

IMMEDIATE

13 March 2013

Asbestos

The Joint Union Asbestos Committee welcomes the spotlight focused on asbestos in schools at today's Education Select Committee Inquiry into Asbestos in Schools. Evidence from campaigner Michael Lees and JUAC Chair, Julie Winn, highlighted unacceptable variations in standards of asbestos management, gave examples of management failures and called for the reintroduction of proactive inspections in schools.

Whilst it was disappointing that Schools Minister David Laws reiterated the long-held Government position that a national audit of the extent and condition of asbestos in our schools is not necessary, and that the current management system is functioning satisfactorily. Nonetheless the minister did at least express some concern at the possible effect of the academies and free schools programmes and acknowledged that this would be addressed through a review of Government policy later this year.

Roger Leighton, head teacher of The Sydney Russell School, Dagenham, shared these concerns, highlighting the excellent support he received from his local authority and suggesting that such 'middle tier' support was needed by academies and free schools.

Commenting on the day's proceedings, Julie Winn said 'It is absolutely essential that as a first step the Government assesses the scale of the problem of asbestos in schools. With children known to be vulnerable because of the long latency period of asbestos related diseases, parents will expect nothing less'.

JUAC is hopeful that members of the Education Select Committee will reflect carefully on what they have heard and support JUAC's calls for central collection of data on the extent, type and condition of asbestos in schools and the re-introduction of pro-active inspections in schools, leading to a programme for the phased removal of asbestos, with priority given to those schools where the asbestos is in the worst condition.

END

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