

## More than a million hours of teaching time lost annually addressing poor levels of toilet hygiene in primary schools

*New report suggests a combination of poor school toilet facilities and poor hygiene habits are negatively impacting on children's education, health and wellbeing*

- Millions of primary school children actively avoiding their school toilets due to hygiene concerns
- Teachers worried about escalating number of children beginning school without toilet training
- Annual cost of lost teaching time equates to an £11m burden on the education system\*\*

A new report launched today by Essity, a leading hygiene and health organisation, has found that primary school teachers are losing more than a million hours of teaching time every year as a result of having to address poor levels of toilet hygiene amongst children.

Titled *Bottom of the Class*, the report suggests that a combination of poor toilet facilities and poor hygiene habits are negatively impacting on children's education, health and wellbeing.

Key findings include:

- A fifth of primary school teachers are spending up to 30 minutes every week cleaning up children after they've been to the toilet, equating to more than a million hours of lost teaching time in UK schools over the course of an academic year
- Based on the average salary of a primary school teacher, this lost time amounts to a cost of £11 million to the education system
- A quarter of primary school teachers and children describe hygiene levels in school toilets as poor or very poor, with a fifth reporting that no checks are made on them during the day
- 44% of children avoid using the toilet at school at some point every week, while 11% do so daily
- One in ten primary school teachers have witnessed children not eating or drinking in order to avoid having to use school toilets
- 60% of primary school teachers rate the hygiene habits of children in school loos as poor and say the problem is getting worse
- An estimated 4.7m primary school children in the UK actively try to avoid doing a poo at school
- Over 59% of primary school teachers believe that improving school toilet hygiene levels would reduce illness amongst children, teachers and staff

The findings, based on extensive interviews conducted by YouGov with more than 400 primary school teachers and 500 parents and children earlier this year, highlight three clear problems; School toilet hygiene levels in the UK are poor, children aren't learning essential hygiene behaviours early enough, and children are actively avoiding using the toilets at school and adopting unhealthy behaviours to do so.

As well as outlining key findings, the report explores the causes and scale of the problems in more detail and sets out how Essity intends to help address them through its *School Hygiene Essentials Initiative*.

Kevin Starr, managing director at Essity UK, says: “The findings of this report indicate a worrying and growing problem regarding hygiene standards within UK primary schools. From inadequate toilet facilities that are unclean and poorly equipped, to the poor hygiene habits of children coming to school unable to wipe their bottom properly or wash their hands correctly, the issues are widespread and transcend socio-economic boundaries.

“There’s clear evidence to suggest that by not paying enough attention to hygiene levels in primary school toilets and the hygiene behaviours of the children who use them, we risk undermining all the fantastic work that is going on elsewhere in our schools and in education in general.

“Schools and local authorities are trying to do their best with limited budgets and resources. Spending more money isn’t an option and we don’t believe it’s the answer either.

“Our aim in highlighting these issues is to open up a dialogue with schools, parents, health experts and local authorities and work with them, using the collective expertise and experience to identify simple and easily implementable solutions to tackle the issues, with little or no cost to schools. By doing this, we aim to improve health and wellbeing, reduce absenteeism and increase self-esteem and confidence of children in the UK.”

The research findings suggest hygiene issues are impacting on education, with 46 percent of children admitting to struggling to concentrate due to avoiding the toilet when they need to go. There’s also the issue of lost lesson time, with 53 percent of teachers concerned that children not being toilet trained and having an accident in class means time is taken away from others in class.

Such findings are being taken seriously by the National Association of Primary Education (NAPE), who welcome the findings of the report. Peter Cansell, national executive information officer at NAPE, commented: “This is an area which is often a cause for concern in schools and we welcome moves to improve the situation. Primary schools play a vital role in helping to shape children at a critical time in their lives, providing the springboard for all their future learning and shaping the habits and behaviours that will stay with them for the rest of their lives. This environment is the first community outside of the family where we all begin to understand our place in the world”.

The impact of such issues on the health and wellbeing of children are also potentially very serious, with children who are avoiding going to the toilet when they really need to putting themselves at risk of dehydration, bladder infections and potential bowel and continence problems in later life.

Sharon White, CEO, School and Public Health Nurses Association, welcomed the report and commented: “Whilst we acknowledge that local authority budget cuts will inevitably have some impact on the finance available to ensure adequate standards, this makes no economic sense. It will cost far more in the long run in terms of the education, health and well-being of our children and young people. It is also critical in our fight against Anti- Microbial Resistance. The findings amplify previous works, dating back well over a decade, demonstrating considerable evidence highlighting the effects that inadequate toilets can and do have on the whole school community; specifically, the children and young people. We know that an effective layout, efficient cleaning and maintenance alongside good access policies are all essential to ensure that school facilities are valued and accessed.

Children and young people need to be healthy to be able to learn and grow; depriving them of basic needs such as toileting facilities should not be a big ask and a public health approach is urgently required to address these unacceptable shortfalls.”

The *School Hygiene Essentials Initiative* will see Essity initially work with teachers, local authorities and health professionals to identify a set of easily implementable and affordable solutions aimed at helping primary schools to improve hygiene levels in their toilets. The company then aims to pilot these in a number of schools to assess their impact on children’s education and wellbeing over a six-month period, building the case and support for them to be rolled out more widely.

In addition, Essity has pledged to create educational resources and share these with educators to make it easier for them to teach children better hygiene skills. This is in response to the research findings which identified that 65 percent of primary school teachers feel that resources to help educate children on good hygiene habits would make the greatest difference to tackling hygiene issues.

Essity will also continue to donate toilet rolls to help make a positive difference; In 2017, the company donated over 60,000 toilet rolls and so far in 2018 it has already donated around 30,000.

For more information on the School Hygiene Essentials Initiative, visit:

<https://schoolhygieneessentials.co.uk/>

**ENDS**

#### **Notes to editors**

##### **About Essity**

Essity is a leading global hygiene and health company that develops, produces and sells personal care (baby care, feminine care, incontinence products and medical solutions), consumer tissue and professional hygiene products and solutions.

It develops, produces and markets personal care and tissue products under leading global brands such as TENA and Tork, and UK brands including Plenty, Cushelle, Bodyform and Velvet.

Headquartered in Sweden, the company has commercial and manufacturing operations in the UK, including six mill sites where the majority of its tissue products are made.

##### **The research**

This research has been conducted using an online interview conducted in partnership with YouGov Plc GB panel of 350,000+ individuals who have agreed to take part in surveys.

The total sample size was over 400 primary school teachers and 500 parents and primary school children across the UK. Fieldwork was undertaken in February 2018. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of the UK school population.

### **Results analysis**

\*Based on 1/5 of teachers are spending up to 30 mins per week on cleaning up a child at school = 53,710 (out of 268,554 teachers) teachers are spending up to 30 mins per week.

39 weeks in a school year x 30 mins per week = 19.5 hours per year per teacher in the UK (based on the 1/5 of teachers that are)

53,710 teachers (1/5 teachers) are spending 19.5 hours of term time each per year on cleaning up a child = 1,047,345 hours per school year in total of the 1/5 of teaching population are spent on cleaning up children in the UK

More than one million hours of primary school teaching time are spent helping children clean up properly after using the toilet in school in the UK per year.

\*\* Based on the average salary of a primary school teacher is £24,525

([https://www.payscale.com/research/UK/Job=Primary\\_School\\_Teacher/Salary](https://www.payscale.com/research/UK/Job=Primary_School_Teacher/Salary))

The average salary of a primary school teacher is £24,525

There are 190 days of teaching time and 11.9 hours of classroom time per day ( 2,261 hours per year)

£24,525 divided by 2,261 hours = £10.84 per hour

If there are 1,047,345 hours per school year being spent on cleaning up that equals (1,047,345 x £10.84)

£11,353,219 per year of teaching salaries being spent on cleaning up children in the UK

More than £11m a year of primary school teacher's salaries is spent helping children clean up properly after using the toilet at school in the UK per year