

PICTURE: SUSAN GREENHILL

Millions in payouts for accidents at school

HARD-PRESSED schools have had to pay out millions of pounds to parents who sued after their children were injured in PE classes.

Teaching unions and heads are warning that the growth of this "dangerous compensation culture" could lead to competitive sport being phased out altogether.

That could affect children's health, with a record 2.3 million already reported overweight or obese.

Authorities in Stoke-on-Trent paid more than £2.2million in compensation and legal fees in three years following school accidents and innocent playground pranks.

Staffordshire County Council was forced to part with nearly £1million. This included £23,649 paid to a pupil after her foot was run over by a bus, allegedly after she was advised to run after the vehicle by a teacher.

By **Milary Douglas**
EDUCATION EDITOR

Another £10,500 went to a claimant accidentally hit in the face by the contents of a fire extinguisher and £14,261 was handed to a girl who was blindfolded and pushed down a slope by her classmates, during a "creative thinking" class.

Dave Wilkinson, branch secretary of the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers, said: "We could stop injuries in schools by cutting PE lessons but it would be a shame."

"I think most parents would prefer it if their child would be participating in sport rather than sitting at desks, even if there is a risk."

In Derbyshire, councils have paid out more than £200,000 in the past three years to pupils injured in



GYM SLIP: Sports lessons at risk

school. Nearly half were because of injuries in PE lessons. One pupil hurt by a javelin was given £4,500 while another received £4,925 after being hit by a cricket bat.

Other successful claims include £6,000 for a pupil hit by a stage light, and £2,875 to a technology student injured on a sanding machine.

Mary Mackintosh, of solicitors' firm Freeeth Cartwright has seen a rise in pupils claiming compensation. She said: "It is a trend which is growing at an alarming speed."

Last year Judith Hackitt, chairman of the Health and Safety Executive intervened after a downturn in school trips and urged teachers to use "common sense".

She said misguided "jobsworths" were robbing children of educational experiences, fun, and the chance to learn how to manage risk.