

## Children pay price in flats full of mould and damp

By Louise Hogan

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*Sinead Martin holds up her daily medication and reveals the damp and mould on the wall of her flat at Dolphin House in Dublin's Rialto*

ONE of Sinead Martin's two children has missed 26 days of school so far this year due to sickness from living in a damp and mould-infested home.

In fact, 90pc of schoolchildren living in the 400-plus inner-city housing complex of Dolphin House in south Dublin have missed school last year due to respiratory problems, stomach upsets or nausea. Among the problems reported by Dublin City Council tenants in the complex are fungal contamination -- which can cause lung disease -- sewage exploding up through sinks and a penetrating smell from blocked pipes. Ms Martin (30), who has been living in her flat with her partner Paul and sons Noel (9) and Aaron (5) for the past seven years, blames the black mould that is clearly visible creeping up the walls for her children constantly being sick.

"Noel has missed so much school that it is affecting his social skills. Kids have their groups and when he goes in now he is now on the outside. It's heart-breaking." All four children are now suffering from asthma and breathing problems and Noel has missed 26 days through illness since Christmas. "It is stomach bugs, they might stay up all night coughing until they are violently sick," said Ms Martin.

"The mould is the first thing you see and smell. In our bedroom it is about an inch thick, in the kids' room the same thing. I've spent a small fortune on specialist cleaning products." Even their dog Odie has been struck down with pneumonia. "I told the vet we have aspergillums mould on the walls. He says to me that farmers call that 'lung rot'," Ms Martin said.

The survey of 75 flats was carried out by the Rialto Rights in Action Group, which launched its latest report on living conditions at Dolphin House yesterday. It found that 92pc of those living in flats with black mould had reported that their children had missed school in the last year due to illnesses.

The campaign group said Dublin City Council (DCC) had finally acknowledged the scale of the problem. Some flats have been refurbished, waste water pipes have been improved to stop them backing up and a survey of conditions has been carried out.

However, Rory Hearne, a group spokesman, said there was still a level of dissatisfaction among residents as out of 49 flats surveyed with mould just eight of those have so far been relocated by DCC. Residents have also called on the Department of the Environment to honour its commitments to regenerate the area.