

I completely understand some parents' frustrations at the disruption to their children's education caused by the industrial action that has taken place over six days between February and May, but as I have explained before, if we have significant numbers of staff out, we cannot do anything other than close for safety reasons.

The decision to take strike action is not one that teachers take lightly, however. By their very nature, teachers care very much about the lives of young people, their education and supporting them to achieve their very best. I do not normally publicly express personal views on such matters, but I strongly believe that the reporting of the industrial action nationally does not accurately reflect why teachers are making a stand.

The offer of a 4.5% pay increase for teachers next year with a derisory bonus offer for this year is woefully inadequate. The fact that this is well below levels of inflation is one aspect over which the NEU is striking, but there is an important second element that is often overlooked. The government will say that schools have sufficient funding in order to meet most of these proposed increases, including 0.5% which we are supposed to have saved from falling energy costs; our gas and electric bill is increasing by £120k from 2023/24, so you will see that that on its own does not add up.

Every 1% of increased salary that is unfunded equates to £60k for Sheldon. If pay awards are agreed and then are unfunded, schools are required to meet that cost from existing budgets. During the summer holidays of 2022, pay awards for support staff and teachers were announced – well below inflation, but without additional funding, which meant a further £204k had to be found from the school's reserves. When one considers that the starting salary for teachers is £30k, you can quickly see the extent of the issue. For schools generally, without sufficient funding to match pay increases, this means that planned resources and provision have to be withdrawn, classes condensed, courses dropped, and, in extreme cases, teachers made redundant.

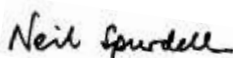
Whilst the offer in England is not at the level it should be, the situation is exacerbated by the fact that pay awards for teachers in Wales and Scotland are higher and have been accepted; this inequity has also caused significant agitation in a system that is supposed to be fair throughout the whole of the UK – and is particularly acute in areas in England bordering the two countries.

I have enclosed a link from a recent blog written by Geoff Barton, ASCL General Secretary, someone you may have seen on the television regarding all sorts of educational matters over the past few years and someone who is incredibly measured. This might provide some additional insight to the issues facing schools right now ([ASCL Briefing](#)).

Such is the severity of the situation affecting education, that the ASCL union is balloting its members for the very first time in its history to ascertain whether school leaders wish to take industrial action. The reluctance leading to this decision on behalf of the members of ASCL is captured in Geoff Barton's article, but it does lay out clearly how we have come to this point.

Having read the article and my letter, you may still not agree that teachers should be striking. However, with a chronic recruitment crisis, a profession taking a battering from many sides, alongside the other points I have made above, this may help to explain why the NEU – and possibly other unions in due course – has been taking the action it has.

Yours faithfully,



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