

# Teachers strike against compulsory redundancies across the Midlands, England

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Members of the National Education Union (NEU) have extended their nine days of strike action which began on January 14 by a further nine days, extending into February.

The strike across 20 schools around the Midlands is against threats of compulsory redundancies by The Arthur Terry Learning Partnership, a multi-academy trust (MAT) which controls 24 schools across Birmingham, Coventry and Staffordshire. Four of the remaining schools are being re-balloted following requests from staff.

Striking workers have shut down several schools, some operating with limited access to vulnerable pupils and those in Years 11 and 13. The pickets have been well attended and a rally held in Birmingham on January 22 was attended by hundreds. Teachers voted 86 percent in favour of strike action on a 99 percent turnout.

The Trust is in financial deficit and plans to implement deep cuts; according to the union, some 100 teaching and support staff could lose their jobs. Staff are also concerned about increased workloads and stress. Redundancies would undoubtedly worsen staff exhaustion and the quality of education and support they are able to provide their pupils.

Thousands of schools nationally have a financial deficit after education funding was slashed by the Conservatives, to levels now largely maintained by Labour. The action in the Midlands is significant for revealing the well of opposition to this state of affairs among educators, and their determination to fight. By rights, it should be expanded across the country in a fightback against austerity, privatisation and the decimation of education.

The NEU and other education unions will not lead such a struggle. They have allowed the academisation of state education for two-and-a-half decades, isolating those who fought forced academisation and the destruction of jobs and conditions.

During 2022-23, the union bureaucracy blocked the

development of an all-out strike across the education sector, accepting below-inflation pay rises which were partially funded out of strapped school budgets, and have imposed further below-inflation deals since.

In the Midlands dispute, the NEU is negotiating cuts with the employers. The Trust has written, “Following a constructive discussion with the NEU earlier this week we submitted a proposal which put forward substantive concessions in an attempt to resolve several concerns... and have agreed to continue engaging with an open and meaningful dialogue.”

According to The Arthur Terry Learning Partnership, it seeking to reduce “significant over-staffing” identified after an “accounting error”. The Trust reported a cumulative revenue deficit of around £4.46 million last year—the third year in a row it has posted a deficit.

It has received loans from the Education and Skills Funding Agency to help cover shortfalls and continue paying bills. These are to be repaid through efficiency cuts under the government’s “Notice to Improve” scheme, taking the Trust’s total deficit in 2024–25 to £8.4 million.

Although The Arthur Terry Learning Partnership is an extreme case, deficits are widely reported across the sector. While 98 percent of academy trusts were in cumulative surplus or breaking even at the end of the 2022-23 financial year, nearly three in five recorded an in-year deficit for 2023-24. Mass sackings and deeper cuts threaten educators across the country.

Almost half of schools are now run by academies, including 80 percent of secondary schools and 46 percent of primary schools—a process begun under Tony Blair.

Supposedly aimed at fixing “poor achievement” in primarily working-class schools, the process has removed schools from the control of local education authorities while maintain public funding. Trusts hold the school assets, set budget and staffing policies, and determine

aspects of the curriculum and admissions.

They have seen large amounts of money leeches out of the sector. Some of the money to pay Arthur Terry's deficit, for example, could be found in the £1,841,000 total remuneration package for key management in 2024-5, up from £1,149,00 in 2023-4; itself double the £518,000 reported for 2022-3.

Trusts can also run large in-year and cumulative deficits before intervention, which can often be offloaded onto the government, with massive restructuring then ordered to repay the debt.

The NEU has abandoned any pretence of fighting academisation and has allowed the relentless privatisation and profiteering out of what ought to be the essential right of every child: a state-funded education system.

It writes that "Schools pay a whopping 20 per cent of their total budget, the money that comes into the school for each child, to the Trust for the central running of services, called a 'top slice'. The NEU understands the average 'top slice' for academies across the country is around five per cent, yet last year the ATLP central spend was closer to 28 per cent." But this is only a particularly egregious example of the system the union has allowed to be implemented.

The state sector fairs little better, with government funding cut to the bone. The NEU reported that in the last year school cuts have deepened by an additional £1 billion. Three-quarters of schools in England have less funding in real terms than in 2010.

What does the NEU propose to end downward spiral of austerity?

President Daniel Kebede declares, "It's easy to get pessimistic about these figures, but as we enter a new year there are more chances than ever for us to persuade politicians to arrest the crisis in our schools. We will continue to call for every politician of any party to commit the money needed to properly fund every school in England."

Appealing to the very forces imposing austerity, as well as militarism and attacks on democratic rights, is beyond pessimistic!

A new path must be taken which can unify staff throughout the sector. The isolation of struggles must be ended. Many academies have taken action in the past two years against similar practices.

At Harris Girls' Academy East Dulwich, NEU members walked out in July last year for three days to protest staff restructuring that threatened up to seven redundancies, including critical safeguarding roles. The

same summer, at UCL Academy, London, staff went on strike against redundancy plans and management bullying.

Currently, there is a separate industrial action taking place at other Staffordshire schools including Wombourne High School and Kinver High School—part of the Invictus Education Trust—over excessive workload.

At Doxey Primary Academy in Doxey Road in Stafford, there is a dispute over new contracts for teaching assistants which cut pay.

Teachers at Baccup in West Yorkshire are striking against the use of virtual teachers and for the protection of their jobs.

Many other single-school based disputes could be cited. They are kept separate to prevent the sort of unified movement, which would rapidly come into conflict with the national government, which the education unions have been striving to avoid.

Not only would such a struggle win mass support among educators, it would chime with the sentiment of broader sections of the working class who also confront relentless attacks on their wages and conditions. Bin men in Birmingham, just around the corner from the teachers' rally, have been on strike for over a year against efforts to slash their wages and overturn safe working practices. They too have been kept isolated.

Taking up a common struggle means establishing rank-and-file committees of teachers and all school staff, independent of the unions, which can form links between schools, and with other sections of workers in struggle, in preparation for coordinated action.



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