

March 2020

CORONAVIRUS Protect Health, Safety and Pay



CORONAVIRUS is now officially a pandemic. With the economy already in trouble, the Tories have announced in the Budget that extra funds are available after all. However, unlike the last crash, unions need to make sure the bailout isn't just for big business but protects workers too.

*Martin Powell-Davies, agency teacher,
Lancaster and Morecambe NEU*

Johnson claims he is being guided by health advice. But the fact that the Tories' first plan to deal with school staff absence was to remove class size limits suggests otherwise. Their primary motivation seems to be to keep workplaces open while expecting schools to child-mind, never mind the risks to health.

Of course, schools can play an important role supporting children from vulnerable families and, for example, emergency workers, but, if schools stay open, union groups must organise to make sure health, safety and welfare is put first. That includes employing additional supply staff to cover absences and counsellors that may be needed, training staff to answer children's concerns, and time for regular hand washing and adequate cleaning. If schools close, then demands on staff to work from home or elsewhere must also be reasonable and agreed with unions.

Unions must also urgently insist that agency staff are not left unable to pay their bills. Casualisation and privatisation of supply cover already means supply staff are inadequately paid. Closures and/or self-isolation could mean drastic income losses. Unions must demand that all staff affected by the crisis have their pay protected fully.

Councils should use their reserves and emergency powers to meet extra costs and demand the Government foots the bill.

Organise to win on workload and pay

It's a scandal that 10% of teachers are leaving the profession every year - but it also exposes the failure of the NEU, and the other education unions, to take advantage of the shortage of experienced staff to organise to win real gains for members.

*Nicky Downes, Coventry NEU &
NEU National Executive member*

With so many teachers also absent from work with work related stress and burnout, improvements to our working conditions cannot come quickly enough and must be fought for on every front.

With cuts to school budgets continuing, redundancy threats to teachers and support staff are on the rise. Essential services, such as SEND provision are being cut. Teachers are having to resource their classroom out of their own pockets. Staff should call on schools to refuse to cut posts but instead join unions in demanding that politicians deliver on their funding promises.

It's good that a debate is opening up in the NEU about what needs to change. Yes, unions need to refocus on building strength in the workplace, organising and recruiting reps and winning victories which should be celebrated and shared widely.

In Coventry, we have had a

very successful local campaign on pay (which is becoming increasingly fragmented) to stop local schools from having a lower pay point at M6. At the start of the campaign only 5 schools paid the full rate. We mobilised our Reps and members - threatening action. There are now only two schools that are non-compliant and we're hoping that others will follow. This has put thousands of pounds back into members' pockets. It's strengthened resolve and given confidence to fight more battles.

We're now taking on the fight against Performance Related Pay. If NET and other academy chains don't use it then neither should any other school.

However, real gains that cover all our members require national action. Lessons can be learned from the two national indicative ballots held by the NEU over the last year - and how other unions have reached ballot thresholds successfully. Absolutely the wrong conclusion to draw would be that a national ballot can't be won. The depth of the crisis in schools - for both staff and the students we teach - is too great for unions to just pursue local battles alone.

Yes, the right preparation is required but, as US teachers have shown, a clear and unifying set of demands is also vital. *(continued overpage)*

Win on Workload & Pay

... continued ... A National Contract for Education can unify members around a single goal that benefits us all.

Workload is the top reason that staff leave education. As part of the National Contract there must be a measurable limit on workload. This coupled with an increase of PPA time to a minimum 20% for all should lead to less teacher burnout and stress.

But we also need to have a say on the actual work we do. All education staff should be fully consulted on marking, planning and all other school policies. Any new policy must be workload impact assessed.

A motion calling for such a National Contract has been highly prioritised for NEU Conference. It calls for trade-union negotiating structures between elected reps and management to agree policies that ensure teachers can fully complete their planning, preparation and assessment and other responsibilities within a clear weekly workload limit - not just directed time but all the other work asked of us too!

We can introduce the Workload Charter that has been adopted in Coventry and Nottingham to other areas but a contract that is for all education workers and covers pay and conditions would be far more effective.

So, let's build in schools but make clear from the start that we are building for national action to win contractual conditions through a National Contract that is binding on all employers that guarantee better pay and conditions for staff - and better learning conditions for school students.

Newham NEU victories over academisation show

If you fight, you can win!

After 12 days of strike action, NEU members at St. Michael's RC Primary School in Newham have succeeded in forcing the Governing Body to agree that there are no plans to Academise their school. They have agreed that they will not revisit their decision until at the earliest September 2022.

Louise Cuffaro, Joint Secretary, Newham NEU

Strike dates for a further 9 days (3 days a week for 3 more weeks) had just been issued when the Governing Body finally declared they had no plans to academise. The members however, conscious of the possibility of an attempt to review this decision after September 2022, made further requests to the GB so that - should the GB wish to review their decision - full consultation will include a working party to include staff, staff unions and parents to look at all options - including staying within the LA family of schools - with no pre-determined outcome.

The 11 members, at the 1 form-entry Primary school, have been critical in inspiring and sustaining the campaign against the planned academisation of their own and other Catholic schools within the Brentwood Diocese.

St. Angela's and St. Bonaventure's, 2 RC Secondary Schools in Newham, recently succeeded in reaching similar agreements with their GBs after 1 days' strike and 6 days' strike respectively.

The 3 Newham schools devised and shared strategies by holding regular strike rallies together and helped leaflet each others' parents to ensure they built understanding and support in the community for the strike action taken in defence of both teachers and pupils against academisation. The St. Michael's NEU group reached out in solidarity to St. Bede's in nearby Redbridge, attending meetings and sharing leaflets - their fight continues and, as has been shown in Newham, can be won!

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