

UK teachers walk out at Outwood Grange Academy schools over plans to lengthen school day

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UK schools at Outwood Grange Academy Trust (OGAT) walked out for three days from June 17, part of an ongoing dispute over plans to increase the school day by 30 minutes from September 25.

The strikes are part of a growing movement of educators against the effects of decades of government funding cuts, imposed with the collaboration of the education unions.

Teachers from 14 schools at 28 sites run by OGAT, in Yorkshire, the East Midlands, North East and North West of England, took part, including National Education Union (NEU) members at Outwood Grange, Outwood Freeston and Hemsworth Academies in Wakefield and NASUWT members at Outwood Academy Hindley in Wigan.

Three previous strike days took place June 3, 10 and 11 in opposition to the trust's plans to impose an extra half hour's teaching a day on workers already suffering unbearable workloads.

The trust says its schools do not comply with government regulations, brought in by the previous Tory government, to extend the school week to 32.5 hours, supposedly to help children catch up after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Staff are facing extra work without payment. The proposal by Outwood is for centrally planned lessons focusing on life skills, but these will inevitably involve some planning and marking.

Teachers already work on average 55.7 hours per week, way beyond the hours they are contracted to work, according to the NEU. The union calculated that an extra half an hour on the day works out to one hour's extra planning and two hours' extra marking a week.

The NEU has accepted the increase in principle, with other schools complying by shortening break times, opening the door to Outwood Trust to demand extra teaching time.

World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke to teachers on the picket lines in Outwood schools in Wakefield and Wigan, distributing the WSWS article, National Education Union conference reveals growing opposition to Labour's attack on

education.

Maths teacher **Peter** joined the 25-strong picket at Outwood Grange school in Wakefield. He teaches a class of 34, and some A-level students. He explained, "The Academy says we are not fulfilling the 32.5 hours criteria; however, we are way over that. When you look at the stats, we are working between 50 and 60 hours a week.

"I enter school around 7 a.m. and finish at 5 p.m. and then work on the weekend as well doing all the admin. Some days I dash home at the end of class but then I'll be working from home."

About how schools other than Outwood complied with the extra half hour advised by the Department of Education by cutting breaks, he said, "Students already do not get enough time to eat their meal with only a 30-minute lunch break. Many other schools have a one-hour lunch break.

"We would have to extend the official day from 2.30 till 3 p.m. A lot of teachers will be affected by childcare; they may have to pay four grand for care."

Niall, a science teacher and NEU representative, explained, "We're contracted to work 1,265 hours in a year. That's what we're paid to do. The government has released non-statutory guidance that says we should be getting up to 32.5 hours in a week. Research shows that most teachers work over 2,000 hours in a year.

"We get paid from quarter past eight in the morning until 2.45 in the afternoon, but most teachers are here from about seven and won't go home until four, five o'clock. We're already working way over what we're paid to work."

He explained that unlike other schools, they cannot claw back the extra half hour by shortening break times, illustrating how intensive and stressful the school day is for pupils and staff.

"At the minute, it's only a 15-minute break for kids, and a 30-minute lunch. Trying to get 700 students to do a 30-minute lunch just isn't feasible. There isn't any way that they can eat and go to the toilet in that time. And then that

impacts lessons—them having to go to the toilet during lesson times.

“There is a lot of discontent...the trust...keep telling us people are overwhelmingly in support [of lengthening the school day], but then we’re not seeing any evidence to back it...putting it onto workload and not paying us is not acceptable.”

Max, the joint secretary for Wigan NEU, was one of 20 pickets at Outwood Hindley School in Wigan. He explained the impact lengthening the school day will have on families.

Some pupils “pick up their siblings from nearby primary schools so if that can’t happen who’s going to pick them up? The parents are going to have to take time off or put the children into after-school club, both of which will cost them money.”

“While teachers welcome some pre-prepared, pre-planned resources that have been made, they still want to tailor them, and they haven’t got the time to do it.”

Describing academy schools (publicly funded but privately run), first introduced under the labour government of Tony Blair (1997-2007), Atkins said, “You’ve got loads of people at the top getting hundreds of thousands of pounds for doing what a head teacher would normally do for 70, 80 grand. It’s a disgraceful waste of public money.”

Increasing teachers’ workload will add to the recruitment and retention problem in schools—particularly acute in secondary education. According to government figures published June 2025, the teacher vacancy rate is five per 1,000. Over a quarter of newly qualified teachers left the profession after three years, while more than a third left after five.

Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson has pledged to recruit 6,500 new teachers but the government’s misnamed Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill, currently going through the House of Lords, ignores the issues which make teaching an unattractive profession.

These include poor pay, heavy workload, Ofsted inspections, a prescriptive curriculum not based on pedagogy but test-driven, lack of special needs (SEND) support and the crumbling school estate, as well as inadequate funding. They have prompted a growing number of strikes in the sector.

Just in the last month:

- NEU members at the Hackney Sixth Form Campus in London began a walkout June 12, until July 4, over plans to get rid of A-level courses, replacing them with vocational courses and cutting some teaching posts.
- Teachers at the Nugent House special needs school in the Billinge area of Wigan began a three-week discontinuous strike over pay on June 9.
- NEU members at Leytonstone school in Waltham Forest,

London walked out June 10, 11. They are opposed to changes to the school day and increasing workloads and have health and safety concerns.

- NEU members at Shaftesbury School in Dorset walked out June 17 over restructuring which involves cutting subject leadership roles.

- Today and tomorrow, strikes will go ahead at All Saints RC secondary school and St George’s RC primary in Fishergate, York over financial management at the Nicholas Postgate Catholic Academy Trust to which they belong.

In 2024, there were 219 ballots approved by the NEU for strike action, and 593 days of action, double the previous year. The union leadership, however, refuses to mobilise their members in mass unified action, keeping disputes isolated. It betrayed a national strike ballot over pay, replacing it with moral appeals to the Labour government.

This year’s four percent pay rise for teachers will only be partly funded by the government, with the rest coming out of already constrained school budgets. Responding to the recent government spending review, Institute for Fiscal Studies director Paul Johnson explained, “Strip out the cost of expanding free school meals, and you get a real-terms freeze in the [schools] budget.”

A survey by the National Association of Head Teachers reported that half of school heads anticipate having to lay off staff due to budget pressures.

These pressures will only increase as the government commits to ever-greater military spending, with the resources to be taken from education, health and welfare.

Rebuilding the teaching profession and the education sector as a whole in the face of this agenda will require a mass struggle, uniting workers throughout the public sector and beyond—breaking with the union bureaucracy and its collaboration with the Labour government. Contact the Educators Rank-and File Committee to join this fight.



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