

Kirklees Council fail to give the whole story of asbestos in their schools.

On 21st October The Huddersfield Daily Examiner had a report entitled “Asbestos in every school in Kirklees built before 2000.” Extracts from the report state:

“THE vast majority of schools in Huddersfield contain asbestos. But council officials have stressed the schools are perfectly safe...”

... a council spokeswoman said yesterday this did not mean children were at risk from the mineral.

“The presence of asbestos in a building does not mean the health of people in the building is endangered. Materials containing asbestos are safe if they are in good condition and are not damaged or disturbed.”¹

These statements by the council are very reassuring but they are misleading, particularly as Kirklees council had failed to complete urgent remedial actions to make their schools safe almost four years after they had been instructed to do so. The Council therefore have no justification for making their claims.

Although a normal asbestos survey should identify accessible asbestos in a school it is less likely that it will identify the hidden asbestos and therefore asbestos can remain undetected so that it will be unknown whether it is in good condition and not damaged.

This was demonstrated at Golcar Junior, Infant and Nursery School in August this year during rewiring when previously unidentified asbestos was discovered. A thorough asbestos survey should have identified this hidden asbestos before the work began, but it would appear that it had failed to do so. Although it is not known whether the asbestos was disturbed, it would appear that there was the potential that it could have been.

Similarly there is a serious problem with hidden asbestos materials in thousands of system built schools in Great Britain, including schools in Kirklees. The problem is that in some schools the hidden asbestos is damaged and in poor condition so that common, everyday classroom activities have the potential to release dangerous asbestos fibres. The other problem is that these fibres have been released in some schools over the course of many years, even decades, without anyone being aware that it was happening.

About half the schools in the country are system built and many contain large amounts of asbestos, all of it old and much of it deteriorating. Because of their structure damaged asbestos can remain hidden, undetected within the voids. This was discovered in 1987 when air sampling tests found that kicking and hitting asbestos insulating board walls in a school released significant amounts of asbestos fibres into the rooms and that was despite the fact that the asbestos material appeared to

¹Asbestos in every school in Kirklees built before 2000 Huddersfield Daily Examiner [Oct 21 2010 http://www.examiner.co.uk/news/local-west-yorkshire-news/2010/10/21/asbestos-in-every-school-in-kirklees-built-before-2000-86081-27515171/#ixzz131ZRZnfy](http://www.examiner.co.uk/news/local-west-yorkshire-news/2010/10/21/asbestos-in-every-school-in-kirklees-built-before-2000-86081-27515171/#ixzz131ZRZnfy)

be in good condition. Other tests showed that just slamming a door released cumulatively dangerous amounts of asbestos fibres.²

The problem was re-discovered in 2006 in a system built school in Wales when air sampling found that cumulatively dangerous amounts of asbestos were released into the classrooms when walls and columns were hit, when the doors were slammed or even when people sat on the window sills. The school buildings in Wales are a type of construction called CLASP, of which there are more than 3,000 in the UK with most being schools. Thousands of other types of system built and traditionally built schools have similar problems.

In October 2006 guidance was issued by HSE, DfES and the Local Government employers, LGE, to local authorities (including Kirklees), dioceses and independent schools.³ The guidance advised that immediate action should be taken to prevent the exposure of staff and children and instructed that inspections to assess the scale of the problem should be completed by the end of the half term, which was two weeks away. It then gave guidance on what measures to be taken to prevent the release of asbestos fibres. This initial guidance focussed on CLASP buildings, although later guidance included all system built schools of a similar construction. The warning stated:

“October 2006 “A joint message from the HSE/LGE/DfES

POTENTIAL FOR ASBESTOS FIBRE RELEASE IN CLASP BUILDINGS

A potential problem for exposure to asbestos fibres has come to light in certain types of CLASP constructed schools, specifically type 4 and 4B. This is an opportunity for you to take appropriate action to ensure that children, teachers and others are not exposed to asbestos fibres...

The upcoming half term (as well as out of school hours) should provide you with the opportunity to assess the situation in your schools.

ACTION REQUIRED

As a priority you should identify the Mark 4 and 4b CLASP buildings under your control for attention. As described above, sealing gaps in the cladding using silicone sealant.”⁴

Kirklees has system built schools, ten of which are CLASP buildings of the specific type that the council had been instructed in 2006 to take priority action to inspect and then implement remedial actions to prevent the release of asbestos fibres into the classrooms, halls and corridors.

A recently published response to an HSE/DfE questionnaire shows that Kirklees council did not start inspecting their CLASP schools for two years after the urgent guidance had been issued, and then four years after they had still not inspected all their schools. Throughout this time they were

² For details follow the links: [Release of asbestos fibres in System Built schools part 1](#) [Release of asbestos fibres in System Built schools part 2](#)

³ A Joint Message from the HSE/LGE/DFES Asbestos- Potential for exposure in "clasp" school buildings. Undated, October 2006 Scape formal Notice Release of asbestos fibres in CLASP buildings Potential for asbestos fibre release in CLASP buildings. 12 Oct 2006 . HSL Summary of fibre concentrations in CLASP construction schools containing asbestos. HSL/2007/22 10 Apr 2007 [Release of Asbestos Fibres in System built schools \(Part 1\)](#) [Release of Asbestos Fibres in System built schools \(Part 2\)](#) see also the timescale of the guidance : <http://www.asbestosexposureschools.co.uk/pdfnewslinks/DCSF%20QUESTIONNAIRE%20TIMESCALE%2014%20Nov%2009.pdf>

⁴ Asbestos – potential for exposure in "clasp" school buildings. A joint message from the HSE/LGE/DfES October 2006

therefore unaware whether or not asbestos fibres were being released. In reply to the questionnaire Kirklees council stated:

“What is your timescale for completing all visual inspections?”

Nine have already been inspected in either 2008 or 2009 with an inspection regime put in place to reflect what was found. The outstanding building is to be inspected during the Summer Holidays 2009....

Have you completed all remedial actions? (Yes or No)

Remedial action at five schools have been completed where possible but follow ups will be required to two schools where it has been impossible to gain access to some areas at the top of stanchions because the ceilings surrounding them are fixed.

If not, give expected completion dates?

Where we have had the problem of fixed ceilings we have programmed the inspections and any remedial work to take place in holiday periods to precede any maintenance or refurbishment work. The last area to be treated in this way is planned for Summer 2010.”⁵

It is unacceptable that urgent actions to ensure the safety of staff and pupils from the dangers of asbestos had not been fully implemented almost four years after they should have been. The reassuring statements made by the Council in the Huddersfield Daily Examiner do not give the full story and cannot be fully justified, rather they have attempted to put a gloss on a potentially serious problem of asbestos in a number of Kirklees schools.

Similarly reassuring statements were made by Kirklees Council in 2002:

“A council spokesman said: “The council has had a stringent asbestos policy for some years to ensure that any asbestos is dealt with properly and safely....”⁶

The statement was made following an article about a teacher who had worked in their schools for twenty five years, had complained about potential asbestos exposure of staff and pupils and was suffering from an asbestos related disease. The article in the Huddersfield Examiner stated:

Mr Ward said: “I too worked as a teacher in Kirklees schools for 25 years. I have had two operations on my right lung because of pleural thickening. The pleura is the lining of the lung where most asbestos-related cancers start.

⁵ Department for Education / Health and Safety Executive Questionnaire survey on asbestos management in local authority system built schools – Alphabetical list of responses – July 2010
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/services/education/survey.pdf>

See also: HSE Inspection Findings: Asbestos management in Local Authority school system buildings 2009/10 Published 21 Sep 2010
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/services/education/fod-interventions.pdf>

⁶ Fear of asbestos at more schools Apr 26 2002 By Neil Atkinson, The Huddersfield Daily Examiner <http://www.examiner.co.uk/news/local-west-yorkshire-news/2002/04/26/fear-of-asbestos-at-more-schools-86081-11822636/>

"I worked at Whitechapel Middle School in Cleckheaton and watched it being built in the 1970s (see pages 5.6 and 7)

"I saw plenty of asbestos being used. I complained via my trade union during the first asbestos scare, but the officers in Kirklees Education took no notice.

"I complained to my local councillor Gillian Rathmell who took up the case. I still remember the letter she got back from Kirklees saying that they did not regard the school as being at risk from asbestos.

"I persevered with Cllr Rathmell's help. Two weeks later Kirklees wrote back to her outlining the measures they were going to take to remove the asbestos lagging from around the blown air heating units and the measures they would eventually take to remove the asbestos tiles from the ceilings.

"All of the work to my recollection was done whilst children and or staff were in school

Mr Ward worked in other schools, including Thornhill Junior and Infant School, Dewsbury, in the early 1990s with a class of children in a room with ceiling tiles which contained asbestos.

"Dust was created whilst the roof was being replaced and the crumbling tiles fell into dust as they had been affected by water leaking through the roof.

"It is my belief that many teachers and children who attended Kirklees schools will die from asbestos-related cancers because of the indifference of council officers and the failure to close dangerous schools." ⁷

In 2002 the inquest took place of a former infant teacher who had taught for 24 years in a Kirklees school and died of the asbestos related cancer mesothelioma.

"A retired teacher diagnosed with an industrial disease from asbestos fibres told how 'puffs of dust' would billow from classroom walls if she tried pinning up pupil's work an inquest heard yesterday. Told by doctors she had mesothelioma, Jean Whitwam made a statement saying she believed she contracted the disease from exposure to asbestos fibres during 24 years working at Outlane Infant School, in Moorlands Road, Huddersfield. ...

Coroner Roger Whittaker said he could only conclude that Mrs Whitwam... had died after breathing in asbestos while she was working at the school. There was no evidence to suggest she had been exposed to it elsewhere." ⁸

If the teachers have been exposed to asbestos in Kirklees schools then so have the children, and that is despite the Council's assurances that they have "had a stringent asbestos policy for some years to ensure that any asbestos is dealt with properly and safely."

⁷ Fear of asbestos at more schools Apr 26 2002 By Neil Atkinson, The Huddersfield Daily Examiner
<http://www.examiner.co.uk/news/local-west-yorkshire-news/2002/04/26/fear-of-asbestos-at-more-schools-86081-11822636/>
⁸ Yorkshire Post Deadly dust that killed a teacher. 25 Apr 2002

Michael Lees
23rd October 2010

Annex

Kirklees Council CLASP buildings Response to HSE questionnaire published 2010

Kirklees Council. We have ten schools with CLASP buildings for which we have responsibility as follows;

Battleyford CE (C) Primary School
Birkenshaw CE (C) F & N School
Crossley Fields J & I School
Fieldhead J I & N School
Gomersal CE (C) Middle School
Headlands CE (C) J I & N
Lydgate J & I School
Roberttown CE (C) J & I School
Scholes F & N School
Whitechapel Middle School⁹

CLASP Buildings by Owner (2007)

Kirklees Metropolitan Council

| Building Name | Mark Year Code |
|--|-----------------------|
| Batley Birstall Fieldhead Infants School | Mk4 1968/69 E1247 |
| Batley Brownhill Junior School | 4 1966/67 E702 |
| Batley Fieldhead Junior School | 4 1967/68 E901 |
| Batley Fieldhead Junior School | 4 1968/69 E1169 |
| Batley Lydgate Road Junior School | 4 1967/68 E1057 |
| Birkenshaw C of E Infants School | 4b 1969/70 E1116 |
| Cleckheaton Scholes Junior School | 3 1961/62 E245 |

⁹ Department for Education / Health and Safety Executive Questionnaire survey on asbestos management in local authority system built schools – Alphabetical list of responses – July 2010
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/services/education/survey.pdf>

| | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| Gomersall St Mary's C of E School | 5 1973/74 E2039 |
| Mirfield Middle School | 4 1968/69 E1071 |
| Mirfield Secondary School | 3b 1965/66 E540 |
| Mirfield Secondary School RSLA Unit | 4b 1970/71 E1532 |
| Mirfield Wellhouse 5/9 | 4b 1970/71 E1573 |
| Mirfield Wellhouse Boiler House | 4b 1970/71 E1640 |
| Spensorough Cleckheaton Middle School | 4b 1971/72 E1830 |
| Spensorough Gomersal Middle School | 4b 1971/72 E1576 |
| Spensorough Hightown | 4b 1970/71 E1614 |
| Spensorough Hightown CE Junior School | 2 1959/60 E145 |
| Spensorough Hightown JN | 4b 1970/71 E1639 |
| Spensorough Roberttown CE (C) 5-9 | 4b 1970/71 E1510 |
| Whitechapel Middle School | 4b ¹⁰ |

Response to DfE/HSE questionnaire to determine compliance with asbestos guidance for system built schools published 21 Sep 2010

Local Authority: Kirklees Council

Asbestos management in system built schools and system built children's settings

2. Background

Certain school buildings constructed between 1945 and 1980 – known as "system buildings" - have structural columns fire-proofed with asbestos materials and enclosed by metal casings or cladding. In 2006, HSE identified that asbestos fibres could escape from these metal casings if:

- there was damaged asbestos beneath the casing; and
- the column casing was vibrated in some way, e.g. by an adjacent door being slammed; and
- there were gaps or other openings in the casings.

When these gaps and openings are sealed - asbestos fibres cannot escape from the columns into classrooms.

If you have responsibility for the maintenance and/or repair of non-domestic premises such as schools or other children's settings, then you have duties as a 'dutyholder' under the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2006.

This means that you should know:

- whether your premises, including system buildings, contain asbestos,
- where it is,
- what condition it is in

You then need to ensure that you manage it properly which includes telling those people who may disturb it that it is there. In system buildings you should assume that asbestos materials are present around structural columns and beneath casings and claddings unless you know for certain that no

¹⁰ CLASP buildings by owner 12 Sep 2007

asbestos materials are present. You should also be aware that steel-clad columns with asbestos insulation may have been incorporated into traditionally-built schools of the time. The HSE check list on their website contains a list of questions to help you determine whether you are taking the necessary action or need to do more to manage the risks from asbestos in system buildings such as CLASP, SCOLA etc, as detailed in the CLASP guidance, at www.hse.gov.uk/services/education/asbestos.htm

| | |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1. Please provide some information about your organisation Organisation: | Kirklees Council |
| Address line 1: | Design & Property Service |
| Address line 2: | Kirkgate Buildings |

Battysford CE (C) Primary School

Birkenshaw CE (C) F & N School

Crossley Fields J & I School

Fieldhead J I & N School

Gomersal CE (C) Middle School

Headlands CE (C) J I & N

Lydgate J & I School

Roberttown CE (C) J & I School

Scholes F & N School

Whitechapel Middle School

4. If DCSF and HSE need to access information held by you or others about the system-buildings for which you have responsibility please provide a contact name and address?

Where can DCSF and HSE access information held by you about the system-buildings for which you have responsibility?

1.By contacting the above person for electronic copies

2.By visiting the above offices

4. Action taken on receipt of alert and guidance

. Have all relevant system buildings in your schools and children’s settings been visually inspected to:

a. identify gaps in columns and casings; and?

9 have, the remaining one is to be inspected Summer 2009

b. identify damage to the column casings?;

9 have, the remaining one is to be inspected Summer 2009

c. identify missing or damaged ceiling tiles?

9 have had the integrity of ceiling tiles around stanchions carried out at the time of inspection by the council's asbestos professionals.

2. How many have yet to be visually inspected?

1 to be inspected during the Summer Holidays 2009

3. What is your timescale for completing all visual inspections?

Nine have already been inspected in either 2008 or 2009 with an inspection regime put in place to reflect what was found. The outstanding building is to be inspected during the Summer Holidays 2009

4. Was any remedial action required? (Yes or No)

Yes

If yes indicate the type and age of the buildings and the location of the ACMs needing remedial action?

All buildings are CLASP

Crossley Fields J & I School 1972: asbestos insulation board to stanchions

Fieldhead J I & N School 1970:AIB in stanchions

Headlands CE @ J I & N School 1967:AIB packings to stanchions

Lydgate J & I School 1969:AIB cladding to stanchions

Scholes F & N School 1963:AIB cladding to stanchions

5. Have you completed all remedial actions? (Yes or No)

Remedial action at five schools have been completed where possible but follow ups will be required to two schools where it has been impossible to gain access to some areas at the top of stanchions because the ceilings surrounding them are fixed.

If not, give expected completion dates?

Where we have had the problem of fixed ceilings we have programmed the inspections and any remedial work to take place in holiday periods to precede any maintenance or refurbishment work. The last area to be treated in this way is planned for Summer 2010.

6. Have you encountered any difficulties in completing the necessary remedial work (e.g. with sealing gaps)?

Yes, where heads of stanchions are above fixed ceilings or buried in walls.

5. Confirmation that arrangements are in place to manage risks

| | |
|--|--|
| 1. Have steps been taken across all your schools and children’s settings with system-buildings to: Yes | No (If no, please explain current position) |
| a. inform relevant staff where asbestos is likely to be present including potential contamination of ceiling voids? | Yes |
| b. provide staff with instructions not to disturb such materials, lift ceiling tiles or access voids unless properly trained and protected? | Yes |
| c. advise schools, and other relevant staff of action to take if they find or suspect damage to column seals or ceiling tiles and remind staff and others , eg , visiting workers , to report any damage to column seals or ceiling tiles? | Yes |
| d. instruct staff not to fix anything to column casings or seals to the columns, (e.g. fire extinguishers, displays, decorations, etc), in a way that is likely to damage the casings or the seals? | Yes |
| e. ensure that all persons, including visiting workers, who might disturb asbestos containing materials are advised of its presence (e.g. wiring contractors, caretakers, etc)? | Yes |
| f. ensure that if work with Asbestos Containing Materials (ACMs) is likely, that it is carried out in accordance with the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2006? | Yes |
| f. ensure that up-to-date asbestos registers are available? | Yes |
| g. provide asbestos awareness training for all employees who could foreseeably be exposed to asbestos, e.g., caretakers and other maintenance staff? | Yes |
| h. consult Health and safety representatives about the management of asbestos in relevant system built premises? | Yes |

3. Does every school have arrangements for ongoing inspection, maintenance and repair of the seals and ceiling tiles as necessary? (yes or no)

Teachers and school caretakers have been strongly advised in the PAMP to complete daily visually inspection of the areas they cover and Head Teachers have been advised to include inspections/monitoring as part of their health and safety regime in and around their schools.

All schools on CLASP register are scheduled to have annual re-inspections by the council of all identified vulnerable areas

If Not please explain:

4. Do you have arrangements to ensure that the control measures detailed in this section remain effective, eg, by monitoring the arrangements, periodic reminders to staff, etc? (yes or no)

Yes

Please explain current position:

The current position is that every school has a copy of the Asbestos Policy containing the Premises Asbestos Management Plan for their premise which holds the latest current register of asbestos information. The PAMPs were rolled out through workshops where the Duty Holder was identified for each premise and they then participated with asbestos professionals in putting together the asbestos action plan from the current known asbestos information for their own premise.

PAMPs are subject to review periodically by the Duty Holders, within Health and Safety inspections and by asbestos professionals when any additional asbestos surveys need to be carried out.

Communication on changes of the Policy or information on up to date information is relayed through the Council's Intranet and the school specific internet called Ednet.

The overall effectiveness of these control measures is reviewed at an Asbestos Management Group held quarterly containing representatives from Children and Young People's asset management team, Corporate Health and Safety and Desi

***HSE Inspection Findings: Asbestos management in Local Authority school system buildings 2009/10
Published 21 Sep 2010***

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Kirklees Council | No inspection by HSE considered necessary |
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¹¹ HSE Inspection Findings: Asbestos management in Local Authority school system buildings 2009/10 Published 21 Sep 2010
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/services/education/fod-interventions.pdf>

Huddersfield Daily Examiner 21st October 2010

Asbestos in every school in Kirklees built before 2000

Oct 21 2010 by Barry Gibson, Huddersfield Daily Examiner

THE vast majority of schools in Huddersfield contain asbestos.

But council officials have stressed the schools are perfectly safe.

New figures show only the six most recently-built schools in Kirklees are free of the mineral.

Kirklees Council yesterday revealed that only schools constructed in the last 10 years have no asbestos.

They are: Castle Hill School, Hillside Primary in Newsome; Moldgreen Community Primary, Moorlands Primary in Outlane; Fairfield School in Batley and Howard Park Community School in Cleckheaton.

The remaining 185 primary and high schools in Kirklees contain some asbestos.

But a council spokeswoman said yesterday this did not mean children were at risk from the mineral.

She said: "Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral and has been used worldwide for about 150 years on a commercial basis.

"Blue asbestos and brown asbestos were banned in 1985 but it is only since 1999 that it became illegal to use any type of asbestos in the construction or refurbishment of buildings.

"Therefore, while the use of asbestos in construction was diminishing from the mid-1980s, only buildings constructed during and after 2000 can be considered to be asbestos-free.

"The presence of asbestos in a building does not mean the health of people in the building is endangered.

"Materials containing asbestos are safe if they are in good condition and are not damaged or disturbed.

"Kirklees has a whole range of programmes to promote safety in schools. To support the process of managing asbestos the council has an asbestos plan in place, it monitors implementation, it provides training on asbestos management and awareness, it supports head teachers and other managers with buildings asset advice and it uses specialist surveyors and contractors to identify and deal with asbestos when that is necessary."

In August re-wiring work at Golcar Junior, Infant and Nursery School was stopped after asbestos was discovered. The material was taken away and destroyed by specialist contractors.¹²

Fear of asbestos at more schools

Apr 26 2002 By Neil Atkinson, The Huddersfield Daily Examiner

A FORMER teacher today revealed asbestos risks at more Kirklees schools.

Peter Ward, of Livers-edge, had to undergo lung operations after working at the schools as a teacher in the 1970s and 1980s.

And he believes Kirklees Council did not take enough action to safeguard staff.

The accusations follow an Examiner story about the death from asbestosis of a retired teacher.

Mrs Jean Whitwam died after contracting the disease when she worked at Outlane Infant School.

Mr Ward said: "I too worked as a teacher in Kirklees schools for 25 years. I have had two operations on my right lung because of pleural thickening. The pleura is the lining of the lung where most asbestos-related cancers start.

"I worked at Whitechapel Middle School in Cleckheaton and watched it being built in the 1970s.

"I saw plenty of asbestos being used. I complained via my trade union during the first asbestos scare, but the officers in Kirklees Education took no notice.

"I complained to my local councillor Gillian Rathmell who took up the case. I still remember the letter she got back from Kirklees saying that they did not regard the school as being at risk from asbestos.

"I persevered with Cllr Rathmell's help. Two weeks later Kirklees wrote back to her outlining the measures they were going to take to remove the asbestos lagging from around the blown air heating units and the measures they would eventually take to remove the asbestos tiles from the ceilings.

"All of the work to my recollection was done whilst children and or staff were in school."

Mr Ward worked in other schools, including Thornhill Junior and Infant School, Dewsbury, in the early 1990s with a class of children in a room with ceiling tiles which contained asbestos.

"Dust was created whilst the roof was being replaced and the crumbling tiles fell into dust as they had been affected by water leaking through the roof.

"It is my belief that many teachers and children who attended Kirklees schools will die from asbestos-related cancers because of the indifference of council officers and the failure to close dangerous schools."

A council spokesman said: "The council has had a stringent asbestos policy for some years to ensure that any asbestos is dealt with properly and safely."¹³

¹² <http://www.examiner.co.uk/news/local-west-yorkshire-news/2010/10/21/asbestos-in-every-school-in-kirklees-built-before-2000-86081-27515171/#ixzz131ZRZnfy>

The Huddersfield Daily Examiner 21 Oct 10

<http://www.examiner.co.uk/news/local-west-yorkshire-news/2010/10/21/asbestos-in-every-school-in-kirklees-built-before-2000-86081-27515171/>

¹³ <http://www.examiner.co.uk/news/local-west-yorkshire-news/2002/04/26/fear-of-asbestos-at-more-schools-86081-11822636/>

Publication: Yorkshire Post **Page:** 3
Edition: South Yorkshire **Pub Date:** 25/4/2002
Headline: Family 'pleased' with coroner's industrial disease verdict on mother who worked at asbestos-hit school
 Deadly dust that killed a teacher

Subhead:**Byline:** Joanne Ginley

A RETIRED teacher diagnosed with an industrial disease from asbestos fibres told how "puffs of dust" would billow from classroom walls if she tried pinning up pupil's work, an inquest heard yesterday. Told by doctors she had mesothelioma, Jean Whitwam made a statement saying she believed she contracted the disease from exposure to asbestos fibres during 24 years working at Outlane Infant School, in Moorlands Road, Huddersfield.

Yesterday coroner Roger Whittaker said he could only conclude that Mrs Whitwam, 66, who lived with her husband Kenneth, in Quarmby, Huddersfield, had died after breathing in asbestos while she was working at the school. There was no evidence to suggest she had been exposed to it elsewhere.

The inquest heard how asbestos had been found, treated or removed from the school in 1992.

Speaking after the inquest, Mrs Whitwam's daughter, Linda Whitwam, said: "People working in the public services rely on the local government to protect them and I think that's not been the case here."

"I think in this case my mother has been badly let down."

She said she and her family were "very pleased" at the verdict, but added she would now be very worried if she had worked or had been a pupil at the school. She said the National Union of Teachers had taken up the case on the family's behalf.

In Mrs Whitwam's statement, which was read to the inquest, she said: "Every time we tried to do anything with the walls, such as pinning things up, dust came from them."

If she tried to staple gun pupil's work on to classroom walls "puffs of dust" would billow out.

The inquest heard that before working at Outlane in 1969 - then a very new school - Mrs Whitwam had done other jobs, but there was nothing to suggest she had been exposed to asbestos elsewhere.

Teacher Gwen Thomas, who still works at the school, said there had been leaks and other design problems since the school opened. When asbestos was found at the school in 1992, pupils were not allowed in. But because a parents' evening was to be held, staff were asked to go in and prepare while removal work took place.

She and other colleagues worked in the staff room away from the part of the school being treated, but were allowed into the affected area to get books. She hadn't worn protective clothing.

Speaking after the inquest she said people involved with the school for a long period of time "obviously have on-going concerns" about the risk of developing an industrial disease.

Retired teacher, Janet Kershaw, told the inquest walls in the school were "flimsy".

In a statement read to the inquest Gavin Tonkin, Kirklees Council's director of lifelong learning, confirmed asbestos had been removed from the school. He said air quality tests had been done prior to asbestos being removed in 1992, which were "satisfactory".

Pathologist Mir Mohammed Aslam said Mrs Whitwam died from mesothelioma contracted from asbestos fibres - he said on average it took between 10 to 30 years for it to develop.

The inquest heard claims that the asbestos removal work at the school would have been carried out

(TO BE CONTINUED...)

March 2004. Flat roof blown off school. Water enters building .

In March 2004 a large area of the flat roof was blown off a school in Kirklees. The school was built in 1968 and is likely to contain significant amounts of asbestos materials. This is a very similar incident to one that tore the roof off in a System built school in South Lanarkshire in March 2008 when HSE were concerned about asbestos fibres being dispersed by the water that entered the building.

"Fartown High school closed this morning after last night's heavy gusts ripped off sections of the

flat roof. Staff arriving this morning took the decision to turn away the 550 pupils after finding large ceiling panels had been swept into the grounds. An outer bitumen covering on the roof had lifted up, exposing foam backed panels beneath. About eight boards, covering hundreds of square feet were then blown off.....

Six upper floor classrooms were directly affected and rain has been running into the building down to the lower floor.”¹⁴

April 2007. Asbestos found in grounds of primary school.

In April 2007 asbestos was found in the grounds of a school in Kirklees. The Local Authority assured parents that there was no risk to children:

“Asbestos was discovered by contractors at Moorlands Primary school...

One parent who contacted the Examiner said that despite the reassurances parents were worried:

We have been informed that there is no danger to the children. But the majority of parents I've spoken to feel unsure whether any level of asbestos is safe.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Huddersfield Daily Examiner storm drama closes Fartown school. 19 Mar 2004

¹⁵ The Huddersfield Daily Examiner Quick action over school asbestos 2 Apr 2007