

PRESS BRIEFING

CIVITAS MEDIA INFORMATION: IMMEDIATE RELEASE (13/05/09)

INCREASE IN INFANT CLASSES OVER 30

Figures released today by the DCSF show that the proportion of infant classes with over 30 pupils has risen from 1.5% to 1.7% since January last year.

'The rise in these huge infant classes is deeply disturbing,' said Anastasia de Waal, Director of Family and Education at Civitas. 'The government has clearly not grasped the importance of small classes for young learners.'

England's 'small' infant classes are *already* oversized

* Evidence shows that classes of 30 are *already* too big for young children. Academic research on class size defines 'small' as being between 15 and 20 pupils in a class, with a minority of studies including up to 25 pupils.

* Yet in 1997 the Labour government's pledge for 'small' infant class sizes set a legal limit of 30 pupils per class. Furthermore, government has failed to honour even this flawed pledge by allowing infant classes over 30 in some circumstances.

Why small infant classes make a difference

'In larger classes, the CSPAR research [a longitudinal study on the impact of class size in England], for example, found that pupils were more likely to passively listen to the teacher as 'one in the crowd', whereas in smaller classes they were more likely to be asked questions and interact with the teacher.'

The Primary Review, Interim Reports: Research Survey 9/2, 'Classes, Groups and Transitions: Structures for Teaching and Learning,' 2008, p26

'The government's failure to commit to genuinely small infant classes defies both parents' wishes and a proven way to narrow the achievement gap,' said Anastasia de Waal.

The evidence: impact of infant class size reduction

Increased achievement, shown in the below examples of the largest experimental US studies:

- STAR Project (The Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio), Tennessee (1985): in this 'experimental' research, the impact of classes of 13-17 ('small') were compared with classes of 22-26 ('regular'), using 7000 pupils in 79 schools. Pupils were randomly assigned to a small, regular, or regular class with a teaching assistant and each school had at least one of each of the three. The researchers found that pupils in smaller classes significantly outperformed their counterparts in the regular classes, including those with teaching assistants; minority and low-

income pupils' performance found to be initially impacted on the most significantly; special educational needs were found to be identified by teachers earlier on in the small classes (American Educational Research Association 2003: Word, E. et al. 'STAR: Tennessee's K-3 Class-Size Study', Nashville, Tennessee State Department of Education, 1990). The Lasting Benefits Study, a follow-up study looking at pupils who had been involved in the project, found the achievement and behaviour benefits for those pupils who had been taught in small classes to still be evident after a further three years in regular sized classes. Project Challenge then implemented smaller classes in Tennessee schools with a high proportion of low-income pupils and found that results in both reading and mathematics went up (McRobbie, J. et al. 'Class Size Reduction: Lessons Learned from Experience,' Policy Brief No. 23, Wested, 1998)

- SAGE (Student Achievement Guarantee in Education), Wisconsin (1996): class size reductions (to 15 pupils or fewer) for the first three years in school were phased in to school districts with high numbers of low-income pupils. Results found that in maths and reading pupils outperformed their counterparts in larger classes; the gap between low-income and more affluent pupils narrowed (Molnar, A. et al. 'Evaluating the SAGE Program: A Pilot Program in Target Program in Pupil-Teacher Reduction in Wisconsin,' Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp165-177, 1999)
- North Carolina, Burke County (1990): classes in the first three years of school were cut to 15, and professional development activities introduced for teachers. Compared to their counterparts in the county, pupils in smaller classes did better in both reading and maths tests; teaching time was found to increase and time spent controlling behaviour to decrease (American Educational Research Association, 'Reducing Class Size, What do we Know,' March 1999)
- Project Prime Time, Indiana (1981): early grade class sizes were reduced from 25 to 18 pupils in 24 elementary schools. The achievement of pupils in the smaller classes was higher in both reading and maths compared to pupils in larger classes in previous years (Hansen, A., Northern Arizona University, 'Research Brief: Class Size and School Size: The Major Studies in Class Size Reduction' for The Principals' Partnership, 2005)

England-based evidence:

Significantly less research on the effect of class size has been carried out in England, however the largest study to date, the Class Size and Pupil Adult Ratio (CSPAR) project undertaken by researchers at the University of London's Institute of Education, has shown a strong relationship between small classes and greater achievement. CSPAR analysed a sample of over 10,000 pupils from school entry until the end of Key Stage 1. The researchers identified a 'clear effect' in literacy and numeracy attainment, even after adjusting for other 'possible confounding factors'. Pupils entering school with low literacy levels progressed the most. The researchers concluded that the effect was comparable to that reported by the STAR project, meaning that the impact of class size reduction is supported by both 'experimental' (STAR design) and 'non-experimental' research (CSPAR design) (Blatchford, P. et al., 'Are class size differences related to pupils' educational progress and classroom processes? Findings from the Institute of Education class size study of children aged 5-7,' British Educational Research Journal, Vol. 29, 2003, pp 709-

730; The Primary Review, Interim Reports: Research Survey 9/2, 'Classes, Groups and Transitions: Structures for Teaching and Learning,' 2008)

Further England-based evidence comes from Maria Iacovou, Institute for Social and Economic Research: using the National Child Development Study Iacovou found a 'significant and sizeable' association between smaller classes and higher attainment in reading in the early years of school (Institute for Social and Economic Research Paper 2001-10, 2001)

Notes to editors

Civitas is an independent social policy think-tank. It receives no state funding either directly or indirectly and has no links to any political party. Civitas's education research seeks to take an objective view of educational standards in Britain. It aims to offer an improved perspective on how best to deliver equitable and high standards of education for all.

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