

Celebrate Stars in our Schools

Friday 27 November is a date for your diary to celebrate school staff, the Stars in our Schools. We know it takes a whole team to help children learn, keep them safe and healthy and keep the school running smoothly – and all support staff are vital to this.

School support staff do not often get the attention they deserve, even though they make up half the school workforce. That's why we're taking a day to celebrate your work.

Some schools are holding special assemblies and coffee mornings. Some are inviting local MPs to pay them a visit to witness first hand what support staff do. Others are dressing up just for fun, holding quizzes for the children or asking them to make thank you cards.

UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis said: "We are determined to continue to speak up for support staff. Stars in our Schools isn't just about a celebration; it's about fighting for fair pay, decent training and proper recognition of the vital

role of support staff in our children's education."

UNISON has sent a letter about the day to all head teachers in the UK – and these can also be downloaded from the special Stars in our Schools website:

www.starsinourschools.uk

We would love your school to get involved in the activities and events

that will be held all over the UK to celebrate the Stars in our Schools. It can be any time in November if that works better for your school.

There are lots of other ideas about how schools can get involved in the resources section of the website. Please contact your local UNISON branch to find out more. You can also sign up to receive updates at www.starsinourschools.uk, where we are running a competition where support staff can be nominated to win a fantastic prize!

Twitter @UNISONinSchools

#StarsInOurSchools

www.facebook.com/UNISONinSchools

Find out more



UNISON in Schools



Left: UNISON general secretary, Dave Prentis, met catering and other support staff for Stars in Our Schools day last year.



***** Tax credits news *****

Tax Credit cuts could affect you – UNISON speaks out. See p3

Government wants to silence parents and communities

The government is rushing legislation through parliament that would greatly increase the power of the Secretary of State for Education to force maintained schools in England that it defines as 'coasting', to become academies.

The Education and Adoption Bill (England) would remove the requirements to consult with parents, local communities and staff when maintained schools are forced to become academies.

UNISON believes the move is more about increasing central control rather than improving the education of our children and young people.

We raised concerns about these proposals to the house of commons committee that debated the bill in July. We also sponsored a meeting in parliament along with our sister education unions NUT, ATL and NAHT, to highlight our concerns to MPs. For more information see our briefing document on UNISON's Skills for Schools website (www.skillsforschools.org.uk).

We will continue to work with our sister unions and other organisations to ensure that the voice of parents, local communities and staff are not lost.

Tackling unfair term-time contracts for school support staff

Poll of councillors shows high level of support for union's campaign

UNISON is calling for a joint national review of the unfair term-time working arrangements used by schools for the employment of support staff.

UNISON believes that treating teachers as full-year employees but reducing the salaries of support staff by up to 20% through term-time working is divisive, bad for morale and unfair. Term-time contracts also penalise a predominantly female workforce and worsen the problems of low pay.

The call for reform is a key part of the national pay claim submitted to the local government employers by the unions UNISON, GMB and UNITE. The claim calls for the introduction of the Living Wage Foundation rates (currently £9.15 an hour in London and £7.85 for the rest of the UK) as the new minimum rate of pay in all schools and a flat rate increase of £1 per hour for all other staff.

The outcome of the national negotiations with the local government employers is respected by the overwhelming majority of schools, including academies, in England Wales and Northern Ireland. Scotland has its own separate national pay negotiations.

Even within term-time only contracts there are variations and

inconsistencies in the formulas used for reducing pay from the full-year rate to a term-time figure and no clarity on holiday entitlement. Employers, even within a single local authority, have a variety of contracts, which makes it difficult to identify who is being paid what, and for how many weeks.

Support for the unions' proposal can be seen from UNISON's survey of councillors and local government officers attending the Local Government Associations 2015 annual conference. 82% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'Is it divisive and unfair that many school support staff (such as teaching assistants) are on term-time contracts of around 39 weeks a year while teachers are paid the whole year?'

Support staff are critical to the smooth running of all schools and make a vital contribution to delivering improved educational outcomes for children and young people. UNISON is clear that paying them properly for the vital work they do is long overdue.

See UNISON's negotiating advice on term-time contracts for school staff:

www.unison.org.uk/catalogue/20925

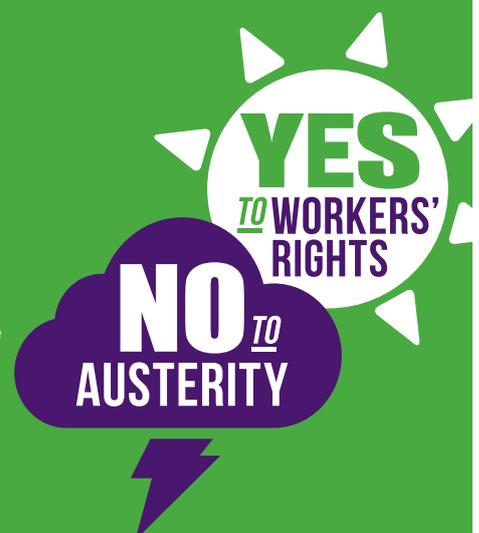
4 October, rally and march, Manchester. join us!

The 'short, sharp shock' of austerity we were promised by the Conservatives continues into its sixth year with no sign of ending.

And while you work your socks off to keep our schools running you have also been on the sharpest and most shocking end of it: pay freezes, cuts, redundancies and restructuring have become the daily grind. And now the Trade Union Bill seeks to silence your union when we speak up for you.

Join us in Manchester on 4 October on the first day of the Conservative Party conference to make your voice heard.

unison.org.uk/4thOct2015



School staff hit by cuts to tax credits

Families hit hard by government proposals

In his recent budget the chancellor announced with much fanfare that he would be increasing the national minimum wage to £7.20 an hour in April 2016 for workers aged 25 and over. It was already due to rise to £6.70 this October.

It will cost low-paid workers far more than they'll gain.

He also announced that basic rate taxpayers would pay £80 a year each less in income tax.

At the same time, however, the chancellor announced big cuts to working tax credits, which are an essential support for families who aren't getting paid enough to live on.

Tax credits have a threshold and for every £1 you earn above that threshold the tax credit is currently reduced by 41p – this is called the 'taper'. The chancellor has reduced the threshold that applies to tax credits from £6,420 to £3,850 – so reductions start sooner and the rate of withdrawal is increased by raising the taper from 41p to 48p.



These changes will cost low-paid workers far more than they'll gain from higher hourly pay and lower income tax.

For example a couple with one person earning the minimum wage with one or two children, will see their annual income cut by £1,277.50.

Jon Richards UNISON's national secretary for education and children's services said:

"Many hard-working school support staff and their families will have their finances plunged into chaos as a result of these changes to tax credits. UNISON will be campaigning and working with MPs and the House of Lords to do everything we can to try and defeat these cruel proposals."

Managing difficult behaviour in schools

Help comes in a handy new UNISON guide

School support staff are on the frontline when it comes to managing challenging behaviour from pupils and students. Difficult behaviour is a key area of concern for UNISON members working in schools. Unfortunately, school support staff are often overlooked when behaviour

management strategies or training programmes are rolled out in schools.

With this in mind, UNISON commissioned behaviour consultant Tom Bennett to write a guide for support staff on managing difficult behaviour. The guide gives straightforward advice for building confidence, defusing difficult situations and building relationships with students. UNISON members can download

the guide free at: www.unison.org.uk/catalogue/22970.pdf

UNISON members can also contact their local branch to order a hard copy of the Guide (stock number 3534).

****Stop Press**Stop Press**Stop Press
Congratulations Tom!**

Since writing the behaviour guide for UNISON Tom Bennett has been appointed as a new schools behaviour expert by the government. Tom will be working to support school staff tackle low-level distractions, which were highlighted as a serious problem in a report by Ofsted in September last year.



Professional registration coming to Wales

Welsh schools cannot survive without teaching assistants UNISON Cymru/Wales warns

Margaret Thomas, UNISON regional secretary, has said that UNISON has embraced the Welsh Government's professional registration of teaching assistants as a first step to improving standards. However, she warned that raising standards would depend on investment in professional development and a proper career structure with transparent pay and conditions.

She said: "Welsh ministers have for years agreed in principle that a national structure for teaching assistants and all support staff is necessary – UNISON wants concerted action to achieve this."

Ms Thomas made clear that schools in Wales "cannot survive without teaching assistants" and more must be done to ensure they are properly trained.

Teaching assistants were too often thrown in the deep end without sufficient professional development and left to get on with it, she said, adding that the majority suffer low

pay, a lack of career opportunities and institutional discrimination that belittles their role.

Her comments follow the publication of new figures highlighting the growing role of support staff in Welsh education.

Ms Thomas said: "Schools cannot survive without teaching assistants. They help to support special educational needs children and those underperforming; help teachers to cope with big classes; release teachers for preparation time; and help those with English as an additional language – but they need access to training and ongoing support to be able to do it."

Shamefully, UNISON has heard reports of some teaching assistants paying for their own training and unhelpful head teachers saying they cannot afford to send staff on a course or pay more if you are successful – yet their school benefits directly from the new skills teaching assistants develop.

How safe is your school?

UNISON survey seeks to highlight asbestos danger



With more than 75% of Britain's schools containing asbestos, UNISON is seeking to establish a picture of how asbestos in schools is being managed.

UNISON wants a workplace rep or contact from each school to complete a short online survey to help build a better picture of the situation. The survey can be found at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/VMR6HY5>.

UNISON knows that children and staff are exposed to the asbestos killer fibre. Over 140 school teachers have died from mesothelioma in the past 10 years. An unknown number of cleaners, admin staff and caretakers will also have died. The number of children who have died as a result of exposure to asbestos while at school is unknown but in the US it was estimated that for every teacher's death nine children will die. That would mean that over 100 people die every year in the UK as a result of exposure when they were at school.

Under the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012, schools must maintain and regularly update an asbestos register with the location and condition of asbestos-containing materials in the school.

UNISON plays a central role in the joint union campaign to manage asbestos risks and details of this can be found at JUAC.org.uk and by following the twitter account @TheJUAC

If you have queries on the online survey or the campaign please email education@unison.co.uk



Coping with care

UNISON has produced a new online training module for school staff about the new statutory guidance (England) on supporting pupils with health needs. Called 'Coping with Care' the module for UNISON members takes only about 15 minutes to complete. It explains the key points from the statutory guidance and looks at common questions about what UNISON members should do when asked to provide health related support for pupils.

Find out more on the Skills for Schools website: (skillsforschools.org.uk/library/healthneeds).

Delivering careers advice in schools

Help UNISON establish a picture

The responsibility to deliver careers advice was devolved from local authorities to schools without any extra funding in 2012. UNISON is aware that many schools are struggling to provide the level of careers advice provided previously and many schools are using existing school staff to provide careers advice.

To establish a picture of the provision in schools we are requesting that a UNISON rep or contact from each school complete a short online survey at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/B68B6ZQ>.

New Northern Ireland Education Authority created

In April 2015 a new education authority in Northern Ireland replaced the five Education and Library Boards and the Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards from. The authority has responsibility for education, youth and library services throughout Northern Ireland with a headquarters and five regional offices.

UNISON Northern Ireland branches attended many meetings in relation to the transfer from the Education and Library Board to the Education Authority. We were successful in ensuring that all UNISON members transferred to a new employer on the exact same contracts, terms and conditions, and job security.

'Offer' is act of desperation

UNISON has criticised the announcement from the new Northern Ireland Education Authority at the end of June that they would "offer" their staff two months unpaid leave during the summer.

Anne Speed, UNISON head of bargaining in Northern Ireland, said: "This offer is one of desperation and has been made with no prior consultation with the trade unions. The current cuts in education have made it difficult for our school services to run effectively.

To make this 'offer' to our low paid members to take two months unpaid leave to try to cover up the huge gaps in the budget is totally unacceptable. Our members rely on their wages during the summer to make ends meet; they do not have the option of taking unpaid leave. This clearly demonstrates the fact that the money coming from Westminster is not adequate to run our public services in Northern Ireland."



Drop the Trade Union Bill!

The Trade Union Bill before parliament is unfair, unnecessary and undemocratic.

Government plans to restrict trade union rights for workers will further shift the balance of power in the workplace towards employers and damage partnership working between unions and good employers.

The government's new Trade Union Bill would, if passed, undermine the fundamental right to strike and restrict the amount of time school reps could spend representing school support staff.

The proposals contained in the Trade Union Bill would mean:

- Strikes would be unlawful unless 50% of those being asked to take

action vote in the ballot.

- In key public services (education, health, fire, transport, border security and energy), there must be a 50% turnout, and 40% of all those eligible to vote must back the strike.
- The rules banning employers from hiring strike-breaking agency staff would be repealed.
- New limits on the amount of time any public sector workers can spend on trade union activities.

The bill also contains proposals to subject trade unions and their members to potentially unprecedented levels of civil and criminal penalties. Dave

Prentis, UNISON general secretary said:

"This is a real attack on people's basic human rights and we will not let it stand. It is very telling that the dangerous provisions in the Trade Union Bill are opposed by many employers as well as unions and other civil society organisations."

Referring to proposals in the bill to introduce even tougher thresholds for



UNISON general secretary election opens

UNISON announced that the process for the general secretary election would start on 11 August. General secretaries of trade unions are required by law to be subject to election after no more than five years.

To run for election a candidate must be nominated by UNISON's national executive council, or by at least two national service group executives, or by at least two regional councils or at least 25 UNISON branches.

The election process officially opened on 11 August when candidates can formally indicate they are seeking nominations to stand.

The key dates of the election are:

2 September

The nomination period started.

9 October at 17:00 hours

The nomination period ends.

9 November

Ballot opens – voting papers are sent to UNISON members

4 December at 17:00 hours

Ballot closes.

17 December

Results are published

people working in schools, health and transport sectors, he asked: "What is the real threat to our country posed by our school meals workers and teaching assistants that would justify this draconian action?"

UNISON will be working with other trade unions, community groups and other civil liberties campaigns to stop the proposals.

For more information and to get involved in the campaign to defend your rights visit:

www.unison.org.uk/TradeUnionBill

School meals staff recognised as professionals

We always knew you were

Professional standards for the school food workforce were launched in July at the Local Authority Caterers' Association (LACA) conference.

UNISON was the staff voice on the School Food Plan panel that developed these standards for a range of job roles that are crucial in delivering meals to children, both back and front of house: head of kitchen; school cook; assistant cook; catering assistant; and midday supervisors.

The professional standards are intended to create consistency across the service and recognise the knowledge and skills that are needed to do this vital job. They are not intended to be used for job measurement or evaluation; pay and performance; or to be another pressure for hard-pressed staff.

The standards, a guide to them and Frequently Asked Questions are on UNISON's Skills for Schools website (skillsforschools.org.uk) and there is



more information on the Local Authority Caterers' Association website. (laca.org.uk).

It is hoped that the standards will support training and career development for school meals staff as well as raising the profile of the content and complexity of their jobs. There have been significant changes in the service with new nutritional requirements and free school meals for infants. UNISON will focus next on whether enough resources are in place to support staff, if there are sufficient numbers to do the job and the state of morale in the kitchen and dining room.

