



2019 General Election – JUAC’s Priorities for Asbestos in Schools and Colleges

Background

The Joint Union Asbestos Committee (JUAC) is a non-party political group that seeks to protect education workers and children from the dangers of asbestos by raising awareness and campaigning for improved asbestos management in schools.

Twenty years on from the ban of asbestos, asbestos in schools remains a national problem, with the latest DfE figures estimating that 83.5% of schools in England contain asbestos.¹ As such significant Government investment is needed to fund the phased removal of asbestos from all school buildings, with the priority being given to those schools where the asbestos is considered to be most dangerous or damaged.

During 2017 there were 27 teaching professional deaths and 7 support staff deaths in Great Britain. Since 1980 at least 380 teaching professionals have died from mesothelioma, a cancer associated solely with exposure to asbestos. Between 2003 and 2017, 8 school secretaries, 10 nursery nurses, 31 teaching assistants and 22 midday assistants died of mesothelioma.

Educational buildings are unlike other workplaces because the majority of their occupants are children who are known to be more vulnerable to asbestos exposure. Also much of the asbestos in educational buildings is in locations accessible to staff and pupils. In 2013 the Government’s Committee on Carcinogenicity² set out that a child exposed to asbestos at age five, is five times more likely to develop mesothelioma than an adult exposed at age 30.

In addition, it is much more difficult to manage asbestos in schools than in other workplaces. This is because normal school activities routinely disturb asbestos. Much of the asbestos in schools is old and in a deteriorating condition, this makes it even harder, or even impossible to avoid fibres being released.

1

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/817525/AMAP_Report_2019.pdf

2

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/315919/vulnerability_of_children_to_asbestos.pdf



In July 2019, the Department published its long-awaited findings of the Asbestos Management Assurance Process (AMAP) survey. Whilst this has provided a greater understanding of the situation in schools than previously, the voluntary survey still fails to provide the coherent picture that the Government, who is ultimately responsible for the school estate, needs. Future surveys must be mandatory and the full findings shared in a spirit of openness.

JUAC believes that the 2019 General Election represents an opportunity for all political parties to make a clear commitment to making our schools safe from the dangers of asbestos.

JUAC calls on all political parties to include the following commitments in their manifesto:

1. To collect and share data centrally on the extent, type and condition of all asbestos in schools.
2. To use this data to develop a programme for the phased removal of all asbestos in educational establishments, starting with the most dangerous first, with completion no later than 2028.
3. To provide adequate capital funding for all asbestos to be removed via this national programme.
4. In line with commitments made by the Government in the 2015 Asbestos Policy Review to prioritise the development of school specific risk assessments, asbestos air tests and environmental levels which take into account the vulnerability of children to asbestos exposure.
5. To support duty holders by providing funded mandatory training, and adequate support and funding from the Government for asbestos management and removal.
6. To support duty holders to provide information about the presence and condition of asbestos in their school(s) and the steps being taken to manage it to stakeholders, including staff and parents.