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Big cutback in janitors is feared

By URSULA YEUNG

The Education Action Group fears that more than 1,400 janitors, caretakers and cleaning staff will be laid off during the current and next academic year as a result of the Education Department's decision to cut subsidies to aided secondary schools.

The cut in funds will reduce the number of such staff from approximately 17 at present to 12 in Government aided secondary schools.

The Education Action Group is worried the department will do the same in primary schools.

If this is the case, and considering there are more than 1,000 aided primary schools in Hongkong, a great many other employees will be laid off, said Mr Anthony Ha, chairman of the group.

The reasoning behind the decision is based on an "undisclosed and undisclosable" survey conducted by the Government in Government secondary schools, he said.

He said the responsibility of janitorial staff in aided schools — which are by far in

the majority — and in Government schools often differs.

Therefore, to be fair and to give an accurate picture, the survey should have been carried out at both types of schools, he said.

The group feels it is unreasonable not to disclose the findings of the survey.

The Education Action Group says it has received a copy of the letter from the Education Department which states that the survey should not be disclosed.

The group feels such a significant reduction in janitorial staff will affect the quality of education.

Teachers will be forced to print class notes and examination papers and take on other responsibilities which are presently done by the janitorial staff, he said.

"We consider that such tasks will further overload already overworked teachers," Mr Ha said.

The reductions will mean that schools may also have to cut back on extra-curricular activities and to close libraries, auditoriums, playgrounds and study rooms during school holidays.

The action group also

fears that a reduction in janitorial staff may add to security problems.

It is becoming more important to have a watchman on duty as schools buy more expensive equipment, said Mr Ha.

The cleanliness and maintenance of school equipment may also suffer, he said.

The Government should feel a responsibility towards the more than 1,400 janitorial staff, many of whom have served schools loyally for many years bearing.

The contracts to be terminated will be those of older janitors who will find it difficult to find new jobs, he said.

The group has appealed to the department to reconsider its decision.

Meanwhile, an Education Department spokesman said the decision was based on the Director of Audit's report on school expenditure and a value-for-money survey done by the department in 1982.

Both studies found that the sums of money allocated to aided schools for employing menial staff were often too much, he said.

The survey found that 247 of the 268 aided schools studied had not been able to spend all the money allocated to them for employing such staff.

The department, which will phase out the employees over three years as of April this year, has not received any complaints from schools concerned, he said.

The department also thought that the number of janitors the Education Action Group says will be affected is exaggerated.