

Asbestos in Schools
A personal perspective





This is not a new problem

'My father was a headmaster and died from mesothelioma 11 years ago'.

44 years ago a teaching colleague lost her husband to cancer caused by the asbestos in his teaching base. I am saddened that, even now, teachers are dying from exposure to asbestos especially as it was known in 1972 that many classrooms were built using asbestos.

But it is still a problem now

My mother died from mesothelioma in September 2013. She had been an infant school teacher for 17 years. Because of the delay between exposure and impact, this is a timebomb waiting to explode.

'I lost my lovely Mum to lung cancer in 2014. A teacher in a school with asbestos disturbed a number of times over her 20 years at the school. LA not interested when she tried to alert them. We had coroner rule on cause of death - industrial injury but the burden of proof is far too high'.

'My husband Steven Johnson died on the 16th Sept 2016 of plural mesothelioma. He was a teacher exposed to asbestos in several of the schools he taught in. We were shocked when given the diagnosis of nine months to a year of life'.

'My school teacher brother died last month as a result of exposure to asbestos in his school'.

Pupils as well as teachers are affected

- A daughter of friend has this incurable cancer. She is in her 20s and will leave a child
- 'I lost my darling daughter to this awful disease. She died in 2013 aged 45 from mesothelioma after we believe she was exposed to asbestos following a fire in her school. She left two young sons and so badly wanted to live'.

And many people are living with the impact now

- I am also suffering from mesothelioma as the result of my work as a teacher. Like Sue, one of my greatest concerns is for the children we taught who must also have been exposed to this danger. I am also in the last stages of my life due to this exposure and want to make sure that the children I taught do not face the same untimely end.
- I was diagnosed with mesothelioma in October 2015. The only place I could have been exposed was in schools where I taught. There is no cure. At 62 I am waiting for someone to find a cure before the inevitable happens

There's not enough transparency for teachers

- as a teacher there were holes in the panel walls at a Peterlee school, and Woodham school was cleared of Asbestos with the children present.
- I have taught in a school that definitely had asbestos in it. I remember being given outraged that we were just told "it's fine, if undisturbed" (as we constantly stuck a staple gun through the wall). My concerns just fell on deaf ears.
- I taught in the same classroom for 30 years, however it was not until the change of Headteacher that I was informed of the asbestos in my room. He advised me to discontinue putting drawing pins into the ceiling as this could disturb the asbestos!

Or for parents and pupils

'I have a 6yr old daughter in state school and while recent renovations were going on I saw an Asbestos removal van outside the school. The school hasn't informed parents of any of this'.

I recall my old sixth form had a big problem with asbestos. It made everyone feel uncomfortable, especially as one of the roofs had collapsed.

The DFE & HSE response

The Health and Safety Executive, which is the lead regulator on managing asbestos advise that **as long as asbestos is in good condition and unlikely to be damaged or disturbed, it is not a significant risk to health to pupils and students** during the course of their daily activities.

The department has provided **targeted guidance** to schools on the effective management of asbestos in their schools and has recently concluded a **voluntary data collection exercise** to understand how duty holders are managing asbestos in their schools.

The department **directly funds the removal of asbestos** through schemes such as the Priority Schools Building Programme and provides capital funding for asbestos management and removal where appropriate for those schools that have identified that asbestos is in poor condition or poses a high risk of deterioration.

The department is not committing to the removal of asbestos in all schools as **blanket and accelerated removal of asbestos in schools is potentially more dangerous** and may involve greater risk to school children and staff

'safe if undisturbed'

- Asbestos has been disturbed in English schools **115** in the last **5 years**

'we had two or three cases where we had to close off school, and in fact pupils had to go into the de-fumigation van, the emergency van, to make sure they were de-dusted and hosed down and cleaned.'

Phil Keay, former Head Teacher of Hetton School, Sunderland giving evidence to Commons Public Accounts Committee February 2017

'asbestos is well managed in schools'

The DFE ran a voluntary survey of schools last year. It had a 25% response rate.

- **85%** of schools contained asbestos
- **19% (22%)** of schools gave serious cause for concern
- **29% (35%)** needed to improve their management
- **52% (43%)** of schools have generally appropriate asbestos management

The national picture

Area	Disturbance	HSE action	Claims	Teacher deaths
East Of England	23	0	21	31 (43)
South East	10	0	47	44 (52)
South West	3	0	25	31 (43)
Yorks & Humber	24	0	32	25 (36)
North East	5	1	15	18 (25)
North West	6	0	28	33 (46)
East Mide	3	0	12	21 (29)
London	25	1	35	24 (33)
West Mids	18	0	37	19 (27)

What needs to be done

- Every school should be required to produce an annual report about the type and condition of any asbestos on the premises and share this with all parents and staff.
- The Government must fund the phased removal of all asbestos from schools. There should be target set with all asbestos removed by 2028. This needs to start with the most dangerous asbestos.
- The HSE must reinstate proactive inspections of asbestos in schools to assess the condition of the asbestos and the quality of management

What you can do now....

- Sign and share the petition (Protect our children and teachers from asbestos exposure at school)
- Tell local parents and school staff about the issue
- Write to your head teacher and chair of governors to ask where asbestos is located and managed in your school
- Write to your local education authority to ask how they are monitoring asbestos management in local schools
- Contact the HSE and your union to raise any concerns you have about asbestos in your school

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To: Justine Greening, Secretary of State for Education
Protect our children and teachers from asbestos exposure at school

100% **11,416** of 16,000 signatures

Sign the petition

First Name *


Last Name *

Email *

Workplace *

SIGN

Sign your name to this petition to show your support for this petition. The petition will only be submitted to the government if you have at least 10,000 signatures.



LOUISE STEPHENS
Louise Stephens
