

School Newsletter – Autumn 2019

Leaked document reveals government “concern” over teaching assistants

Recent coverage of school funding cuts has included widespread reports of how cutting the number of teaching assistants in schools has had a detrimental impact on teaching and learning.

The leaked document however makes claims to the contrary i.e. the government thinks there are **too many** teaching assistants and it's simply a matter of effective deployment:-

“ Number 10 and the HMT (the treasury) have been keen to publically express concerns about the rising numbers of teaching assistants and set out governments commitment to more effective deployment of teaching assistants being integral to more efficient use of school spend”

Contrary to the government's claim that the number of TAs is “rising”, secondary schools have seen a 12% decrease since 2013.

UNISON National Education Officer Joanna Parry responded to say:-

“TAs play a hugely important role supporting teaching and learning, boosting pupil attainment and giving specialised assistance to the most vulnerable children. The government's reported concerns around TA numbers are an insult to teaching assistants who are stretched to the limit yet still make a positive difference to pupils “

UNISON will continue to defend TAs against these shocking government threats. We have long argued that the vital role teaching assistants play in boosting quality and raising standards should be backed up by increased investment.

UNISON members can help by emailing their MP to say how concerned they are that, despite all the concerns raised with them to the contrary, the government thinks there are too many teaching assistants in our schools.

Accidents at work

If you have an accident at work you should be asked to fill in an accident form. Sheffield City Council (SCC) has a standard “Accident and Incident Form “which should be used to report accidents, violent incidents, work related ill health, near misses and hate crime incidents. Please note this includes being verbally abused and/or subjected to intimidation.

Academies should have their own Accident and Incident Report Form.

On the back of the SCC form it says “Do you wish a copy of this report to be sent to the relevant Trade Union?” UNISON encourages our members to tick yes to this question. It is useful for UNISON to know what kind of accidents are happening in the workplace should you require advice, support or representation at a later date.



Claiming for an injury at work

If you think your employer is to blame for an injury sustained at work, contact UNISONdirect on 08000857857 and they will advise you accordingly. Your employer must have liability insurance for this kind of claim. They must display a copy of the certificate insurance or make it available in electronic form. In certain circumstances a copy should be available on request. ***Remember claims must be made within 3 years of an accident**

Teaching assistants use their own money to fund uniforms and trips to help struggling parents

Teaching assistants are dipping into their own pockets to help cash-strapped families buy school uniforms, fund trips and provide lunch money, according to a recent survey by UNISON.

Schools are also providing emergency supplies of groceries, with more than one in ten (12%) operating food banks for families.

The findings are based on responses from across the UK of more than 4,500 (4,549) teaching assistants from primary and secondary schools. They highlight how pressured, low-income families are turning to schools for basic support.

More than half (54%) of respondents said parents are increasingly in need of more help, while just under half (49%) reported pupils arriving at school hungry more often, and two in five (41%) witnessing increasing levels of poverty.

The result is that teaching assistants are using their own money to provide extra help to those in need. More than a fifth (22%) had bought uniforms, a similar proportion (23%) PE kits, while 20% had helped pupils with lunch money.

Nearly one in five (17%) had even provided cash so children could go on school trip, according to the findings.

The acts of kindness come as teaching assistants themselves are feeling the financial squeeze. More than three quarters (77%) of schools are making cutbacks, especially over the last couple of years, and more than half (52%) are axing school support staff jobs.

More than two thirds (70%) of respondents said the number of support staff had decreased despite the number of children they were responsible for increasing (69%). 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 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.

"Perversely, recently leaked documents suggest the government is questioning the role of teaching assistants. They should be getting behind teaching assistants, just as they have teachers and school leaders."

The 'Recruit a Friend or Colleague' Scheme

Do you know of any friends or colleagues who deliver public services in Sheffield and are not yet members of a trade union?

If so, you can earn yourself **£10** for each new member you recruit to UNISON.



Terms and Conditions

1. For every member recruited to Sheffield UNISON by either stewards or members there will be a payment of **£10** which will be paid after the recruited member remains in membership for 13 weeks.
2. Only those application forms received at the **branch office** by either post or hand will be eligible for inclusion in this incentive. Any forms submitted either online or to national/regional office will therefore be excluded.

If you do recruit a friend/colleague, can you please write your name and membership number on top of their application form so we know who to pay after the 13 week period has expired!

SICKNESS ABSENCE



It is likely that at some point during their working career, UNISON members will experience absence from work due to illness. The following 'trigger points' may lead to the schools management taking up the matter at the informal stage of the Sickness Absence Procedure

Trigger Points:-

- a) Any absence or pattern of absence that gives cause for concern.
- b) Short Term Absence – (1 to 3 days) 3 times in a term and/or 4 times in the previous 12 months.
- c) Long Term Absence – 6 weeks absence or where it is likely the absence will extend beyond this point.

- Please note that these triggers apply to Sheffield City Council school employees regardless of the reasons for absence. Academies will have their own trigger points so it is worth asking for a copy of your employers Sickness Absence Procedure.

A letter to staff from management requesting attendance at a sickness absence meeting invariably leads to members feeling stressed and anxious. Your employer has a duty of care to take reasonable steps to ensure your health and wellbeing. Part of this duty of care includes meeting with you. The absence and its impact on the school will be referred to. However the sickness absence meetings are NOT to question the validity of the illness.

The primary aim of these meetings is to support employees by identifying problems that may be impacting on attendance. For example a member with arthritis may not be able to lift heavy items or manipulate small objects. Once that has been identified, the schools management are obliged to make reasonable adjustments and/or refer to Occupational Health for further advice.

UNISON members who work for SCC are entitled to representation at these meetings. This undoubtedly reduces stress as our role is to offer advice, moral support and ensure the procedure is followed in a fair and transparent manner. Some academies proposed changing representation at all stages of the process, changes that were successfully challenged by support staff *and* teaching trade unions.

If you are invited to a meeting under the Management of Sickness Absence Procedure please do not hesitate to contact the UNISON branch office for advice or support.

MEET YOUR REPRESENTATIVES



ROD PADLEY

I am an elected Convenor for Education. I have worked in Sheffield City Council for over 39 years. I have 30 years' experience in representing members in all areas of the Council. I have dedicated the last 15 years to representing members in Education. I am also the Branch Secretary for the City of Sheffield Branch. If you have any issues or queries, you can contact me on the above number or alternatively send me a direct email at:- r.padley@sheffunison.org.uk



LISA SMITH

My name is Lisa Smith and I have worked as a Nursery Nurse then UNISON Convenor for the past 29 years. I take great pride in both roles. Campaigning to improve terms & conditions as well as representing support staff who find themselves in vulnerable situation is a role I take very seriously. If you have any individual concerns, general queries or would like a workplace visit, please do not hesitate to contact me you can reach me on 0114 2736307 or by email at:- l.smith@sheffunison.org.uk

Stars in our schools

This year's national celebration day for school support staff is on Friday 29th November.

Schools across the UK will be holding awards ceremonies, special assemblies, inviting local MPs, holding coffee mornings etc to recognise the fantastic, and often overlooked work done by school support staff.



It takes a whole team to make schools a safe happy place for children to learn and support. School support staff are vital to the effective running of a school, but their role is not always given the status and recognition they deserve.

Please join us in celebrating the positive role school support staff play in making schools safe and happy places for children to learn.

A full list of ideas is available on the Resources page of the "Stars in Our Schools" website – www.StarsInOurSchoolsuk .

If you would like further information/support please contact Lisa Smith at the UNISON branch office.

- Please note:- Sheffield UNISON LG branch has already written to your headteachers to ask them to support the day by holding a special event.



Change of Address?

Have you changed your address, telephone number or workplace?
If so please contact the Branch Office to update your details.

Email Address:-

It is vital UNISON keeps in contact with its members. The most effective way to do this is via email. Please contact UNISON as matter of course to ensure we have your email address. This will improve speedy communication and cut down on postage costs, currently at 10% of the branch income.

