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Secondary education – the battle to teach

Commenting on the independent study “A life in secondary teaching” prepared for the NUT by Professor John MacBeath and Professor Maurice Galton, Doug McAvoy, NUT General Secretary, said:

“The report paints a disturbing picture of declining pupil behaviour fuelled by large class sizes, pressure to meet targets, an inappropriate curriculum and a lack of time for teachers to discuss the problems with colleagues.

“The growing unwillingness of parents to support schools is compounding problems of poor discipline. The breakdown in family life and in society’s values leave teachers often having to do their job in a disciplinary vacuum.

“Life in secondary teaching is tough and rewarding, but unrelenting Government initiatives do not help. But despite all the difficulties and pressures, teachers love to see the glint of understanding in pupils’ eyes.

“Teachers need time if they are to overcome these disciplinary problems and large classes are the major obstacle to achieving this. The most popular use of an additional teacher identified in the survey is to allow more intensive help with small groups in order to enthuse pupils and help prevent them slipping into disruptive behaviour.

“Whole class teaching is criticised as an incentive to pupils for disengagement from lessons.

“It is quite clear that Government claims of a reduction in workload are not being felt in our secondary schools. Teachers want more help from classroom assistants for administration and technical activities. What they do not suggest would be helpful is for assistants to take over teaching responsibilities.

“Fundamentally teachers need more time. This can only be achieved by reducing class sizes and ending the constant external demands on the teachers in our schools.”

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