



EA'S CYNICISM RISKS 'INCALCULABLE DAMAGE' TO A GENERATION OF CHILDREN

Northern Ireland's education system is teetering at 'critical mass', threatening 'incalculable damage' to a generation of children, a teachers' union claimed today.

The Ulster Teachers' Union also accused the Education Authority of 'cynical absurdity' in its latest 'bean counting audit', a case of 'fiddling while Rome burns'.

"Issuing an audit edict last month demanding information on minutiae such as how many Lego bricks school infant classes have, or how many Vileda wipes are in the caretakers' cupboards takes cynical absurdity to new heights," said Avril Hall Callaghan, UTU General Secretary.

"We are in a fiscal situation which risks doing incalculable damage to a generation of our brightest and most vulnerable children – and all those in between – yet the Education Authority launches a bean-counting exercise to serve its thrall to bureaucracy, and fiddles while Rome burns!

"Northern Ireland's education system is being assailed from all sides. We have a non-existent government, non-existent budgets, an Education Authority which seems more interested in box ticking than supporting its teachers, an Inspectorate which appears at times openly hostile to teachers.

“Teachers daily face a toxic mix of long hours, intolerable pressure and unmanageable workload; we see a suicide rate among female nursery teachers way above the norm in England –comparable figures aren’t available here but there’s little to suggest the circumstances should be any different**.

“In the middle of this maelstrom we have our children and their teachers.

“It’s not difficult to see who is going to bear the brunt of this unparalleled period of upheaval. But if the children pay now in terms of unfulfilled potential, then Northern Ireland will pay later.

“If Northern Ireland is to succeed as an entity it needs investment in its greatest asset – its young people, those who will bear us all through into the future. Today’s decision-makers need to remember that it’s these young people who will be the decision-makers of tomorrow.

“We see calamitous headlines daily regarding the health service – our education service is faring no better, believe me.

“It is cynical in the extreme that decisions should be made which target those least able to speak up for themselves – our children. It is utterly disingenuous to rob them of their rightful education. That’s why we need parents to come on board and back teachers’ calls for change. Enough is enough.

“We are already seeing begging letters going from schools here to parents in a bid to save subjects from the curriculum; we’ve seen schools in England asking parents to donate toilet rolls so precious funds can be spent on books instead*.

“It beggars belief. What century are we living in? The situation is fast approaching critical mass. We need a movement to get behind our children and our teachers and ensure that those without a voice are heard above the bureaucracy and in-fighting – otherwise I fear for all our futures.”

Editor’s Notes

* St John's Primary, in Sussex, recently held a non-school uniform day but instead of donating to charity, pupils were asked to bring in essential items. The chair of the Crowborough school's governors, said it wanted to highlight the "massive financial crisis" all schools face under budget cuts.

** For the first time, the ONS has recently released a breakdown of suicide figures by occupation, highlighting those workers at particular risk.

There were 2,544 suicides in England among women between 2011 and 2015: the period covered by the report. Of these, 102 were primary or nursery teachers.

There were far fewer suicides among women in the secondary sector, meaning that the overall risk of suicide for all female teachers was 31 per cent lower than the national average for women in England. During the period 2011 to 2015, there were 139 suicides in total among female teaching and education professionals.

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