



## Case Study:

Mould in local authority buildings:  
Primary School, Wrexham



## Background

Every year local authority buildings face serious problems with mould growth. The winter months can cause havoc inside properties. An increase in natural materials being used in the home and a decrease in ventilation effectively helps create ideal mould growth conditions and turn properties into giant 'grow-bags'.

All homes and buildings contain mould spores, which can thrive when the conditions are right. Damp and moist areas resulting from water leaks, penetrating moisture, rising damp and unheated areas in a house, such as a basement, provide the ideal environment for mould to grow. The most common cause of mould is condensation which is made worse by a lack of heating and inadequate ventilation.

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Mould doesn't just damage material objects; it can rot away wood, plaster, drywall and building material which, if left untreated, may weaken the building's structure. As well as affecting the health of the property, it can also cause problems to those inhabiting the building. The allergens, irritants and toxins produced by mould can cause reactions in humans. With such severe risks to health, local authorities need to ensure their tenants are properly protected.

In 2004, mould was classified as Category One and Two risks to health under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) causing the same threat to human health as asbestos. A Category One case of mould can cause severe respiratory problems, cancer and could even be fatal. Category Two mould incidences can cause lung problems, instigate asthma and exaggerate symptoms for asthma sufferers.

Local authorities have a duty of care for those occupying the building, whether these are staff and pupils in schools, the general public or civil servants. In order to protect them, local authorities, housing associations and letting agents are legally required to ensure their properties are free from damp and mould and clear any mould outbreak within a 28 day time frame, making it essential to resolve the issue.

### The Problem

Ysgol Estyn Community School, Wrexham, was built in 1905. After more than 100 years of use, areas of the school began to develop substantial mould growth, caused by ineffective insulation and damp, which badly affected the fabric of the building.

Due to the negative health effects of mould on occupants in the building, and the public liability to pupils, staff and visitors to the school, the local authority decided that immediate and professional action was needed. VPS were appointed to eradicate the mould, restore affected areas and mitigate the risks caused by the problem.

### The Solution

Specialists in mould removal, VPS, took a number of steps to ensure that the mould was treated promptly and efficiently. By assessing the situation VPS were able to provide a bespoke solution that was suitable for this particular building. As a school, the treatment had to be implemented quickly and with minimum disruption to the staff and pupils.

Mould was removed and the affected areas of the school were properly sealed using solid wall insulation. This reduces heat lost through walls, prevents damp and stops 'cold-bridging', which allows heat to flow out of poorly insulated walls. In addition, the treatment provides acoustic insulation between the classrooms, ideal for a teaching environment.

The turnaround from initial assessment to full completion of the task took only 15 days, with VPS working during school holidays to prevent disruption to pupils and staff. This specific type of treatment has a 30 year guarantee which offers peace of mind and long-lasting quality.

### The Outcome

Mr Jones, Head teacher at Ysgol Estyn School commented, "We have to ensure the safety of all our pupils, staff and families coming into our primary school. VPS has provided a professional solution and ensured the mould was dealt with properly and quickly. Not only is the school warmer, but the acoustics in the classroom are much improved – an added benefit with so many young children."

Local authorities cannot afford to ignore the problem. If left untreated, mould can result in deterioration of health, a reduced value of property, structural damage and even legal action. Because mould is a natural phenomenon it cannot always be eradicated completely, however, professional treatment will keep mould at bay for longer and help to minimise damage to tenants' health and protect housing association properties for the long term.

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