Increasing class sizes affecting students: survey

The State School Teachers' Union said it was becoming increasingly concerned about the effects of bigger class sizes on students in WA public schools.

A new survey of over 2,500 people revealed that 63% of respondents believed class sizes at their school had increased in 2015.

The survey found that 83% of respondents believed that the class size increases were directly linked to the education cuts imposed by the Barnett Government in 2013.

"This survey was filled out by teachers, parents, school leaders and Education Assistants who are very concerned about the effects of larger class sizes on students' ability to learn," said SSTUWA President Pat Byrne.

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"Obviously the more students in a class, the less one---on---one attention the teacher can give each child.

"Teachers are particularly concerned about what this means for students who need special attention or who are at educational risk.

"Teachers are reporting that increasing class sizes are affecting not only their teaching capacity, but also their ability to manage behavioural issues in the classroom."

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Ms Byrne said the union was also particularly concerned that more than 5% of survey respondents believed that their class size was above the maximum capacity allowed under the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement.

"Those maximums are set for a very good reason: to ensure that all children are in an environment that is optimal for learning and to make sure that their health and wellbeing can be catered for," she said.

"We are also very concerned more than 48% of respondents indicated their class was close to or at the maximum class size limit and we will be seeking to raise this with the Department of Education."

Ms Byrne said many survey respondents had also raised issues about a lack of space and equipment to cater for the increase in student numbers.

"Some respondents said there were simply not enough chairs and desks for the number of students in their class, while others said they were struggling to squeeze more than 30 children into a classroom designed for only 24.

"Some classrooms are bursting at the seams, and this becomes a safety issue as well as an educational one."

Ms Byrne said some parents had commented they were so worried about the effects of increasing class sizes that they had decided to home school their children, or send them to another school.

"We have written a state budget submission calling for the return of the almost $200 million the government has ripped out of schools and this survey proves that it is critical the government acts to protect public education instead of undermining it."

The survey comes after a Productivity Commission report found that WA schools have the second highest student to teacher ratios in the country.

Note: This survey had 2586 respondents from 632 public schools.

Pat Byrne Speaks With Perter Collier

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