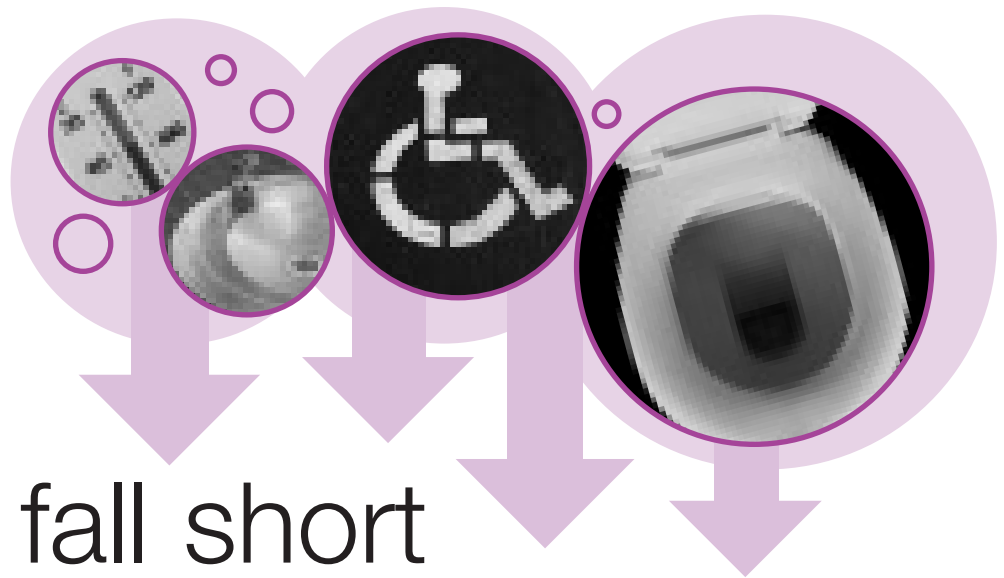


What's inside:

- Fighting the headlice menace
- How is your blood pressure?
- Speaking up on voice care
- Say no to manual handling
- Fire safety guide for schools
- Sprinklers – the campaign continues
- Want to be a rep?



Facilities fall short

Abysmal toilets, a lack of drinking water, poor wheelchair access, damp buildings, small classrooms, changeable temperatures and unacceptable noise levels. This is the picture in many schools and colleges according to an ATL survey on facilities in education buildings.

According to 31% of teachers, pupils' toilets were either poor or abysmal, and 43% rated them only satisfactory. Staff toilets fared little better with one in four teachers rating them as either poor or abysmal. Teachers commented that there were few toilets, they were not kept clean and had to sometimes be shared with pupils.

Gillian Carroll, a secondary boys' school teacher from Gloucestershire said: "Appalling facilities for female staff, very few toilets and no female cloakroom."

Another concern among teachers was the lack of adequate supplies of drinking water. A third of teachers said that their school did not have sufficient supplies. A primary school teacher from Omagh, Northern Ireland said: "Drinking water is available by means of a tap in the classroom. However, it's difficult to manage individual drinks."

Teachers also said wheelchair access was limited – 40% of teachers surveyed said their schools and colleges did not provide good access.

Ventilation in schools also raised concerns among teachers with over 40% saying that their school did not have good ventilation, and 28% said their schools and colleges suffer from damp.

Over half of teachers said the temperature in their schools and colleges was changeable, with less than one third saying it was about right. A primary school teacher from Birmingham said: "Very difficult to have constant temperature in classrooms – poor heating system does not heat all of the building properly – whole wall of largely south-facing windows in virtually every classroom makes it extremely hot when the sun is out."

Over half of respondents also felt that classrooms were not a suitable size for teaching – with the major complaint being they were too small. Smaller rooms for monitoring and tutoring also seemed in short supply – 80% of teachers said there were insufficient rooms.

Michelle Quinn from St Teresa's Roman Catholic primary school, Lancashire said: "The building has absolutely no space for children who are withdrawn from lessons (to receive extra help) to work. They have to do phonics outside the classroom, which is embarrassing for Year 5s, with everyone walking past all the time. When the man comes in to do guitar lessons, he forces them to move and there is nowhere for them to go!"

Noise levels are also affecting teaching and learning with over a third of teachers saying it caused problems for lessons. Susan Willard from Balfour Junior School, Medway, Kent said: "An open plan design means that the daily noise level is stressful, and children are easily distracted by movements outside the classroom."

The issue was raised at ATL's annual Conference in Torquay, with Kim Knappett (Inner London) describing the poor working conditions in her school. Having catalogued a huge number of problems – faulty heating, lack of ventilation, bad drains – she revealed that the school had opened for the first time just a few days prior to Conference.

ATL general secretary, Dr Mary Bousted, said: "Teachers and lecturers strive to give their pupils a good education – but to be able to do this, the buildings in which they teach must be fit for purpose. We can't stress enough that in order for teachers and children to teach and learn in an effective manner, school buildings need to be safe, clean and inspiring. Grotty toilets, damp and dirty buildings are not the right places to make our children feel they and their education matter."



Fighting the headlice menace

The very mention of headlice can get your scalp itching. The small six-legged wingless insects, are a persistent and stressful problem in many schools. They are difficult to detect and are usually transmitted through head-to-head contact. Anyone can catch headlice – clean hair offers no protection

A common misconception is that one of the first signs of headlice is an itchy scalp; this is not always the case, especially when they have recently arrived on the head. Headlice feed by biting and sucking blood through the scalp of their host. Lice take between six and 14 days to become fully grown, after which they can reproduce.

ATL members often seek advice on how to deal with headlice. Medically speaking, it is not regarded as a serious health problem. It is not possible, legally, to exclude a child from school for headlice infection or to send him/her home on the grounds that it must be treated before she/he can return.

If headlice is detected, the Department of Health advises that there are two options to treat it:

1. Lotions

Lotions should not be used unless a living, moving louse is found. The instructions on the packet must be followed carefully. Unfortunately, some lice develop resistance to a particular insecticide. Therefore, if the lice are unaffected by the lotion used, a doctor/pharmacist/health centre should be consulted for advice on alternative treatments.

2. The Bug Busting treatment method

Community Hygiene Concern (CHC) operates an education programme on headlice detection and treatment. It has produced a Bug Buster kit which aims to systematically remove live lice by combing through the hair and physically removing any lice found.

Bug Buster teaching packs can be obtained from CHC. Some schools adopt a whole-school approach in which parents/carers check their children and family members on the same evening and treat as necessary.

Schools are encouraged to participate in CHC's National Bug Busting Days held on 31 January, 15 June and 31 October of each year or on any dates which suit schools' needs. Participation can help to prevent lice circulating – if all cases are identified and treated at the same time, there will be less opportunity for circulation to occur.

The Bug Buster kit, which includes an illustrated guide and comb, is available from:

Community Hygiene Concern
22 Darin Court
Crownhill
Milton Keynes MK8 0AD

Tel: 01908 561 928

Fax: 01908 261 501

Website: www.chc.org/bugbusting

The CHC operates a helpline at the above number which is available Mondays to Fridays between 9.30am and 4.30pm.

Bug busting kits are available on prescription for children who have live infestation.

The Department of Health's advice on headlice can be downloaded on www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_077269.

How is your blood pressure?

People with high blood pressure are three times more likely to develop heart disease or suffer strokes than those with a healthy blood pressure. Moreover, they are twice as likely to die from these conditions.

Last September, there was a nationwide campaign during which "pressure stations" were set up in supermarkets, clinics and workplaces across the country. During the campaign, a quarter of a million people across the UK had their blood pressure tested. Four in ten of those tested needed to take action to reduce their blood pressure.

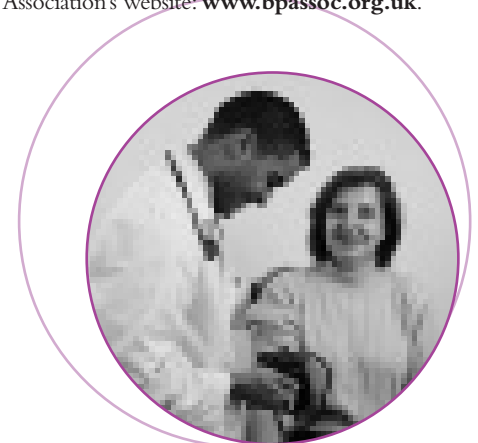
The highest incidence of high blood pressure readings were from those tested in Wales and Northern Ireland (44%). This was followed by those in England (40%) and then Scotland (39%).

At a regional level, those tested in the West Midlands and Yorkshire and Humberside jointly topped the Blood Pressure Association's blood pressure league – 45% had high readings. South Central, North West and South West England also had greater incidences of high blood pressure. The lowest incidence was in London, where 33% of those tested had high readings.

This survey shows incidences of high blood pressure across the UK are worryingly common. Those working in the education sector are not immune from this life-threatening condition. ATL advises its members to have their blood pressure checked. It is also important to adopt a healthy lifestyle to help lower the risk of high blood pressure by:

- eating less than 6g of salt a day – do not add salt to your cooking and check food labels
- eat at least five portions of fruits and vegetables per day
- be active for at least 30 minutes, five times a week
- try to keep to the right weight for your height.

You can find out more at the Blood Pressure Association's website: www.bpassoc.org.uk.



Speaking up on voice care

Sixty-eight per cent of teachers working in primary schools have experienced voice problems which they feel have been caused by their job, according to a survey by ATL.

Over a third (37%) of teachers who have experienced voice problems have visited their GP, and almost a quarter (24%) have had to take time off work, according to the poll of 490 teachers working in maintained and independent schools in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

Jo, a teacher at a primary school in London, said: "I usually lose my voice at least once a teaching year. I do know how to use my voice properly but when I'm tired and run down I don't do what I should. Teachers often try and 'teach through' their voice problems which is the worst thing to do for your voice. We don't take time off when we should!"

Overall 60% of teachers surveyed have experienced voice problems, with 68% of teachers working in maintained schools experiencing voice problems compared to 57% in independent schools.

The high level of voice problems among teachers is unsurprising since 54% of teachers admitted to having to raise or put pressure on their voice at least once a day, with 70% raising or putting pressure on their voice at least once a week. However, 42% of teachers who had experienced voice problems said their school had offered little or no support when problems occurred.

Paul Kemp, a teacher at Reed's School, an independent secondary in Surrey, added: "I have become increasingly aware of voice problems and persistent sore throats as I have got older. They are usually worse in the first few weeks after a holiday. Last autumn term it was so bad that I did visit my GP and was referred to a specialist. Currently treatment is ongoing. Polyps on the vocal chords are one possible diagnosis."

Claire Woodhead, a teacher at Terrington Hall Prep School in North Yorkshire, said that contributory factors to voice problems included: "Over-use caused mainly by talking a lot, and also through giving instructions and singing when teaching music – too much demonstration, one class after another, also struggling on when I have got a cold."

Overall, 87% felt that voice care should be made compulsory in all teacher and lecturer training courses. ATL general secretary, Dr Mary Bousted, concluded:

"These statistics are truly shocking – too many teachers are putting pressure on their voices on a regular basis and are suffering



as a result. It is vital that schools support their staff and help them protect their voices when problems occur."

"It is also essential that all education professionals are taught how to use their voice more effectively, which is why ATL is calling for voice care to be made compulsory in all teacher and lecturer training courses."

You can join in our voice care campaign by signing the petition at: www.atl.org.uk/atl_en/news/campaigns/voice_care_campaign.asp.

Say no to manual handling

At ATL's annual Conference, a resolution was passed calling for new legislation to outlaw the use of staff not trained in heavy lifting techniques to move furniture or bulky items.

Supporting the resolution, Executive Committee member Gill Stainthorpe called on teachers to stand up to employers. "We are teachers, we should not be lifting," she said. "We should not be moving furniture, we should not be packing up – we should not be used as cheap labour. Providing training is no excuse – teachers must say, 'No! It's not my job'."



Fire safety guide for schools



Towards the end of last year, the government produced a new guide, aimed at ensuring that schools are safer and better protected from the risk of fires. The guide is available on the Teachernet website www.teachernet.gov.uk/fire.

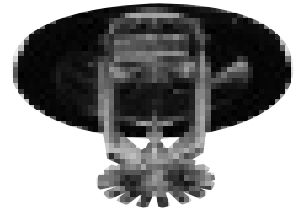
The guide includes advice on the management of fire safety. The Regulatory Reform (Fire Services) Order 2005 applies to both new and existing school buildings. To comply with the

Order, every educational establishment should appoint a designated fire manager, ideally from its senior management, whose remit should include ensuring that fire risk assessments are in place. In managing fire safety effectively, alarm systems and evacuation plans need to be tested regularly. ATL advises that at least one fire drill should take place each term, at different times.

Each year one in 20 schools in the UK will have a fire, around 60% of which are started deliberately. Nearly a third start in school time. These range from small fires to more serious incidents. Where fires self extinguish or are put out by staff, many are unreported, at least to the fire brigade. ATL safety reps are urged to request their employers to ensure that all fires are reported. They should also bring the new guide to the attention of their employers.

Setting a good example in fire safety is Northern Ireland, with over 98% of people having a smoke alarm in their home. To continue this success, the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service is offering on its website fire prevention advice for the community. The website contains information on fire safety at home and at work. It also has a schools programme and games for pre-school children. The website can be accessed at www.nifrs.org/fire_safety.php.

Sprinklers – the campaign continues



Research commissioned by the Local Government Association and the British Automatic Fire Sprinkler Association found that, while the measured cost of arson attacks on schools stood at £65 million in 2001, the real cost is closer to £115 million.

The research also considered the use of fire prevention measures, such as sprinklers. It suggested that there were a number of negative perceptions around sprinkler systems such as the cost, reliability and damage caused. The research concluded these were unsubstantiated by any facts. It found that the cost of fitting a sprinkler system in a new school is a maximum of 3% of total build (7% if retro-fitted) and that this cost could be recovered within five years through reduced insurance premiums.

In its fire safety guide for schools, the government confirmed its policy to install sprinkler systems in new schools, unless they demonstrate that there is a very low risk of fire. ATL considers that the government has not yet accepted the need to make it a legal requirement for sprinklers to be installed in all new-build or refurbished schools, let alone all schools. We are therefore continuing our campaign for schools to be fitted with sprinklers so that all the children in the UK are properly protected against the dangers and disruption of fires.

Find more information on sprinklers here:

www.atl.org.uk/atl_en/help/A_Z/s/sprinklers/sprinklers.asp.

And have your say on the issue here:

www.atl.org.uk/atl_en/education/have_your_say/sprinklers.asp.

Want to be a rep?

Are you interested in becoming a health and safety rep or do you have a colleague who might be? If you want to find out more, you can email us on hs@atl.org.uk.

This is also the way to get in touch about any health and safety issues you are concerned about and would like to see featured in Health and Safety News.

