

Cold blast highlights dangerous gas heaters in classrooms

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This week's blast of arctic weather has prompted Federation members at Uralla Central School in the New England region to hold an unusual protest over dangerous unflued gas heaters in their school.

Federation Senior Vice President Amber Flohm said staff donned blankets on one of the coldest days of the year, in protest at the failure of the Education Department to install safe gas heaters with flues at the school.

"When the maximum temperature in Uralla is five degrees as it is today, how does the NSW Education Department expect students to learn when the expectation is that they will need to open windows in the room to allow for the operation of these unflued heaters," Ms Flohm said.

"NSW Health and others continue to warn of the harmful effects of unflued gas heaters, particularly on children and susceptible adults, whereby air pollutants such as nitrogen dioxide are pumped straight into a classroom.



"Such a continuing health hazard for students and teachers is unacceptable."

The action came as teachers at Peel High School in Tamworth walked off the job on Thursday over the negative impact of the statewide teacher shortage on their school, while Armidale Secondary College members walked off over issues regarding the amalgamation of two former high schools in Armidale.

Ms Flohm said winter in Uralla is famously harsh and instead of pushing this school down the list for replacement heaters, it should be a priority.

"Our members say they want students in Uralla to be able to learn in winter with the windows shut when it is raining or snowing, like many other schools in the New England region," she said.

"It is absurd and unacceptable that in one of the coldest areas of NSW, the Education Department's advice to schools in winter is

to open a window.

“The NSW Government has promised to replace unflued gas heaters in our classrooms but acknowledges that they are still used in the majority of public schools.

“The health and safety of our teachers and their students must become a priority for this Government.

“It’s time they stepped up and committed to our kids’ learning environments.”