

Classroom air quality a 'national scandal,' says BESA

4 years ago



The Building Engineering Services Association (BESA) has described the state of indoor air quality (IAQ) in UK classrooms as “scandalous” and a direct threat to the health and well-being of children and teachers.

A survey of 133 schools commissioned by ventilation solutions provider [Airflow Developments](#) revealed that almost three quarters (72%) of classrooms suffer from ‘below standard’ air quality.

Three in five teachers said their classroom conditions were having a direct impact on student health by aggravating asthma and other lung conditions, and 90% reported that it was having a direct impact on behaviour and ability to work.

Over a quarter of teachers told the [Air Quality in UK Classrooms Report](#) that their school was trying to improve air quality but did not have the funding to make the necessary ventilation changes. 71% called for air filtration or purification systems to be installed.

BESA said the link between poor air quality and child health was highlighted during the pandemic prompting calls for a comprehensive government funding package to retrofit school buildings with affordable ventilation and air filtration solutions.

“Most schools are limited to simply opening windows,” said Nathan Wood, chair of BESA’s Health & Well-being in Buildings group. “This ‘natural ventilation’ helps to an extent but is clearly not a complete response and is totally impractical during cold winter months or if the school is located close to a busy road or other source of noise or pollution.

Pressure

“Sadly, there is nothing surprising in the findings of Airflow’s survey, but it is very helpful because it illustrates the scale of this national health scandal and should put pressure on local authorities and central government.”

Six teaching unions recently lobbied the government to find more money to help schools tackle their IAQ problems: The ASCL, GMB, NAHT, NASUWT, NEU and UNISON all expressed alarm at the extent of the air quality crisis in school buildings, which was exposed after the government supplied £25 million worth of CO2 monitors for classrooms.

In response, the government pledged to supply 7,000 air purifiers for classrooms, but the unions said that was totally inadequate to address the scale of the growing air quality crisis.

Airflow managing director Alan Siggins called for “grassroots pressure” to focus the government and local councils on this issue. “Funding solutions need to be found quickly and there must be support from the upper reaches of government for that to happen. Investment in modern ventilation systems is a must for the health of future generations,” he said.

“Schools, teachers and even parents can raise the issue at PTA meetings or with local councillors to start turning the screw.”

Wood added that many of the solutions were relatively straightforward and inexpensive, but every building is different so should be addressed individually.

“Head teachers should approach local ventilation firms and ask them to survey their building before they do anything else. The first step is to understand the challenge including which parts of the building are not adequately ventilated before producing a cost-effective strategy.”

BESA has produced three IAQ guides, including advice about a range of low-cost ventilation and filtration solutions, which can be [downloaded for free here](#).

www.theBESA.com/iaq