



## DERBYSHIRE ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS

### SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVES BRIEFING

Updated MARCH 2003

#### CLASS SIZE

#### **Background**

Class size covers many issues – funding, workload, conditions of service and provides a campaign focus which is likely to be supported by both members and the wider community.

Since 1985 there has been a steady increase in the school population and cuts in spending which have led to a steady increase in class size.

In 1994 there were over 1 million pupils in classes over 31, including approx 30% of primary classes. By 1995 a further 80,000 primary pupils were in classes over 31, an increase of 10.3%

Duncan Graham, Chairman and chief executive of the former National Curriculum Council, has said that the NC was developed with classes of 25 in mind. "The further you go beyond 30 the greater the difficulties become. Beyond 35 I would question whether you are really getting any kind of value for money" (World in Action, Granada TV).

In some schools certain classes are kept deliberately small in size, for example those containing children with learning difficulties. The question is, however, should proper provision for these children be paid for by over sized classes throughout the rest of the school?

#### **The Law**

There are no legal limits on class size. Class size is determined by schools' governing bodies, usually constrained by an inadequate budget.

Health and Safety regulations which were introduced in 1981, to apply to all schools by 1991, were deferred until 1996. The Government now plans to abolish the regulations altogether. These required that children under 11 should have 2.5 sq metres of floor space and those between 11 and 16, 3, 3.5 sq metres.

#### **The Position in Derbyshire**

In Derbyshire, the last three years have seen 5,000 extra pupils with 1000 fewer teachers. By January 1995 there were 33,000 primary pupils in Derbyshire in classes of 31+, 4.27% of those on roll, an increase of 9.9% of pupils over the year. (DfES figures). Our own survey indicates that the last round of cuts raised these figures to 50,000 pupils in classes over 31. 61% of all primary pupils in Derbyshire are now taught in classes over 31. An increase of 18% on last year!

## **NUT Policy**

### **1. The Union's long term objectives on class size are:**

- Nursery classes should not exceed 20 children and should be staffed by a qualified teacher and a qualified nursery assistant.
- Infant classes and any class which includes "reception" should not exceed 23 children.
- Mixed age "vertically grouped" classes should not exceed 21.
- Post 16 classes should be staffed on a 10:1 pupil teacher ratio. Pupils with special educational needs should have staffing ratios as recommended in DES circular 11/90 – an extremely complex formula based on the learning difficulty and the provision of teachers and special support assistants (SSA) – providing a PTR between 5:1 and 10:1 plus SSAs.
- "Practical" classes or those involved with GCSE teacher assessment of pupils should not exceed 18 children.
- All other classes should not exceed 26 children and where statemented pupils are integrated "class sizes should be adjusted appropriately".

### **1. "Action Policy"**

If discussions with governors, the LEA etc and all else fails, and members wish to take industrial action, the union would ballot members based on the following pupil numbers.

- Reception classes 27+
- Mixed – aged "vertically" grouped classes 24+
- "Practical" classes 20+
- Classes of pupils needing particular and individual attention (SEN) 15+
- All other classes 30+

## **What Can You Do?**

Nationally we want to establish legal class size maxima. We need to campaign for these on a number of levels.

- Make sure that you keep DAT fully informed of the situation in your school by, for example, returning the class-size surveys which provide us with valuable information
- All reps have the right to a copy of the school budget. The union can provide help in deciphering and interpreting them. We can then discuss it with members and negotiate with governors.

- If for example, there is money in the reserves, we need to ask why it is being held at a time of such urgency, secondly we need to negotiate how the money is spent, and to insist that class size reduction and teacher employment are priorities. If you require assistance at this level of discussion with governors an officer of the Union would be pleased to help make the case.
- Governor awareness - Governors sometime have no idea about the effects of oversized classes. Invite them to sit in lessons to see for themselves. You could present information to them from staff within the school outlining the difficulties teachers face in a number of areas. However it is done, Governors must have the realities and strength of feeling directly presented to them.
- Community awareness. Every secondary head in Derbyshire recently contributed to a document presented to the Chair of Education outlining the problems faced by their school as a result of the cuts. Perhaps primary heads could be encouraged to do likewise. Every school has a development plan. By referring to these and issues affecting the quality of education we can make effective publicity. You could use the local press and/or organise a local campaign. Sometimes the mere suggestion of public campaigning is enough to encourage local management and governors to consider alternatives. You could work with other school, parent groups etc. Again DAT officers would be pleased to help in any way they can.

### **Industrial Action**

Teachers do not like taking action which in any way harms the education of the children in their care. DAT would want to be certain that every avenue has been pursued and all the alternatives have been attempted before approaching the National Union. We would also want to be certain that there is strong support for action within the school or schools. We can also make recommendations, to the National Action Committee, of the Union, over the types of action YOU wish to take.

### **Types of Action**

- A refusal to teach oversized classes. This could result in a number of children being excluded from class on a rota basis. It could result in refusal to teach the whole class until the number of children is permanently reduced. These obviously have a cumulative effect on both the teacher and the children.
- A strike of all members within the school. We could ballot members either within the school or across the county if we can show the level of funding is creating problems across the county.
- "Rolling" action. Either of the alternatives above could be organised on a rolling basis so that either classes within a school or whole schools each took action on a rota basis. This might avoid the token nature of a one-off strike, without one class or school having to take the brunt of all the action.
- National Action. There have been calls for national strike action. The membership recently voted against this type of action. Whilst the government's underfunding of the education service is a national issue, not all authorities are affected in the same way. It is therefore difficult to organise action on a national basis which unifies the membership and has the wider support of the public and is not a token gesture.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this DATABASE is to provide you as a rep with information which will enable you to organise meetings and take up the issue in an informed and confident manner. You and the membership within the school are the strength of the union.

DAT is currently reorganising itself to meet the changing needs of members within schools. If you wish to discuss anything in this briefing further, or need assistance in your school please contact: Bill Greenshields, County Secretary at the NUT Office on (01629) 585086.