

Teachers in England reject 2.8 percent wage offer and support indicative strike ballot over wages and conditions

Tania Kent
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The National Education Union’s (NEU) indicative ballot over the government’s 2.8 percent pay offer for teachers across England has produced an overwhelming rejection—by 93.7 percent—of the pay award.

Over 83.4 percent of those who voted said they would be willing to take strike action to “secure a fully funded, significantly higher pay award that takes steps to address the crisis in recruitment and retention”. The turnout was 47.2 percent.

The NEU responded that its national executive would “discuss” the outcome at its national conference on April 14-16. Teachers must be warned: the union bureaucracy will use the ballot as a bargaining chip while doing all in its power to suppress broad-based opposition to the decades-long decimation of education under Conservative and Labour governments.

This is precisely what happened with the last “indicative ballot” on wages and education funding last year. After teaching unions ended 8 days of strike action for a 6.5 percent fully funded wage claim—part of the mass strike movement against the Conservative government in 2023—they accepted a 5.5 percent below-inflation pay rise, claiming this was the start of a counteroffensive against the attacks on public education.

Teachers later returned a further mandate for strike action before the NEU’s last annual conference in April 2024—more than 90 percent voted for strike action in a 50.3 percent turnout. But the NEU refused to act on it, instead asking teachers to wait months for the outcome of talks with the STRB (teacher pay award body). This was coupled with appeals for the election of a Labour government.

Teachers face intolerable working conditions, a

funding crisis with dozens of local authorities facing bankruptcy, a near collapse of SEND (special education needs) provision, and crumbling schools threatening the safety of teachers and children.

The education unions claimed a Labour government would “rectify” the crisis. General Secretary of the NEU, Daniel Kebede, stated: “We are ready to work with a Labour government to embark on a journey of renewal. To rebuild and to reinvigorate, to instil hope in our young people, and to champion a new era of possibility and progress.”

Instead, Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer heads the most right-wing Labour government in history, removing the winter fuel allowance for pensioners, refusing to scrap the punitive two-child benefit cap, slashing £15 billion—from welfare cuts targeting the sick and disabled and throwing 30,000 children into poverty with immediate effect—and other government department cuts. A record 4.8 million children will live in poverty by the end of Labour’s first parliamentary term, according to data published last week by Edinburgh University.

Labour’s cuts are being openly pitched as necessary to funnel billions more into Britain’s war-drive.

Far from Labour championing a new era of “progress”, children now face higher levels of poverty than any other group in society (twice that of pensioners). Labour’s war on welfare will exacerbate the social crisis confronting families and will inevitably place even greater strains on schools.

Current research shows that kids in the most deprived areas are far less likely to achieve a grade 5 or above in English and Maths, but are far more likely to be obese; to lose their teeth, to live in nutritional food deserts; to

struggle with their mental health; to be absent or expelled from school; to be homeless; even to die younger. And in adulthood, those who grew up in poverty earn less and are more likely to have long-term mental health issues.

The budgetary crisis facing schools continues to escalate. The 2.8 percent wage rise will not be funded, meaning schools will have to provide it from existing woefully low budgets. Research shows that despite last year's "fully" funded pay rise, half of secondary schools in England have been forced to cut staff this year due to financial pressures that are pushing many "towards breaking point", according to polling.

As well as cuts to teaching and support personnel, there has been a marked increase in the proportion of secondary school leaders reducing subject choices at GCSE level to save money, while extracurricular activities, school trips and investment in IT have also been hit.

Pupil premium money, intended to support the most disadvantaged children, was also increasingly being diverted to plug budget gaps elsewhere, according to 45 percent of secondary heads—up from 32 percent last year.

The findings were based on a survey of 1,200 teachers across 1,000 schools by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) on behalf of the Sutton Trust education charity.

More schools are having to make cuts this year, the polling suggests. The proportion of secondary leaders cutting teachers has gone up from 38 percent in 2024 to 51 percent, while 50 percent reported cuts to teaching assistants, up from 41 percent last year.

"State schools are overwhelmed with financial pressures, and many are rapidly heading towards breaking point," said Nick Harrison, chief executive of the Sutton Trust, which is calling for a new national strategy to close the attainment gap.

"This is having a devastating impact on their ability to provide the support that the most disadvantaged pupils need, with almost half of secondary school leaders forced to use funding intended for poorer pupils to plug budget holes. If action isn't taken, we will be failing the next generation", Harrison concluded.

And despite the government's call for a "digital revolution" based on artificial intelligence in schools, 48 percent of participating secondary leaders reported

cuts to IT equipment, up from 36 percent. The situation was even bleaker in primary schools, where 56 percent reported IT cuts.

The schools rebuilding programme which needs £11.4 billion to bring crumbling schools to "satisfactory levels" has been awarded in real terms only £300 million this year.

Even work to remove Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) is miles away from completion, despite three sudden roof collapses in UK schools in 2023. It is now over a year since the DfE announced remedial plans for schools and colleges in February 2024, and still 87 percent of the 232 schools and colleges identified as at risk have not had work carried out. Some 122 buildings need extensive work including rebuilds and refurbishments.

A Labour government demanding "ruthless prioritization" of government spending for the military, has no intention of providing this funding. It will have to be fought for tooth-and-nail by education workers.

The unions' claims that Labour can be "pressured" are aimed at subordinating pent-up anger among educators and parents to a Thatcherite government. Labour is acting as the most ruthless defender of the corporate oligarchy, including its militarist agenda to send the next generation to war, subordinating the economy to wartime rearmament by attacking the social gains of the working class, including education.

Teachers must take matters into their own hands and build independent rank-and file-committees to organise the necessary struggle in defence of public education. Billions must be poured into schools, colleges and universities, not funding for the war machine! Contact the Educators Rank-and-File Committee (UK) on the form below and help build the necessary leadership to fight for this perspective.



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