NEWS LESSON

The Teenagers Who Walked Out of School



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	**unions**	☐	A	attention from newspapers, television and the internet
2	**authorities**	☐	B	groups of workers who join together to protect their rights
3	**underinvestment**	☐	C	buildings and equipment that are used for a purpose
4	**publicity**	☐	D	the people or offices that have official power
5	**inequality**	☐	E	an unfair difference between groups of people
6	**prolonged**	☐	F	continuing for a long time
7	**contradiction**	☐	G	not spending enough money over a long time
8	**facilities**	☐	H	a situation where two ideas cannot both be true

3 Read

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

Secondary-school students across France are blocking their own gates. They say the buildings, the class sizes and the staffing have been ignored for years.

1 Since late September 2026, thousands of secondary-school students in France have walked out of lessons, blocked school gates and marched through city centres. Their complaint, as they put it, is straightforward: their schools are struggling, and the government is not doing enough to fix them.

2 Students describe overcrowded classrooms, buildings in poor condition and lessons cancelled because no teacher is available. The campaign gained attention in Saint-Denis, near Paris, where pupils at Lycée Paul Éluard protested against serious problems at their school. What began as anger over local conditions quickly grew into a wider movement. Young people in other cities recognised similar problems in their own schools and began to organise.

3 On 13 October, demonstrations brought more than 160,000 people onto French streets, according to official estimates. Organisers put the figure much higher. Greta Thunberg, who became internationally known through school strikes for climate action, visited students in Saint-Denis to support their demands. Her presence gave the campaign further publicity, although its main concerns remained practical: reliable lessons, decent buildings and enough teachers to cover the timetable.

4 The government promised to provide 3,000 additional replacement teachers in the worst-affected areas. Student groups and teaching unions welcomed attention to the problem but argued that temporary measures would not solve years of underinvestment. France also faces pressure to control public spending, making large improvements difficult to fund. A classroom may need repairs urgently, but money spent on schools cannot be spent elsewhere without changes to the budget. Unions argue that the shortage of teachers has been building up for years and will not be cleared up by short-term contracts.

5 The protests have not been entirely peaceful. Some marches led to clashes with police, injuries and arrests, prompting concerns about the treatment of young demonstrators. Authorities said they needed to respond to disorder, while students and campaigners accused police of using too much force. Meanwhile, some parents questioned whether missing weeks of school could damage the very education the protesters were trying to improve.

6 That contradiction is central to the debate. Continuing to attend poorly equipped schools may seem pointless to frustrated teenagers, yet prolonged disruption could leave them further behind. The movement also raises the question of educational inequality. If children in richer areas have more reliable lessons and better facilities, how equal are their opportunities? Whatever happens next, these students have spelled out what they expect: to have a say in decisions that shape their future.

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. All the marches passed off peacefully. T F NG
2. The government offered several thousand extra replacement teachers. T F NG
3. The education minister met the student organisers. T F NG
4. Teaching unions think short-term contracts will not end the teacher shortage. T F NG
5. Police and campaigners agree that officers used too much force. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

accused	concerns	disorder	equipped	frustrated	pointless	reliable	urgently

1. The shop owner _____ the delivery driver of breaking the window.
2. After three hours of waiting, it seemed _____ to stay any longer.
3. The roof is leaking, so it needs to be fixed _____ .
4. Many teenagers feel _____ when nobody listens to them.
5. Residents raised _____ about the noise from the new road.
6. A science lab that is badly _____ cannot teach practical lessons.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. By Friday, the head teacher _____ all the afternoon lessons. (CANCEL)
2. The government promised that 3,000 replacement teachers _____ to the worst-affected areas. (SEND)
3. If lessons keep being cancelled, students _____ further behind. (FALL)
4. Unions say the shortage _____ for years. (BUILD UP)
5. Several demonstrators _____ during the march last week. (ARREST)

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Many verbs go with particular nouns. Check the noun near the gap and ask which verb sounds natural with it.

agreement	carry	do	gain	hold	put	take

1. Teachers' unions plan to _____ pressure on the government to hire more staff.
2. The campaign began to _____ attention after the first march.
3. The ministry has promised to _____ out a full review of school buildings.
4. The two sides failed to reach an _____ on how to spend the extra money.
5. Politicians are expected to _____ the demands of the protesters seriously.

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

4 True, false or not given

1 F · 2 T · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 accused · 2 pointless · 3 urgently · 4 frustrated · 5 concerns · 6 equipped

6 Verb forms

1 had cancelled or had canceled · 2 would be sent · 3 will fall or are going to fall · 4 has been building up or has built up · 5 were arrested

7 Language focus

1 put · 2 gain · 3 carry · 4 agreement · 5 take

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