

Striking teachers from Jewish Community Secondary School in north London: “Teachers are at breaking point”

Our reporters
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World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke with striking teachers from Jewish Community Secondary School in New Barnet, north London, at a rally of over 200 teachers and supportive parents held in Camden Thursday—the last of three days of regional National Education Union strikes this week, involving close to 200,000 teachers.

Emily Smith, an Early Career Teacher in her first-year teaching, explained that even though students at their school were middle class, they still felt they were failing the children, especially those with special needs. “Teachers are at breaking point. Holidays are basically recovery after working ten to twelve hours a day for weeks.”

Emma Taylor agreed: “Even after ten years of teaching. No matter how efficient you are, the work/life balance is not sustainable. Maintaining relationships is a struggle. And there are so many opportunities for the students that you can’t access because you have no time.”

Both teachers felt it was important to show support for other strikers like the nurses. “It’s basically about redistribution of wealth,” Emily said. “All the money from the government goes in the pockets of their mates. In hospitals and schools so many supplies [supply teachers, agency nurses] are being employed and a big percentage is being skimmed off.”

“We’re outsourcing catering companies, rather than employing cooks,” Emma pointed out. “I’m in charge of preparing students for Oxbridge [Oxford and Cambridge Universities] and we are paying for private tutors.”

“Many teachers have Long COVID,” added **Valerie Bossman-Quarshie**, a teaching assistant at the school.

“They should be treated as human beings. I see how much they do. Everything is affecting everyone politically. The government are making education worse and then they blame the teachers or the students.”

“The government is playing with people’s lives for their own gain,” Emma said. “We should have experienced educators making decisions.”

“Post COVID and post Brexit there just aren’t enough educators in early years,” Valerie added. “The children aren’t getting enough support and neither are the teachers. I worked as a carer before, but I gave it up because I felt I was being used. Now I see teachers coming in through Teach First and they are being used. They are just bodies. They are thrown in front of classes with barely any training and if they can’t manage the class it’s their problem.”

“We need to unite with other unions. We need a general strike,” Emily said.

Emma added, [Labour Party leader Sir] “Keir Starmer is not representing us. We were demonstrating outside parliament and he didn’t even mention the strike.”

Valerie agreed, asking, “What happened to [Labour’s previous slogan] ‘Education, Education, Education’? My union is UNISON. We didn’t get enough votes for a strike but they are with Labour and the Labour ministers aren’t even allowed on the picket lines.”

The educators raised concerns about the mental health of students due to current pressures, saying that many were suicidal. “It is particularly bad among 16 to 18-year-olds,” Emma stated. “We have students telling us that they are depressed and want to kill themselves and there is no provision. Then we have to deal with

that. I would like students to have a voice. They are so far removed from decisions taken about them. They should be listened to.”



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