

# National Education Union ends Midlands, England teachers' strike following agreement with Trust

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The National Education Union (NEU) called off the strike of 800 teachers who work for the Arthur Terry Partnership Learning Trust (ATLP) across the Midlands last Thursday. The Trust, which runs 24 schools, is in a financial crisis was attempting to impose 100 redundancies.

Following eight days of solid strike action, supported by staff and parents throughout January, the NEU announced ending the strikes stating that following negotiations, the Trust has withdrawn the threats of redundancies and restructuring and the CEO of ATLP has been removed.

Nine further days of strike action were due to begin on February 2. The NEU claimed the agreement as a “victory” and that “strikes work”. However, while teachers, staff and parents will be relieved to hear that the threat redundancies have been lifted the ATLP remains committed to balancing its deficits and in this endeavour, the NEU is fully on board as partners.

The Trust issued a statement that it had agreed to pause all current restructuring and redundancy consultations and would “take every step possible so that any future compulsory redundancies are a last resort”.

ATLP stated that the NEU did recognise “the significant financial challenges facing ATLP” and agreed that “action must be taken to ensure the financial recovery of the trust”. The ATLP and NEU would be meeting weekly to “assess the financial situation, agree the plan to tackle the deficit, and monitor progress”. An ATLP spokesperson said, “NEU representatives and ATLP leaders agree that this transparent, open and collaborative approach will mean the financial challenges can be addressed most effectively.”

The NEU formally launched its latest campaign to “Save Education” with an indicative ballot opening on February 28 against the three-year 6.5 percent wage

proposal and for a huge increase in funding to education. But in the real world it is collaborating with employers to balance the books of Trusts. It’s campaign statement to Save Education states, “After more than a decade of under-investment, education is running on empty. That’s why it is vital we take a stand together to win the pay rises educators deserve, to win the funding our schools need and to resist further increases in workload which will damage children’s education.”

The NEU’s public outcry over the funding crisis, which the union says has left schools with £1 billion less in funding this year, belies its role as partners with private sector operators which run the Academies for profits. It is this corporate partnership that unions are embedded in that poses the greatest risk to education and one that teachers must confront to mount a successful counteroffensive. The NEU never addresses how it is that the government has Academised some 80 percent of secondary schools and 46 percent of primary schools. Funding and wages are at the same level as 2010 and this was on their watch.

ATLP have accepted the central tenet of the trade union bureaucracy’s argument that to impose cuts it must work with the union, who will assist in policing the staff and opposition that exists.

According to ATLP’s latest accounts its deficit is around £10 million, which it is committed to legally resolve. Any claim that this will happen without impacting jobs, workload and quality of education is a fiction. The Trust released a “questions and answers” email to parents following the agreement with the NEU. There is no mistaking its intentions.

It states, “The trust will conduct a review of all non-staffing and central costs, with the aim of removing or reducing these and redirecting funding back to schools’

budgets. There will be ongoing regular meetings between the NEU and the new trust leadership looking at reducing the top-slice, and joint negotiating and consultation committees between union reps and management will be set up in every school to ensure union groups are part of decisions made.

“The Trust has needed to agree financial support from the Department for Education [DfE] in the form of repayable loans. This support has come with a number of conditions focused on the delivering a credible financial recovery strategy.”

The loans from the DfE are thus far £3.5 million in repayable loans at the time the accounts were prepared with a further £1 million loan last December.

There has been much criticism in the media over every child being issued with an iPad across the Trust. The accounts say there were some 11,281 children on the schools’ rolls, each issued with an Apple tablet. This is not uncommon and teaching and learning in today’s world necessitates the use of technology, which every child should have access to. The Trust has confirmed that to take this away would only scratch the surface of their debts. “Recent internal and external reviews, including those commissioned by the Department for Education, have identified overstaffing as the primary driver of the Trust’s current financial pressures”, it said.

While management at ATLP are awarding themselves obscene pay packets at the expense of children’s education, which the NEU have highlighted during the strike, these are not unusual across Academy Trusts. ATLP have defended these pay awards as “competitive”. The Trust’s accounts say key management staff received £1,841,000 in 24/25 up from £1,149,000 23/24 for eight management posts. This equates to £225,000 on average, almost 10 times the salary of a teacher entering the profession and over four times that of experienced teachers at the top end of the pay scale.

ATLP has said the NEU had asked for guarantees that no redundancies will occur for three years after the end of the present restructure. But it said: “Future workforce requirements are influenced by factors that cannot be predicted with certainty over such a timeframe, including changes in pupil numbers, funding levels and/or government policy”.

What the details of the new agreement brokered have not been revealed. There aren’t any guarantees that there won’t be redundancies. There is no guarantee that staff who leave or retire will be replaced, which will impact workload. The only guarantee is that there is a

commitment to resolve the deficit.

The WSWS article published on the strike warned: “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.”

The ATLP dispute could have been used to mobilise the broad-based hostility to privatisation, funding, workload and protection of wages and conditions. It could have been a rallying point for schools across the UK. It is for this reason that it was ended at the point where demands were made for its expansion by teachers which was gaining support across schools who were not on strike and were re-balloting to join it.

A new path must be taken which can unify staff throughout the sector. The isolation of struggles must be ended.

Not only would such a struggle win mass support among educators, but it would also chime with the sentiment of broader sections of the working class who confront relentless attacks on their wages and conditions.

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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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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