

## UNISON speaks up for teaching assistants following leaked government briefing

UNISON is speaking up for teaching assistants (TAs) following a leaked government briefing that said it had concerns about “the rising number of teaching assistants”. UNISON says that of all the concerns faced by schools, the rising number of TAs is not one of them. In fact, secondary schools in England have seen the number of TAs cut by 12% since 2013, and primary schools are struggling with limited resources, rising pupil numbers and more children with complex needs. Huge cuts to school funding under the government have seen TAs not replaced when staff leave, made redundant and losing out on

crucial training & support. So these reported ‘concerns’ are an insult to TAs who are stretched to the limit, yet still making a positive difference to pupils every day.

UNISON will campaign to defend TAs against any government threats. We have written to the Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson, about our concerns and asked to meet with him to discuss these issues. UNISON’s General Secretary Dave Prentis also wrote to the Guardian newspaper disputing these apparent ‘concerns’.

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## Schools staff deserve a pay rise

Support staff working in schools are paying the price for a decade of austerity – pay freezes, pay caps and funding cuts of nearly 50%. Since 2009, school support pay has fallen by up to 22% in real terms, while the cost of living has continued to skyrocket.



UNISON’s Pay Up Now! campaign is about getting a fair pay deal for everyone working in schools. You work under immense pressure, so your work life balance must be a priority too. Our pay claim also calls for an extra day’s annual leave, a two hour reduction in the working week and a national review of workplace stress and mental ill health.

### How can you help?

- Make sure the contact details we have for you are correct. Update them at [my.unison.org.uk](http://my.unison.org.uk) or call UNISON Direct on **0800 0 857 857**.
- The campaign webpage [unison.org.uk/LGPay](http://unison.org.uk/LGPay) will be regularly updated. Sign-up for campaign updates, or become a Pay Champion
- If you work for the council or school and you are not a union member, join us now.

Find out more



UNISON in Schools



@UNISONinSchools  
#StarsInOurSchools



## 29 November – Stars in our Schools celebration day!

Friday 29 November is this year's annual day dedicated to celebrating school staff: the Stars in our Schools. We know that school support staff are vital to help children learn, keep them safe & healthy and keep the school running smoothly. Yet you don't get the attention you deserve despite making up half the school workforce. That's why we're taking a day to celebrate your work and raise awareness of the impact it has on young people in our schools.

Over the past few years, primaries, secondaries, special schools, academies and faith schools have

all taken part, holding special assemblies, coffee mornings or sports afternoons. Some have invited local MPs to pay them a visit to witness first-hand what support staff do. Others have held dressing up days, quizzes for the children or asked them to interview support staff to find out what they do.

We recognise that schools are under huge pressure in the current climate. But it remains more important than ever for UNISON to highlight the valuable and fantastic contributions of school support staff. We would love your school to get involved if possible.

It can be any time in November if that works better for your school. There are lots of ideas and free resources (including materials in Welsh) on the special Stars website: [www.starsinourschools.uk](http://www.starsinourschools.uk). Please contact your local UNISON branch to find out more.

UNISON is also running a competition for school staff who go the extra mile. The winning Stars and the person who nominates them both win a £25 voucher. You can make your nominations online at the Stars website.

## Schools funding increase is not what it seems

In August, the Prime Minister announced billions of pounds for our schools for England over the next three years from 2020. Until now the Government has refused to acknowledge the cuts that have devastated our schools for years, but thanks to the effort of parents, pupils, staff and campaigners, they have finally begun to wake up to the reality. This is a serious win after years of campaigning and the biggest boost we've secured for our schools so far — but it's not enough. The headline figures announced aren't what they seem, and the school funding crisis isn't over yet especially as there is no boost for this year.

The School Cuts Coalition of education unions have analysed the

numbers and found that children with SEND are promised less than half the funding needed, and early education providers will get only a fifth of the funding they need to stay open. There is no commitment to funding the 392 nursery schools in England beyond 2020. Further, the post-16 education system is promised only a third of the funding needed to reverse devastating cuts. On top of this, there is no new money for the local authority support services for schools which have been savagely cut by this government.

UNISON will continue working

alongside head teachers, teachers, parents and other campaign groups to expose these gaps and hold the government to account.



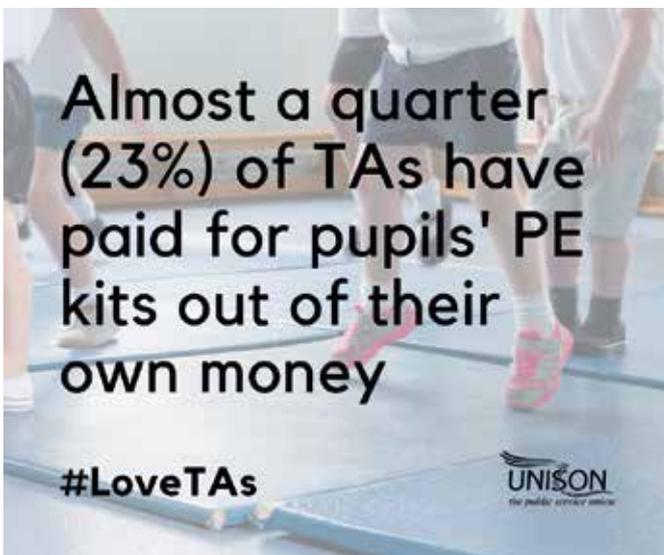
# UNISON secures deal to protect members' jobs in largest national multi academy trust

UNISON and the other unions declared a national dispute with Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) in March this year over cuts to schools HR and finance staff, workload and teachers' pay progression. AET is the largest national multi academy trust in England.

Following a high profile organising campaign by UNISON and the other unions a deal was reached after talks at the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service in June. Members voted to accept the new offer, which includes a commitment to no compulsory redundancies of finance

and HR staff before 31 August 2020; enhanced voluntary redundancy terms and pay protection; and a commitment to a national review of pay progression and the pay and grading of restructured staff. In addition the employer agreed to halt planned restructures and deep cuts to support staff in its secondary schools in London scheduled for September. This was only achieved because our members weren't prepared to take the huge cuts and were prepared to take action to stop the job cuts that would have had a terrible impact on pupils' education.

## School support staff use own money to fund uniforms and trips to help struggling parents



UNISON has raised with the Secretary of State the results of our recent survey which found that around a fifth of TAs are providing cash to struggling families to help buy school uniforms, fund trips and provide lunch money. Schools are also providing emergency supplies of groceries, with more than one in ten operating food banks for families. More than half said parents are increasingly in need of more help, while just under half reported pupils arriving at school hungry more often. Two in five said they were witnessing increasing levels of poverty.

The acts of kindness come as school staff themselves are feeling the financial squeeze. More than three quarters of schools are making cutbacks, especially over the last couple of years, and more than half are axing school support staff jobs. Seven in ten respondents said the number of support staff had decreased despite the number of children they were responsible for increasing. The result is high stress levels (70%) and reduced morale (68%), with more than half (56%) considering leaving their jobs.

UNISON head of education Jon Richards said: "It's shocking that some parents are so desperate they're turning to

teaching assistants and other support staff in schools for help.

"This demonstrates that support workers are not just essential in the classroom. Their role now extends to acting as benefactors, so pupils and their families don't go without, despite many not earning much more than the struggling parents themselves.

"They go above and beyond their job descriptions day in day out. Yet the government fails to recognise their worth by paying them a decent wage or acknowledging their vital contribution to children's education".

UNISON published the findings of this survey and it was covered by The Mirror and The Sun newspapers, as well as on the radio. The findings will form part of our ongoing campaigns around school funding and pay.

UNISON believes you are long overdue a decent pay rise. So we are asking employers for a 10% pay increase and a minimum local government wage of £10 an hour. We think this is fair, as pay needs to catch up to overcome a decade of austerity. UNISON is also calling on the government to fully fund the rise, so that there is an end to the scandal of poverty pay and you get a long overdue pay rise.



# School uniform supplier challenged over ethical concerns

One of the UK's largest school uniform manufacturers has been challenged by unions to show its clothing isn't being made using sweatshop labour. Trutex, which has been supplying school uniforms in the UK for more than 150 years, has so far refused to release information about the factories it uses, according to labour rights campaigning organisation Labour Behind the Label. Companies including Marks & Spencer, Primark, New Look and ASOS now all regularly provide supply chain information about the factories producing their clothing, following public outrage about brands exploiting workers.

As many parents have little choice but to buy logoed items from a few designated suppliers, including Trutex, they may unknowingly be supporting exploitation. Government guidance to schools urging them to avoid exclusive single supplier contracts have largely gone unheeded.

An online petition has been launched asking Trutex to follow the lead of other clothing companies and publish information including a list of its factory sites, the number and type of goods produced, and a gender breakdown of workers at each site.

Commenting on the joint campaign, UNISON head of international Nick Crook said: "Parents are facing a financial and ethical double-whammy. They often have no option but to buy overly expensive uniforms from a monopoly supplier. When they do, the supplier isn't clear about the source of uniforms or the treatment of workers who make the school jumpers, shirts, trousers and skirts. There's no reason why Trutex and the

other school uniform suppliers can't do what Marks & Spencer, Primark and New Look have already done, and open their supply chain to greater public scrutiny."

The online petition calling for Trutex to release its supplier list can be found at [labourbehindthelabel.org/trutex](https://labourbehindthelabel.org/trutex)



## Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Anyone involved in supporting children with SEND knows that this is an area that has been overlooked and underfunded for too long leaving children floundering and their families distraught. It was therefore welcome that the government has acknowledged this in recently announcing an extra £700 million for England for this area. We know this won't go far, but it's a start.

What is important for us now is to make sure that this money does not 'disappear' and goes to the front-line. We know that well-trained, well-paid, professional teaching assistants being allowed to get on and do what they do best makes all the difference to the lives of young people with additional needs. That is why UNISON will continue to

lobby hard to make sure support staff are recognised and respected for the work they do.

The Department for Education is launching a "major review into support for children with special educational needs" in England – we want your voice to be heard. As the UK's biggest union, and the biggest representative of staff in SEND, we have clout.

**If you work in SEND and are happy to tell us about your experiences to help us to shape the response we give nationally please make contact with us at [education@unison.co.uk](mailto:education@unison.co.uk) and mark for the attention of Leigh Powell, National Officer.**

# It's Checktember! Find out how your number skills measure up



National Numeracy, an independent charity, is calling on the nation to check their maths skills this September. They have renamed the month 'Checktember' and are encouraging everyone to go online and check that they have the number skills needed for everyday life and work. Research released earlier in the year revealed a third of us wish we were better at maths and numeracy. This is where Checktember comes in.

Throughout the month people are being encouraged to sign up to the National Numeracy Challenge, a service which helps people to check their level and get help to improve. A score of 80 or more is equivalent to a GCSE pass or above. But regardless of score, any individual can

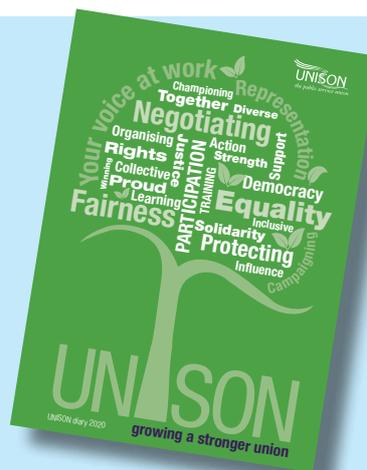
access learning resources providing help to work on any weak areas.

Do you need a maths MOT this Checktember? Try the National Numeracy Challenge here. <https://lp.nnchallenge.org.uk/checktember-unison>

**Follow the conversation on social media at #Checktember2019.**

## UNISON diaries

**Why not find out if your branch has ordered the 2020 UNISON diaries ready for delivery in October? They can be ordered online from: <https://shop.unison.site>**



## Join us for the UNISON school staff seminar

More than 100 people attended our annual schools seminar in Sheffield last term. A highlight of the seminar was an inspirational session on the successful lunchtime supervisors' dispute in Grimethorpe, near Barnsley. Staff had taken 36 days of strike action to see off unnecessary and damaging redundancies.

Other hotly debated topics included pensions, SEND issues and the menopause as a workplace issue. The Rt Hon. the Lord Blunkett, former Education Secretary, was our guest speaker, and spoke of the importance of learning mentors in providing a link between schools and parents.

The seminar is free and open to all UNISON schools staff members. So come to the next one in spring 2020 (the date will be agreed this autumn with plenty of notice for you to put the date in your new UNISON diary!). Contact your UNISON branch if you're interested in attending next year's seminar. If you don't know how to get hold of your branch, call our helpline on:

**0800 0 857 857.**

## Professional standards in place in Wales

As of 1 September 2019, the 'Professional Standards for Assisting Teaching' have been introduced for use by all TAs and Higher Level TAs in Wales as a way to reflect on their practice and identify professional learning. Along with the registration of school support staff in Wales, this is another step towards acknowledging the vital role that support staff play in school life and supports the call to not only have TAs recognised professionally, but to continue to argue that pay and terms and conditions be improved to reflect this. UNISON responded to the Welsh Government's consultation on these standards and thanks to everyone who got involved.

The Education Workforce Council's (EWC) revised Code of Conduct and Practice also came into force from 1 September 2019. The Code sets out the standards expected of those registered and is intended to support and guide their behaviours and judgements as professionals working in education and training roles in Wales. All registrants will have received a copy of the revised code but more copies can be obtained from the EWC should members need them. Additionally the EWC have produced some good practice guides to accompany the code. Further copies can be obtained or downloaded by visiting [www.ewc.wales](http://www.ewc.wales)

## Stop press

*UNISON is campaigning to protect members from the threat of a no-deal Brexit. For the latest on this fast-moving story, go to [www.unison.org.uk](http://www.unison.org.uk)*

# Technicians update

UNISON is working with **Preproom.org**, an online resource for technicians, to highlight the issues faced by school technicians. We sponsored their #TECHOGNITION event and continue to build a campaign to highlight the vital role of school technicians. With the funding crisis in the UK, technician redundancies and cuts in technical hours have become commonplace. We have produced a briefing for MPs and worked with technicians to highlight some key concerns that need to be addressed:

**Career development:** Technicians love their jobs and are a committed workforce, keen to develop their knowledge and skills, but they need continuing professional development (CPD), and clear career pathways to encourage them to develop their skills and impact upon pupil outcomes. We need to halt the cuts to training budgets which are undermining access to development.

**Health and safety:** Health and safety is paramount in schools, but cuts in jobs and resources increase risks – notably for science technicians working with chemicals, electricity etc. As staff workloads and time pressures escalate so potential for mistakes increase and preparation and cleaning time is hit. Staff are finding work more demanding as workloads increase without additional hours. This leads to work related stress, long term sick leave or staff leaving the profession.

Equipment is not being replaced or repaired so staff have to improvise or take equipment out of service and consumables (chemicals, solvents etc) are now less plentiful, so practical experiments are becoming teacher-led demonstrations rather than hands on experiments in many cases. The advice service CLEAPSS says: “Cutting technician hours or not replacing technicians on financial grounds without adequate reference to the curriculum should be avoided.”

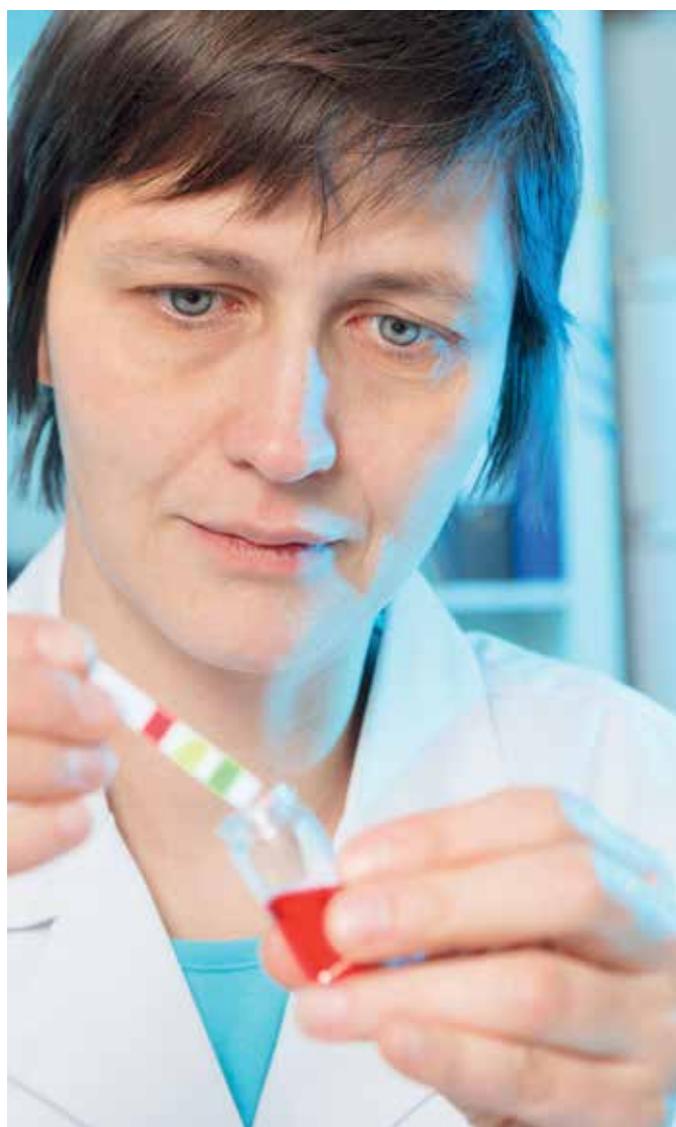
**Workload and ratios:** Cuts in staff mean that the staff/pupil ratios recommended by CLEAPSS/ Association for Science Education (ASE) – known as the service ratio – are not being met in many schools. Understaffing affects pupils and other teachers, particularly as class room practicals increase in importance. UNISON is surveying members to look at whether the service ratio is being used.

**Low pay:** Technicians have seen years of below inflation pay awards, downgrading of posts, cuts in hours and term-time only contracts. All of these have made work as a technician less attractive and appealing as a career. We need a School Support Staff Negotiating Body and a good pay award.

**Recognition:** As well as pay, status and recognition are important to technicians as they are often under-appreciated. Senior Leaders should recognise the vital role of technicians and promote their profile and CPD.

**Sustainability:** The continuous cuts to school technicians must be halted. We are reaching critical levels. The consequences are increased risks, extra work for the remaining technicians and teachers and a long term negative impact on pupil outcomes.

We will be working with Preproom, MPs and other partners to call the government to account for the crisis facing this vital group of staff.



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Join today at **joinunison.org** or call **0800 171 2193**