NEWS LESSON

Why French Students Are Leaving Their Classrooms



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What one change would improve a school you know?
2. Can missing a lesson ever teach someone something useful?
3. What makes adults take young people's opinions seriously?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**demonstrations**	☐
2	**staff**	☐
3	**entrances**	☐
4	**clashes**	☐
5	**budgets**	☐
6	**wealthier**	☐
7	**replacement**	☐
8	**challenge**	☐

A	events where many people walk or gather in public to show what they think
B	having more money
C	a person who does a job instead of someone else
D	plans for how much money you will spend
E	fights or angry arguments between groups
F	doors or gates where you go in
G	the people who work in a place
H	something difficult that you must try to do

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Thousands of teenagers across France are missing lessons to protest. They say their schools need more help.

1 When students refuse to go to school, it is usually because they want a day off. But in France, thousands of teenagers have been missing lessons for a very different reason. They are protesting because they say their schools need more teachers, better buildings and more money. In September and October 2026, the protests spread to several parts of the country.

2 At some schools, students say lessons are cancelled because there are not enough staff. They also complain about crowded classrooms and buildings that need repairs. At a school in Saint-Denis, near Paris, students described poor conditions and demanded action. They blocked entrances and joined in demonstrations. Soon, other young people were organising their own protests. Students in other towns said they were putting up with the same problems.

3 On 13 October, large demonstrations took place across France. More than 160,000 people joined them, according to government figures, although the organisers gave a higher number. The Swedish climate campaigner Greta Thunberg visited students in Saint-Denis to show her support. The protests attracted attention far beyond France. Students argued that their education was being affected and that adults in power had not listened to them.

4 The French government said it would send in thousands of extra replacement teachers to schools that needed them. But many protesters believed this was not enough. They wanted a longer-term plan to improve classrooms, school buildings and teaching. Some parents and teachers supported the students, while others worried that staying away from lessons would make learning even harder. There were also clashes with police during some demonstrations, creating new arguments about how protests should be controlled.

5 There is no easy answer. Improving public schools costs money, and governments must decide how to spend limited budgets. But students in poorer areas may already have fewer opportunities than children in wealthier places. For the teenagers taking part, the protests are about more than missing a lesson. They want schools that give everyone a fair chance. Many of them say they are not asking for luxury, only for lessons that actually take place. Their biggest challenge is turning attention in the streets into real changes in the classroom.

Sources: France 24. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. Every parent and teacher supported the student protests. T F NG
2. The government agreed to send in more replacement teachers. T F NG
3. According to the government, over 160,000 people took part on 13 October. T F NG
4. The protests have already led to new school buildings. T F NG
5. Students say they want expensive new equipment for their schools. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

classrooms	complained	demanded	luxury	opportunities	organisers	repairs

1. The _____ of the march said far more people came than the police counted.
2. The school roof was leaking, so the head teacher asked for money for urgent _____ .
3. After the accident, local families _____ a safer road outside the school.
4. A warm classroom with a working heater should not be seen as a _____ .
5. Children from poorer families often have fewer _____ to succeed.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. Thousands of teenagers _____ lessons for a very different reason. (MISS)
2. At some schools, lessons _____ because there are not enough staff. (CANCEL)
3. On 13 October, large demonstrations _____ place across France. (TAKE)
4. The government said it _____ send extra teachers to schools. (WILL)
5. More than 160,000 people _____ the demonstrations, according to government figures. (JOIN)

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Some words go together naturally. Learn the pair, not just the word, for example hold a meeting.

chance	heavy	hold	limited	make	pay	show

1. Hundreds of students gathered to _____ a protest outside the town hall.
2. The school needs to _____ attention to its leaking roof.
3. Many parents decided to _____ their support for the students at the school gate.
4. Schools have to work with _____ budgets.
5. Every child should get a fair _____ to learn.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What would make a student protest worth supporting?
2. Should students help decide how a school spends its money?
3. What could a school do to show it had really listened?

9 Role-play: the school march

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the parent

Your teenage son or daughter wants to miss school on Friday to join a march about school buildings. You understand the problem, but you're worried. Ask at least two questions before you decide.

Student B · the teenager

You want to join a student march on Friday. Explain why it matters, answer your parent's worries and suggest a plan that makes it safe.

Useful phrases

I'd like to join the march on Friday.

I'm worried you'll fall behind.

It's not just about me, it's about everyone.

What if things get out of hand?

Could we agree on a compromise?

I'll catch up on the lesson at the weekend.

Afterwards, tell the class: did the parent agree, and what condition did they set?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 A · 2 G · 3 F · 4 E · 5 D · 6 B · 7 C · 8 H

4 True, false or not given

1 F · 2 T · 3 T · 4 NG · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 organisers · 2 repairs · 3 demanded · 4 luxury · 5 opportunities

6 Verb forms

1 have been missing or have missed · 2 are cancelled · 3 took · 4 would · 5 joined

7 Language focus

1 hold · 2 pay · 3 show · 4 limited · 5 chance

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