

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**  
**Report into School Cleaning Survey**

1. The 2018 AGM passed the following resolution:

*"That this AGM instruct the EIS to investigate the impact of cuts to cleaning services in schools and to campaign to oppose any reduction in the frequency of classroom cleaning."*

**The Survey**

2. A short electronic survey was shared with all school reps and Health & Safety reps, i.e. around 3,000 members. The survey was open for three weeks and consisted of two questions:
- *Has there been a reduction in the frequency or quality of the cleaning services within your school due to funding cuts in the last 3 years or so?*
  - *What impact have cuts to cleaning services had in your school?*

**Results & Findings**

3. Six hundred and eighty-one responses were received to question 1 of the survey and six hundred and twenty-six of these then responded to the second question. The response rate of 681 from around 3000 reps is high and allows meaningful conclusions to be drawn from the survey.
4. The first question (*Has there been a reduction in the frequency or quality of the cleaning services within your school due to funding cuts in the last 3 years or so?*) generated the following results:

<b>ANSWER CHOICES</b>	<b>RESPONSES</b>	
Yes	546	80.2%
No	92	13.5%
Other (please specify)	43	6.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>681</b>	<b>100%</b>

5. A large majority (80.2%) of the reps who responded believe that there has been a reduction in the frequency or quality of the cleaning services in the last 3 years or so. A low proportion (13.5%) disagreed and 6.3% of responses did not give a view.
6. The second question (*What impact have cuts to cleaning services had in your school?*) was open and generated 626 individual responses. Each response

was analysed by considering three themes; poor quality of cleaning, teachers cleaning classrooms and health concerns arising from the cleaning. Sections of responses that commented on the poor quality of cleaning are marked in green; sections that commented on teachers cleaning classrooms are marked in blue and sections of responses that commented on health (inc hygiene) concerns arising from the cleaning are marked in yellow. Where a response did not reference any one of these three themes, no colour was applied.

7. Of the 626 individual responses to question 2, around 54 responses did not state or imply that the quality or frequency of the cleaning services had worsened. Two themes were evident from this group of responses: that cleaners were working beyond their contracted duties in order to maintain cleanliness standards and that cleaning quality was maintained in some schools due to the nature of PPP contracts in place.
8. Around 480 responses of the 626 responses commented on the poor cleaning, dirtiness or other concern regarding cleaning. The following themes were regularly cited:
  - No cleaning at all on some days;
  - Reduced cleaning on some days – possibly only a wipe-down;
  - Limited or reduced hoovering;
  - Windows and high ledges not cleaned;
  - Large amounts of dust;
  - Tables, sinks and other surfaces not cleaned or not cleaned regularly;
  - Toilets not cleaned regularly, and toilet rolls, soaps and drying materials not replenished regularly;
  - Smelly toilet areas and sinks;
  - Cleaning under or behind large objects not carried out;
  - Floors not cleaned – even if muddy or sticky;
  - Bins not emptied daily;
  - No deep cleans during summer breaks;
  - Cleaners given cheaper ineffective detergents or even water to clean with;
  - Vomit and other bodily fluids not cleaned up effectively;
  - Cleaners given too little time per room;
  - The work of absent cleaners not being covered.
9. Many responses that commented on the cleaners stated that the worsening in cleaning standards was not the cleaners' fault but down to the reduction in the amount of cleaning time that they are given per room. Some responses expressly stated that their cleaners were working additional time (beyond their contracted hours) in order to maintain the cleanliness of classes.
10. A number of responses commented on the poor-quality of cleaning products issued and a few responses stated that water was used to clean dirty surfaces.

11. Over a hundred responses stated that their classrooms were “dirty “and a few responses described the condition of their school as “filthy” or “disgusting.”
12. Around 120 of the 626 responses stated that they or teacher colleagues had cleaned their classrooms or another part of the school. Several of the responses stated that they cleaned parts of the school themselves because as teachers they were concerned with pupils’ welfare, as the cleaning would not be otherwise done. The following themes were identified:
  - Teachers using their own disinfectant wipes on surfaces (such as table tops within their classrooms) as they were not otherwise properly cleaned daily;
  - Teachers cleaning vomit and other bodily fluids at times;
  - Teachers cleaning staff toilets and staffrooms;
  - Teachers emptying bins or replenishing toilet supplies;
  - Teachers (and cleaners) bringing in their own cleaning materials;
  - Teachers spending time cleaning rather than pedagogical work;
  - Teachers and pupils having less pride in their schools.
13. Around 138 of the 626 responses expressed health or hygiene concerns within schools arising from poor cleaning, including the perception of more frequent staff and pupil illnesses. Many responses stated, or speculated that, specific staff and pupil illnesses were caused by poor cleaning. The following themes were identified:
  - Higher staff/pupil sickness absence rates were linked to poorer cleaning standards;
  - More instances of a group of pupils from one table being ill at the same time;
  - More instances of classes having bugs or norovirus;
  - High dust levels potentially affecting respiratory ailments and exacerbating asthma conditions, and
  - Outbreaks of mice, rats and ants.

## **Conclusion**

14. This survey produces clear evidence that there has been a reduction in the frequency or quality of school cleaning services in the last 3 years or so. This survey shows that staff and pupils’ health seem to have suffered as a result of the reduction in cleaning quality and that a clear minority of teaching staff clean their own classrooms due the reduction in the quality of cleaning.
15. This survey shows that many of the respondents believe that cleaning standards have dropped due to funding cuts in cleaning services in recent years. This has resulted in fewer cleaners in some schools, leading to cleaning rotas in which only basic cleaning or no cleaning is done in some classrooms on some days. Some respondents also commented that cleaners seemed to have been given cheaper less effective cleaning materials and, in a few cases, were using water to clean surfaces.

16. The most significant consequences of poor cleaning were identified as:
- Increased staff/pupil sickness absences;
  - Teachers spending time cleaning rather than pedagogical work;
  - Unhygienic and dirty teaching environments;
  - Staff and pupils having less pride in their surroundings.
17. The survey responses show that teachers are deeply concerned about the reduction in the frequency and quality of school cleaning and their consequences.

### **Recommendation**

18. There is a concern amongst representatives regarding the dirtiness of schools due to cuts in cleaning services. These cuts are driven by local education authorities and would therefore be best addressed by Local Association campaigns and through discussion at LNCT level. One aspect of any local campaign to improve or restore school cleaning services is that councils owe a duty of care to staff and that duty should prevent foreseeable harm to staff
19. It is clear that in some authorities cost savings in school cleaning are having an adverse effect on the quality of cleaning and that many teachers believe that this has had a direct and negative impact on the health of staff and pupils.

Executive is asked to agree:

- i. To circulate the survey findings to LA secretaries for consideration by local associations;
- ii. To encourage Local Associations and branches to campaign for improved cleaning services;
- iii. To publicise and highlight the extent of the reduction in cleaning standards in recent years and the effect it is having within schools.

## Appendix 1:

Selected responses:

1. "Our Early Learning and Childcare staff are washing the floor and cleaning toilets which they didn't do before. Classrooms and corridor floors are not hoovered/buffed as often as they use to be and the children's desks are not wiped down every day. In general, the classrooms are dustier and grubbier than before."
2. "In 2018 2 of the 3 schools I work in had to be closed for deep cleaning measures due to infectious illness - sickness virus casing half school to become ill."
3. "Building is disgustingly dirty."
4. "My classroom is dirty and I have to buy Anti-bacterial wipes to keep desks clean. I also Hoover at times. Stairwells and corridors are covered in dried mud for a few days between cleans and this does not show pupils high expectations for looking after our school. Pupils do change shoes before entering the classroom however they need to enter the building in outdoor shoes. Pupils in my class and myself have been off with viruses which spread through the class as door handles, desks etc are not cleaned daily."
5. "We had a very bad infection that required a deep clean to get rid of and all staff and a huge majority of the pupils got sick. I don't believe this would have happened if the school was cleaner in the first place."
6. "All classes not being cleaned on a daily basis, floors not moped, tables not cleaned, areas not hoovered. General build up of dirt in areas such as windowsills, cupboard tops etc. As children are sneezing and coughing over tables on a daily basis as well as painting and cutting and sticking, they should be wiped clean daily and not when they are on the rota to be cleaned."
7. "The classroom carpets are only vacuumed three times a week. That means if a child accidentally comes in with muddy feet or someone spills the sharpener contents or anything else, we can sweep it up as best we can with a dustpan and brush but we still end up sitting amongst the remains on the carpet. Many surfaces are no longer being dusted. Last night I wiped down a months worth of dust from the computer table last night as it was getting unbearable. Classroom furniture was not moved aside during the "Big Clean" in the summer holidays last year. As a result the classroom I moved into felt filthy. If you peek behind trolleys and units there's a thick layer of dust and hair. Members of teaching staff have been hoovering up spills, wiping down tables and dusting."
8. "Increase in staff illness, decline in standard of the learning environment for the children"
9. "Classroom just not cleaned as thoroughly as it used to be. Sinks not cleaned. Table tops wiped less frequently. Ledges and shelves don't seem to get touched. No antiseptic soap or paper towels in individual classrooms either. All part of cost cutting we're told. Cleaners say not enough hours to do what they're expected to do. Lots off sick perhaps due to stresses of the job."
10. "The cleaners can only 'spot clean' - this leads to dirt and mess building up behind and under units, window sills, on boards, under equipment etc In some cases, when cleaning staff have been absent, we have gone days

without the school being cleaned at all as there are little to no relief workers - we have often relied on the goodwill of staff from other schools to assist. Staff will often try and maintain the cleanliness of classes as much as possible, paying for materials from their own pocket. Teaching staff absences often coincide with cleaner shortages, from personal experience my only absence in recent years was due to a vomiting bug that had spread in the school. The cleaners, at that time, were off for various reasons."

11. "School is constantly dusty. All resources covered in thin layer of dust after just a short time. Cleaner told to only use water so vomit and urine stains and smells linger. Staff constantly have to buy own soap and refill paper towels. Areas ignored altogether e.g. behind moveable boards and furniture. Cleaner is in such a hurry she regularly sweeps up and discards school resources rather than picking them out where possible. egg cubes and parts of toys which have been lost down sides of tables. Children constantly sneeze and cough on tables and these are only cleaned with water every other day, so germs spread like wildfire."
12. "My school is dirty!"
13. "Children have been more prone to infections and at one point in the winter, the Norovirus was so bad, the school had to be closed for two sets of two days in order for a deep clean to be done."
14. "Classrooms are most definitely not cleaned as well as they once were. Also cannot remember the last time there was a 'deep clean'. The spread of germs is concerning. Classrooms are simply given a once over every night rather than being thoroughly cleaned."
15. "The classrooms are only being cleaned every other day and the hall is only done once a year. This has caused more cases of sickness in the school. When this happens the council send in a deep clean team of around 12 cleaners. This compares to the 2.5 cleaners we normally have for a 18 classroom school."
16. "Cleaners are stretched between more classes, and therefore not spending enough time in each class. Speaking to cleaners, their resources are not good enough or strong enough. In our new building the bleach isn't strong enough to wash the floors to be clean, with the guidelines they are given. We have less cleaners."
17. "Less cleaning staff. Cleaning not done to anywhere near the standard of previous due solely to reduction in staff."
18. "Dirty tables, floors and general filth throughout the school. Complaints from staff and cleaner alike, only having 10 minutes to clean a classroom. Walls are marked and not clean. Floors now get swept and bins emptied but sinks and work tops are left uncleaned."
19. "General cleanliness and appearance of school has slipped, some areas looks particularly dirty and dusty."
20. "At the start of each year, I'm having to thoroughly clean my room myself."
21. "Our school is not clean. Desk tops in classrooms are not cleaned often enough and many teachers are doing this themselves. The staff room is almost never vacuumed and, again, teachers are having to do this task. There are not enough cleaners for the size of the school. It is not about the quality of the

- cleaning staff but about the actual number of cleaners we have in school. It is not possible to keep our school clean with such a small number of staff."
22. "No deep clean. (Used to be an annual activity) Things like windows, window ledges never cleaned or teaching staff do this. Evidence of more outbreaks of vomiting bug and respiratory infections in pupils and staff."
  23. "Floors not cleaned etc. Lower standard throughout the school. This impacts on the children's pride in their school."
  24. "Untidy classrooms and I think more cases of winter vomiting bug and colds."
  25. "Flies in my classroom. Smell begins to hit during warmer weather at start of Spring. Tend to clean my own desk area each week. In one classroom, due to dust in my lungs I had 4 absences"
  26. "Our school constantly feels dirty and I, alongside other staff members, spend their time do additional cleaning and buying cleaning products. I would say this also affects the health of all in the school as often germs spread more quickly."
  27. "I am a teaching head teacher and nursery manager - among my other roles I have now added cleaning, hoovering, dusting and mopping. Sometimes I have to decide between preparing sessions for children's learning, sorting out someone's pay with HR and wiping tables that present an infection control hazard. I need three of me really but since when did the EIS or anyone else really care about or put any effort or resources into finding out about life for teaching head teachers and the ridiculous choices they need to make where there is no option sometimes but to consider whether or not to compromise children's learning and well-being."
  28. "School dirty. Lots of children absent with recurring sickness bug. Teachers having to clean own classroom etc"
  29. "Classrooms much dirtier Teachers having to clean tables and sinks. Illness more widespread due to poorer hygiene."
  30. "The bins in my class and in the shared open area do not get emptied every second day. They are full to the brim and children have to squeeze rubbish into them. Sometimes the rubbish spills out onto the floor and I end up cleaning it after three o'clock. Children brush their teeth and the bins can be full of paper towels that they've used to empty their mouths. Surfaces of desks are filthy and I end up cleaning them after the children have left. I constantly have to clean my own class as it's never cleaned thoroughly. I've even cleaned the windows as nobody ever comes in to do them. The whole school feels dirty and it's not surprising f that so many children pick up stomach bugs. The paper towel dispenser is always needing filled and I often have to dry my hands on my clothes. The sanitary bins in the staff toilets are frequently overflowing and rarely get emptied. Not a very pleasant working environment plus I shouldn't have to clean my class!!!"
  31. "Kids sitting on mucky floors. Door handles and sinks not cleaned...bad outbreak of norovirus. Staffroom not always cleaned."
  32. "Hoovering classrooms only on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Unhygienic if wet interval on Friday and crumbs etc. not hoovered up until the following Tuesday. Cleaners stressed trying to get same work done with fewer staff and no cover for sickness. One day had 1 cleaner for whole school (14 classrooms plus offices, toilets, corridors, canteen and hall)."

33. "Poor hygiene resulting in colds and sick bugs being passed around staff and children constantly. Having to buy my own cleaning products to clean the classroom as I was sick of getting ill. Staff toilets only cleaned once a week and bare minimum done as only one cleaner in the whole school."
34. "No longer filling paper towel dispensers, soap or blue roll. Having to clean desks and surfaces ourselves daily. Toilets still having toilet gel put down them but little else in the way of maintenance. Takes time away from preparing lessons and becomes an added responsibility of classroom teachers and support staff. Staff often buying wipes etc for own classrooms to cut down on cleaning time."