



Class sizes in practical subjects

Rising class sizes are a matter of serious concern to the NASUWT. They give rise to educational, health and safety and workload concerns.

The Secondary School (Grant Conditions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1973, Regulation 15 stipulates that the maximum limit for a general class is 35 pupils, and, for a practical class, 20 pupils except where approved by the Department of Education. Practical subjects are science, technology and design, home economics, physical education, music and art and design.

Review of DENI Circular Number: 2016/11

It appears that schools are flouting routinely the regulations on class sizes in practical subjects. DENI Circular Number: 2016/11 appears to be being interpreted as a blanket approval for flouting the regulations on class sizes.

The NASUWT understands that the Education Authority, supported by the Education Training Inspectorate (ETI), is currently challenging the change to the numbers in practical subjects, particularly in technology and home economics.

There are particular risks involved in technology and design classes due to the nature of the practical activities involved. Schools should be aware that industrial legislation applies due to the manufacturing activity. The risk assessment advice within Consortium of Local Education Authorities for the Provision of Science Services (CLEAPSS) states that *'the Health and Safety Executive has indicated that it would have no hesitation in prosecuting an employer if it believed that overcrowding was a contributory cause of an accident'*.

What members should do

Teachers need to protect themselves and in the event that they are asked to teach a practical class of over 20 students should:

- ask for a copy of the health and safety risk assessment – it is not appropriate for a school to instruct the classroom teacher to do this, it must be carried out by a competent and trained person;
- ask for a written statement that the Board of Governors is satisfied that any practical activities are unlikely to present a risk to the health and safety of either pupils or the teaching and support staff involved in the class;

- contact the Health and Safety Officer within the Education Authority for advice and for written confirmation that they are satisfied with the health and safety risk assessment.

If the above documentation is not provided, then NASUWT members should not carry out any practical activity during the lesson and should contact the NASUWT immediately.

Rotating pupils out of the classroom

The practice of rotating pupils out of the classroom during practical activities is not acceptable on educational, workload or safety grounds.

The curriculum at KS3 and KS4, in the practical subjects, has been developed on the basis of substantial practical activity with a maximum of 20 pupils. The nature of the curriculum is such that pupils cannot be 'rotated out' of practical activities. To do so jeopardises their educational progress in practical skills and denies them access to educational opportunities to which they are entitled.

Teachers should not be expected to plan and assess two lessons at the same time.

NASUWT members should make it clear that they will not co-operate with any system of pupil rotation, including: drawing up the rota, setting work or marking work done by pupils who have been withdrawn. This would cause additional workload and is, therefore, covered by the NASUWT's action short of strike action instructions.

If teachers are supervising pupils in another room while also teaching a practical activity, the health and safety of both teachers and pupils is at risk. An accident occurred in a school during the last academic year in precisely these circumstances.

If rotating pupils out of the classroom is operating in your school, contact the NASUWT for advice.

Contact details for the EA Health and Safety Officers

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NASUWT action instructions
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