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### Where pupils are brighter, naturally

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Primary pupils who learn in classrooms with plenty of natural light are more likely to be academically successful. But pupils in classrooms where there is excessive noise are likely to see their key stage test performances suffer.

The latest reports from the national Primary Review examine the effect of the built environment on primary pupils' education.

Researchers from London's Institute of Education studied more than 170 academic papers dealing with the school environment. They found that poorly managed and maintained buildings can affect pupils' learning and happiness, and teachers' ability to do their jobs effectively.

For example, they said: "Poor classroom acoustics can create a negative learning environment for many students, especially those with hearing impairments, learning difficulties, or where English is an additional language."

Similarly, they claim that excessive classroom noise distracts and annoys pupils and teachers. This includes environmental noises, such as traffic or ventilation systems, as well as irrelevant pupil conversation. The academics believe that such noise can directly and adversely affect pupils' test performance.

Pupils' achievement is also affected by the temperature and ventilation of their classrooms. Poor ventilation can result in raised carbon dioxide levels. This can lead to diminished concentration and an inability to focus on mental tasks.

Badly lit classrooms are equally detrimental to pupils' achievement. Low levels of natural light can lead to reduced concentration, as well as disturbed sleep patterns and depressed social activity.

But exposure to natural light is linked to improved performance. And the warmer the light, the greater pupils' sense of wellbeing.

The researchers also found some evidence to suggest that better views from the classroom window enhanced pupils' moods.

"The terms 'flexibility' and 'adaptability' have never been far from the thoughts of the builders of schools," the researchers said. "Learning needs change, and the spaces in which learning takes place may also need to change."

Mick Brookes, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, agrees that the classroom environment is vital to children's wellbeing.

"Teachers in primaries want to see bright, attractive classrooms," he said. "It sets the tone.

He added: "When you're in an enclosed classroom and can't see out the windows, it doesn't create the right atmosphere.

"That isn't to say that there aren't some very good examples of new buildings. But there are 18,000 primary schools - there's a long way to go."

#### KEY FINDINGS

- Streaming and setting have no effect on attainment, but ability groups in class can help.
- A pupil's age is important when considering class-size effects. There is a case for small classes in reception, but a lack of evidence showing an effect on older pupils.
- Pupils who learn in classes with natural light are more likely to be successful, but pupils underperform in classes with excessive noise.
- Teaching children about the roots of words can help to prevent them struggling with words that are not spelled the way they sound.

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