

Association of Teachers and Lecturers
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(School and class) size matters, finds ATL survey

Nearly all (96 per cent) of education staff feel there should be a maximum number of pupils for primary and secondary classes, according to a survey on school and class size by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL).

A quarter of the respondents believe the current pupil to teacher ratio in their classes is unacceptable even with their support staff. Seventy per cent say it would be unacceptable if they are on their own without support staff. Additionally, 10 per cent stated that they are on their own with over 30 pupils on most occasions, and 40 per cent normally work alone with at least 26 pupils.

Among those who teach in a school with more than 500 pupils, 83 per cent feel that the size of their class has an impact on pupil concentration; 83 per cent also believe that this has an impact on pupil participation. They also said they are particularly concerned about the size of their classes, with 80 per cent stating that the numbers in their class affects their own stress levels.

A primary teacher from Wiltshire said: "When I had a class of 34 Year Two children I not only had all the extra work and stress involved from having so many children, but I also had a lot of pressure from unhappy parents who felt the class was "illegal" being over 30. The head would just say her hands were tied and could do nothing to help. I found the whole year totally draining and even now don't feel fully recovered. Some of my passion for teaching has been drained."

Many other respondents echoed the difficulties that come with having a large class. Helen Terry, a secondary school teacher from Rotherham said: "I'm unable to give all students the time and attention they often need."

Having a large class isn't the only difficulty many respondents face, with 24 per cent stating they have more than one academic year group in their class/es, meaning that lesson planning doubles in both time and effort.

A primary teacher from Leicestershire said: "I have 32 lower juniors for maths. I have no Learning Support Assistant. I am an NQT and frankly I am just muddling through as best I can."

A significant number said that smaller class sizes, leads to better pupil participation and behaviour. Fiona McCusker, a primary teacher from Bedfordshire said: “Having worked in different schools, with varying class sizes, it is clear that the smaller classes have fewer behaviour problems and the children receive a better education as there is more time to get to each child during a lesson to check their understanding.”

Anne-Marie Carroll, a primary teacher from Rotherham supported this view and said: “When a support member of staff takes a group out and it reduces my number to 24 or less, it makes a massive difference to the one-to-one help I can give my children. Thirty is way too high to get the level of input for every child that the Government demands of us.”

Jane Bednarczyk, a Teaching Assistant from Leicester believes having a larger class most certainly has an impact on behaviour and said: “It is hard to deal with behavioural problems in larger classes and very hard to give individual support to those students on the SEN register in large classes.”

School size seems to also have a direct impact on pupils. Of those respondents who work in a school with more than 500 pupils on the roll, 50 per cent believe that the size of their school has an impact on pupil behaviour in terms on bullying; with a further 43% saying it has an impact on fighting.

Cheryl Teal, a teacher from a specialist sports college in Leicester said: “In a school with a large number of students it is much more difficult for all students to be known by all members of staff. Larger schools, I feel personally, make it easier for certain students to be somewhat 'anonymous' i.e. behaviour is likely to be worse around people who don't know who they are, and hence is difficult to bring them to account.”

Having a large school also has a bearing on the ability of pupils to forge relationships with staff, with almost 61 per cent agreeing. Furthermore, it also results in the whole school not being able to get together for activities such as assemblies or sports days, with 85 per cent of education staff stating this was a problem.

ATL general secretary, Dr Mary Bousted, said: “These findings show clearly that school and class size has a direct impact on pupils and staff. It is shocking to learn that 70 per cent of respondents find the pupil to teacher ratio within their class/es unacceptable when they are on their own, without support staff. Support staff are invaluable and when this support is reduced, or in some case non-existent, that isn't good for pupils and their personalised learning.

“ATL calls for maximum class sizes to be introduced for primary and secondary classes, with proposals based upon the evidence of what works best for students and teachers.”

Ends

For further information please contact the ATL press office on 0207 782 1589 or visit our website www.atl.org.uk .

Note to editors:

1. 1,119 UK based ATL members, working in the maintained sector, were questioned between 9 and 20 March 2009.

Key survey results:

	Overall %		
How many pupils do you have in your school?			
Fewer than 50	1.2		
51-100	2.6		
101-250	20.1		
251-350	13		
351-500	16.4		
500 +	46.7		
How many pupils are there in your class/es?			
1-10	1.3		
11-15	1.1		
16-20	4.9		
21-25	14.7		
26-30	50.5		
30 +	15.5		
Other (specified)	12		
In your opinion, do you feel that the pupil:teacher ratio within your class is acceptable?	Yes	No	Don't know
When including support staff	71.2	25.6	3.1
Without including support staff	26.8	70.1	3.1
On most occasions are you on your own with?			
1-5 pupils	5.1		
6-10 pupils	4.2		
11-15 pupils	4.3		
16-20 pupils	7.3		
21-25 pupils	16.8		
26-30 pupils	40.7		
30+ pupils	10		
N/A	11.8		
Do you have more than one academic year group in your class/any of your classes?			
Yes	23.7		
No	75.6		
Don't know	0.7		
In September 2001, The Schools Standards and Framework Act placed a duty on LAs and schools to limit the size of infant classes for five, six and seven year olds to 30 or fewer pupils for every qualified teacher. If you teach these age groups, does your school comply with this duty?			
Yes: I have 30 or fewer pupils in my class	94.2		
No: I have more than 30 pupils in my class	5.8		
Currently there is no limit on the maximum number of pupils for junior and secondary classes. Do you feel there should be?			
Yes	96.4		
No	1.3		

Don't know	2.3					
Do you believe that the size of your school AND class has had any impact on pupil behaviour in terms of:	Yes overall	Yes 500+ pupils	No overall	No 500+ pupils	Don't know overall	Don't know 500+ pupils
School:						
Truancing	26.5	40.1	58	42.7	15.5	17.2
Bullying	41.5	50.4	44.7	33	13.9	16.6
Racism	17.3	19.1	65	61.4	17.7	19.6
Violence/fighting	36.7	43	50	43	13.3	14.1
Class:						
Truancing	21.6	31.1	66.8	56.3	11.5	12.6
Bullying	36.4	44.1	52.4	43.3	11.2	12.6
Racism	15.4	16	70.5	68.1	14.1	16
Violence/fighting	28.9	29.5	56.5	54.5	14.6	16
Do you believe that the size of your SCHOOL has had any impact on the following:	Yes overall	Yes 500+ pupils	No overall	No 500+ pupils	Don't know overall	Don't know 500+ pupils
	43.8	51.8	48.3	40.3	7.9	7.9
Pupil concentration	54.6	59.7	39	33.3	6.3	6.9
Pupil participation	49.6	54.6	44.9	39.8	5.5	5.6
Pupil well-being	42.4	44.5	51.4	49.6	6.2	5.9
Ability for pupils to forge relationships with one another	53.8	60.8	42.2	35.6	3.9	3.6
Ability for pupils to forge relationships with staff	48.5	63.6	47.2	33.1	4.3	3.3
The subjects taught	51.6	55.3	43.9	40.1	4.6	4.7
The activities offered (choirs, sports clubs, school plays)	32.7	38.8	58.8	50.6	8.5	10.6
Ability to provide school lunches	40	44.1	54.5	49.7	5.5	6.2
Ability to run school trips	66.1	83.1	32	15.6	1.9	1.3
Overcrowding (in corridors, classrooms, playground, lavatories)	48.3	66.1	46.8	29.5	4.9	4.4
Health & safety at school	64.8	85.2	33.4	13.7	1.8	1
Ability to have the whole school together for activities such as assemblies or sports days.						
Furthermore, do you believe that the size of your CLASS has had any impact on the following:	Yes overall	Yes 500+ pupils	No overall	No 500+ pupils	Don't know overall	Don't know 500+ pupils
	79.8	83.4	17.5	14.5	2.8	2
Pupil concentration	77.2	82.4	20.3	15.8	2.5	1.8
Pupil participation	57.6	62.9	38	32.7	4.4	4.3
Pupil well-being	44.9	46.8	51.5	49.4	3.6	3.9
Ability for pupils to forge relationships with one another	61.9	69.1	35.5	28.4	2.6	2.6
Ability for pupils to forge relationships with staff	41.2	47.6	52.9	45	5.9	7.5
The subjects taught	65.4	74	32.3	23.9	2.3	2.1
Overcrowding (in classrooms)	51.3	61.4	45	34.7	3.7	3.9
Health & safety in the class						
Do you think the size of your school AND class has had any impact on staff in terms	Yes overall	Yes 500+	No overall	No 500+	Don't know	Don't know

of:		pupils		pupils	overall	500+ pupils
School:						
Teacher stress levels	58.9	65	32.3	25.6	8.8	9.5
Ability for staff to forge relationships with pupils	54.9	64.3	39.8	31.5	5.3	4.1
Ability for staff to forge relationships with other colleagues	54.3	64.1	40.7	29.7	4.9	6.2
Ability to provide sufficient support each pupil may need	68.1	69.7	25.9	23.6	6	6.7
Ability to tailor learning to suit pupils needs	66.1	69.3	27.7	24	6.1	6.7
Job satisfaction	54.9	59.5	34.8	32	10.3	8.5
Class:						
Teacher stress levels	75.3	80.1	20.3	15.8	4.4	4.1
Ability for staff to forge relationships with pupils	58.6	66	37.4	29.1	4	4.9
Ability for staff to forge relationships with other colleagues	32.8	35.2	59.4	54	7.8	10.7
Ability to provide sufficient support each pupil may need	81.7	81.8	14.6	13.8	3.7	4.4
Ability to tailor learning to suit pupils needs	80.2	83	16.8	14.1	3	2.8
Job satisfaction	64.3	68.6	27.7	23.2	8	8.2

2. The 2009 ATL annual conference is taking place from 6-9 April at the BT Convention Centre, Liverpool.
3. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) is an independent, registered trade union and professional association, representing approximately 160,000 teachers, headteachers, lecturers and support staff in maintained and independent nurseries, schools, sixth form, tertiary and further education colleges in the United Kingdom.
4. ATL exists to help members, as their careers develop, through first rate research, advice, information and legal advice.
5. ATL is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC), Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) and Education International (EI). The union is a member of the Social Partnership – working with the UK Government, employers and other unions on education issues. ATL is not affiliated to any political party and seeks to work constructively with all the main political parties.