

Winning a generational settlement for education

The NEU's indicative ballot opens on 28 February for both teachers and support staff. Every educator should build for the biggest yes vote for action.



Striking works

Three years ago this spring, educators across England and Wales took part in national strike action in defence of pay and funding. While that strike action finished too early, it made some serious gains: teacher pay has stayed roughly in line with inflation, funding for schools was increased and new

money was won for education. Subsequent annual pay rounds have also seen our threat to ballot win concessions from the STRB (School Teacher Pay Review Board) and the Government. Striking works.

But we need to acknowledge that those victories were only partial. The downward pressure acting on education as a result of neoliberalism - the cuts, the privatisation - and the mounting pressure forced onto children and families by the collapse of public services has only increased in the intervening three years.

Schools are in crisis

Schools, educators and children are being failed more profoundly now than in 2023.

- Who hasn't experienced budget cuts?
- Who hasn't had to compromise the educational experience of children because of funding?
- Who hasn't found themselves teaching in inappropriate and crumbling spaces?
- Who hasn't withdrawn the support a child needs because of a lack of money?
- Who hasn't taught a class that is too big?
- Who hasn't helped a child who can't afford the basics?
- Who hasn't experienced frustration at the lack of opportunities for working class kids?

The list could go on. What is true is that education is failing our children and it is being barely held together by the extra labour of educators.

Winning a Generational Settlement for Education

That is why this strike wave must be different from 2023. We cannot simply settle for a slight increase in the percentage pay amount for educators, the promise to move some money around so that it is partially funded. We cannot settle for a defence of the 1265 'limit' on working hours.

Reset education

Instead, we must fight for a generational settlement for education - a strike outcome that will break the cycle of managed decline, overwork and lack of opportunity for our children. We cannot rely on any politicians to deliver this - no election will change this reality - we have to win it in our schools and communities through our strikes.

Responding to our experience of organising in schools, rs21 Educators developed the 4:20s demands in 2025. We don't want a cycle of barely acceptable one year pay deals to continue, while education gets worse. We want to win a better education system for both educators and children. The 4:20s are our attempt to articulate a set of demands that we can make to the DfE that would support a generational settlement for education - one that resets our education system.

1. A maximum class size of 20

This is essential to tackling the poor educational experience that our system delivers for children. We have the largest class sizes in Europe and this cuts teacher time per child, making it harder to meet needs and harder to support individual development. Cutting class sizes is also crucial to tackling excessive workload.

2. PPA of 20%

Every child and every educator wants their lesson to be meaningful, engaging and awe-inspiring - this can't be done without sufficient time to plan children's learning. 20% PPA time will allow this time and is crucial for tackling the issue of workload.

3. 20% pay rise for all staff

Teachers and support staff are leaving the profession in droves. The long hours and incredible emotional labour are hard and when you can get

paid more elsewhere for doing a lot less, why not? We need to acknowledge the damage that this brain drain is doing for our children and pay our professionals a decent wage to keep them in the classroom.

4. 20% increase in per pupil funding

Previous pay increases have been partially funded but all of that new money has gone on pay. We need an increase in per pupil funding so that schools can have more money to meet the needs of their children and to enrich their educational experience.

Making this strike count

The above demands provide a framework for articulating our key objective in this ballot and with these potential strikes - a victory that can transform education for our children. Every activist, Rep, NEU Officer, even our General Secretary, should be returning to this central idea over and over again. Not only is this good politics, creating a coalition between educators, parents, children and the community, it will help sustain the type of strike action that we need in order to win a serious, funded and transformational settlement for education. In every school across England, educators must build the ballot and the strikes to make this victory count.

The 4:20s

- Maximum class size of 20
- 20% PPA time
- 20% for all staff
- 20% increase in per pupil funding

A Union for All Education Workers

The NEU Special Conference must stand by Support Staff. Then every activist must make recruiting all educators a reality. Our schools need an industrial union.

This special conference is a triumph. It is the culmination of almost a decade of organising by hundreds of trade unionists across the country. In the face of opposition from the government,

Some NEU members, even Executive members, have been spooked by the sound and fury of petty bureaucrats at the TUC and Unison. Our position has to be that support staff remain the worst



organised workers in the Education sector. We are not trying to “steal” members. Education workers are intelligent independent people who can make their own decisions. We are trying to organise workers, build union power and fight for a better education system.

Others harken back to the “good old days” of the NUT, when they acted as a teachers union and didn’t have to worry so much about the other workers in schools and colleges. This is an illusion. The division between organised teachers

employers, and the bureaucracy of other unions, we have built the largest education union in Europe. An education union for all education workers. From teachers to learning support assistants, from groundskeepers to cleaners, from lab technicians to safeguarding officers, if you work in education, the National Education Union will organise you.

and less organised support staff has been used repeatedly by bosses and governments alike to worsen working conditions, strip funding from schools, and threaten jobs. The NEU by organising everyone that works in schools can at last overcome this division and chart a new course for education and education workers.

This special conference must reaffirm the good work of these trade unionists. We must assert the right to organise 70,000 of our colleagues. The fight for a union that fights for all education workers is one that has been led from the beginning and to the present day by support staff. Despite the fact that their jobs are always first on the line. Despite the fact that they are on term-time only contracts. Despite the fact they are far more at risk of victimisation than their teacher colleagues, support staff have stood up time and again for education workers and for education.

It is trite to observe that schools could not function without support staff. It is far more important to notice that the NEU would be a much weaker union without support staff members. We wouldn’t only lose 70,000 of our most active members, we would also weaken our organisation significantly. We would divide our strongest workplaces, frustrate our ability to co-ordinate, and enable the employer to play different groups of employees off against each other. The NEU must agree to continue organising support staff.

Building Workplace Power

Our national ballot over pay and funding can be a bridge into activity for members in our schools. The scale of the national campaign builds confidence and the focus on government funding can lessen antagonisms with school leadership teams making it easier to get less confident members to be visible and active. As activists we have to seize the opportunity to deepen organisation within our schools: recruiting union leads for every workbase, department, year group and section of support staff. The ballot offers the opportunity to establish informal workplace committees focused on recruiting non-members and mobilising the yes vote.

Building workplace committees and challenging the local impact of cuts also provides a tangible connection between our support staff and teacher ballots. Support staff are the most at risk from local cuts and strongest when organised alongside teachers. Actively recruiting leads for groups of support staff and raising local support staff and teacher issues collectively to management is a first step towards that aim.

Sustaining organisation

Translating a temporary boost in activity into sustained organisation requires us to do more than just throw ourselves into the ballot. Alongside mobilising the vote we need to raise the contradictory position of school leaderships in both opposing cuts to funding and deciding where the impact of cuts falls. Every school group will be able to identify changes that have intensified workload or put support staff jobs at risk. Discussing how to push back over should sit alongside mobilising the yes vote. Having honest discussions about the need to



It feels like that's all that's holding our schools together!

fight both nationally and locally raises the prospect of leveraging the increased activity and organisation locally as well as nationally..

Realising our collective power in school requires raising the political horizons of what our school groups can challenge. Starting with how building membership, activity and turnout strengthens our bargaining position and sharing stories of how school level disputes, ballots and action have won elsewhere. Our aim must be to build groups, large and confident enough, that they can wield an effective veto over management initiatives that threaten jobs, or increase workload.

red pen is a bulletin for educators who want to do something about the crisis in our schools. Every academic year, budgets get tighter, educators are a little more overworked, more needs go unmet and more children get let down by our crisis-ridden education system. We know schools aren't working.

In this regular bulletin, we hope to host discussions around both practical tactics and longer term strategies that educators can use to make a difference in schools - both locally and nationally.

This bulletin has been produced by **rs21 Educators**, members of **Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century**. You can find out more about **rs21** here: revsoc21.uk. We feel that there needs to be a greater clarity about our vision of education and a space for school based educators to shape strategic discussions. We welcome contributions from any educator who wants to be part of those debates.

To find out more about **rs21**, to view past editions of **red pen** or read more analysis from **rs21 Educators**, go to: revsoc21.uk

