustics meant many pupils failed in national examinations.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families said 800 new primaries had been built since 1997 and plans were under way to rebuild or refurbish half of the remainder.

Story from Telegraph News:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1962234/Education-Teachers-%27undermined-by-classes-of-over-25%27.html>

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