

BRANCH LINES

UNISON West Sussex Branch newsletter • www.unisonwestsussex.org.uk

UNISON SCHOOLS' SURVEY HEADLINES

West Sussex
members paint
a bleak picture
of school
reorganisations.

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In this edition, we focus on the schools' funding crisis and the implications for school support staff. Many of you took part in our schools' funding survey, so we're sharing some of the main headlines with you. There's more analysis to be done, but we'll reveal more in a future issue.

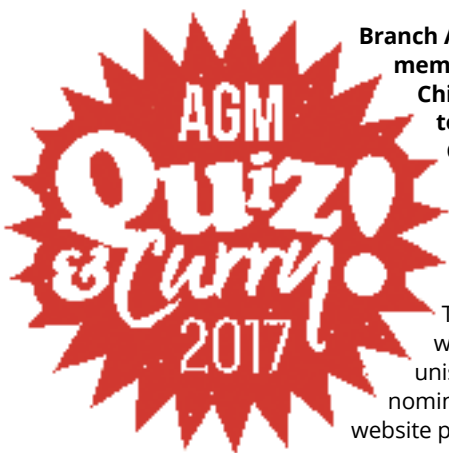
We bring you evidence of the effect of council cuts to schools in other parts of

England and an update on local schools facing reorganisations as cuts begin to bite.

We do have some good news: this year's UNISON learning grants are now available to all members.

Finally, you're warmly invited to attend our new-style AGM event in Chichester on 31 March. It's outside of school hours and includes a free meal and wine.

Dan Sartin, Branch Secretary



Branch AGMs take place at the end of March. All schools-based members are welcome, especially at the final event in Chichester. It starts outside school hours (from 4:30pm to 9pm) on Friday 31 March in the Martlets Restaurant, County Hall, Chichester, PO19 1RQ.

We'd love to see you there. It's followed by our quiz and curry night with free dinner, free raffle ticket and automatic entry into our free prize draw. You could win a tablet computer! Also, free wine for groups of four or more.

There will be a 'rep of the year' award ceremony. If you would like to nominate your rep, please email office. unison@westsussex.gov.uk and tell us the reasons for your nomination. Only 80 places are available. Book now via our website page: www.unisonwestsussex.org.uk/news/agms-2017

Labour councillors ask council for more schools' cash

At February's full council meeting, Labour councillors led calls for West Sussex County Council (WSCC) to provide £1.3m worth of emergency funding to help schools through the funding crisis.

They asked councillors from all parties to put more pressure on the government to ensure schools have the funding they need.

Of the council's 224 schools in the past year, 29 had applied to a special county fund reserved for schools in financial difficulties. Others reported reserves were almost exhausted.

Labour councillor Michael Jones said: "At some point we have got to put our money where our mouths are, and support our strength of feeling with hard cash. If our schools are at this direst hour of need, then we should be there for them.

He acknowledged £1.3m was "only a modest amount" compared to the '£20m of

emergency funding asked from the government by headteachers', "but at least this would be something the council could afford, and would be of some real practical help."

Tory councillors responded to the call by giving £1m towards school counselling services. UNISON West Sussex is pleased to see all parties recognising the seriousness of the local situation caused by failed national austerity policies.

Schools' survey headlines

The UNISON West Sussex schools' survey ended in late January. Thank you to the hundreds of people who responded.

We're still analysing feedback, but here are the top ten headlines so far.

1. Over 80% said their restructure was financially driven, but
2. Only 36% said the process was managed well.
3. 78% said their restructure had increased their workload, with
4. 65% telling us it had lowered morale; and
5. 44% saying it had contributed to health and stress-related problems.
6. 48% said they had greater levels of responsibility after the restructure, with
7. 73% saying the number of staff available to do the work had got worse.
8. Worryingly, 47% told us educational outcomes for children had worsened (no-one said they'd improved),
9. 31% said safeguarding risks had increased (no-one said they had decreased); and
10. 65% said special needs and disabilities (SEND) provision had become worse as a result of their restructure.

These findings are extremely worrying. The fact that only one third of you thought your restructure was managed well sends an important message to school heads, HR advisers and business managers.

Perhaps most worrying is the perceived impact on children's attainment, with almost half of you telling us this had worsened, rising to two-thirds for SEND children.

We'll share our full findings with the 'Worth Less' campaign, the national union and the media. We'll include a special feature in the next edition of Branch Lines.



Website reveals massive school funding losses

Following publication of the government's final proposals for the new National Funding Formula (NFF), organisations representing school staff, including UNISON, have updated the schoolcuts.org.uk website to reflect the funding losses facing each school in England.

The picture is bleak. The website, (using funding data published by the DfE), suggests 98% of schools face a real terms reduction in funding with an average loss for each primary pupil of £339, and £477 for every secondary pupil.

According to the National Audit Office schools will face a real terms drop of £3 billion. This threatens the successful implementation of a new NFF.

Every English constituency stands to lose out from the government's proposals, with per pupil funding losses reaching over £1,000 in the worst hit cases.

Branch secretary Dan Sartin said: "The funding crisis means overcrowded classrooms, support staff not being replaced and parents having to pay towards the cost of lessons. Children, parents and staff deserve so much better."

To find out how your school is affected go to: www.schoolcuts.org.uk

Reorganisation deadline looming

Many West Sussex schools will be starting formal consultations on likely reorganisations beginning in March.

UNISON fears many schools delayed workforce and resource planning decisions pending the outcome of discussions on transitional funding (in advance of the introduction of the new schools' funding formula). This now sees changes not taking place until 2018 at the earliest.

West Sussex schools had been hoping for £20m emergency transition funding to be locally applied, before the introduction of the new formula. But at a meeting in early February, Bognor Regis MP and schools' minister Nick Gibb (pictured) failed



to reassure headteachers this would happen, refusing to grant their request. Even in his own constituency, he will see every school lose out with an average loss for every pupil of £309 in real terms. Inevitably, we fear this will lead to many major reorganisations and redundancies. We

hope this will not be the case, given the outcomes of our recent survey (see page 3), but we are preparing to support members if needed.

Consultation packs must be published by 15 March latest. Formal consultation on staffing changes must include UNISON representation. Should we find out your school is affected, we will be in contact.

However, if you hear anything please contact your workplace rep straight away. If you don't have one, elect one before 15 March. Use the form on our website home page.



New year, new course, new you

UNISON is offering grants to members studying at further education or first degree levels as part of the support we offer to help members get ahead and develop their careers.

We have a vast array of courses available, and we offer bursaries for courses run by other organisations, including the Open University.

The following grants are available for members studying at their own expense in 2017 on a first come, first served basis:

- learning support grants of £100 for members on further education courses or first degree level courses;
- Open University grants of £200 for 60 point courses at first degree level with the OU or £60 for 30 point courses.

We've had a few West Sussex members being awarded grants recently. In February one of our members was awarded £200 towards an OU course. To make sure you have the best chance of securing any sort of UNISON grant (not just education, but others such as winter fuel and school uniform grants) go to our website home page.

Academy chain cherry picking West Sussex schools

The University of Brighton Academy Trust (UBAT) has dropped its take-over of Southgate Primary School, Crawley because it found out the school was in special measures. This goes against one of the key principles of the Tories' academisation programme, in that it was supposed to improve poor performing schools.

The school should have converted on 1 February, but the trust told staff in December that after consulting Ofsted's inspection report, it would no longer be progressing with the conversion. It felt the measures it would have to introduce to improve the school could not be balanced against the needs of other schools in the trust.

Branch secretary Dan Sartin said: "Decisions such as this are completely unacceptable. No doubt we will see the emergence of a two-tier schools' system where academy chains only bid to run 'high performing' schools, leaving others to be managed by the County Council. And yet councils – which are being starved of cash –

will be forced to pick up expensive bills to support those schools. This cannot be fair. Situations like this are not helped at all by academies cherry-picking schools they would like to run. The failure of Tory education policy has resulted in schools like Southgate being subjected to inadequate 'due diligence' during academisation. Frankly, it's been a waste of time, resources and energy."



OFF THE GRID

West Sussex County Council has now launched its successor platform to the old 'Grid for Learning' which was decommissioned at the end of last year.

The new platform, hosted through a website, is called 'West Sussex Services for Schools' (WSSfS). It is important for members and UNISON reps because it hosts all the policies, guidance and procedures relating to your employment. So for example, everything to do with the sickness absence procedure, grievance

process, ill-health retirement, job evaluation, role profiles and health and safety, to name but a small fraction.

WSSfS does not have the same widely-enjoyed access as the old Grid for Learning. This means your school is now responsible for providing all staff with access to HR policies, guidelines and attachments to contracts of

employment. These must be provided in hard copy in a staff room or through the administrative office or on your school's intranet.

After negotiation, UNISON reps and branch officers will continue to have full access to real-time content on WSSfS. So if you need to access a document, or want support from UNISON because you know what you want to know but can't find the right document, contact your local school or academy UNISON rep, or the branch office.

3 What you will pay each month

Please tick the appropriate box for your earnings before deductions.

Annual pay		Your subscription
Up to £2,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£1.30
£2,001-£5,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£3.50
£5,001-£8,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£5.30
£8,001-£11,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£6.60
£11,001-£14,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£7.85
£14,001-£17,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£9.70
£17,001-£20,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£11.50
£20,001-£25,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£14.00
£25,001-£30,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£17.25
£30,001-£35,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£20.30
over £35,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	£22.50

4 Choose your political fund

One of the ways UNISON works on your behalf is through political campaigning. Your subscription includes a political fund payment so you won't pay any extra, but in UNISON you choose how you want that money to be used.

Please tick one box only.

- Our Affiliated Political Fund takes UNISON members' views directly into the Labour Party, working to promote UNISON policies.
- The General Political Fund is used to pay for branch, regional and national campaigns but is independent of any political party.

5 Choose how you wish to pay *Please tick ONE box only*

EITHER deduct from salary:

I wish to join UNISON and authorise deduction of subscriptions from my pay by my employer.

Signature

OR pay by direct debit:

please complete the direct debit form below

I wish to join UNISON and authorise deduction of subscriptions by direct debit

Date

Please go to unison.org.uk/privacy-policy to see how we will protect and use your personal information

Instruction to your bank or building society to pay by Direct Debit



Please fill in the form and send to UNISON West Sussex, address overleaf

Name and full postal address of your bank or building society

To: The Manager Bank/building society

Address

Postcode

Name(s) of Account holder(s)

Service User Number

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Reference number (for office use only do not complete)

Please pay UNISON Direct Debits from the account detailed in this Instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this Instruction may remain with UNISON and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my bank/building society.

Signature(s)

Date

Bank/building society account number

Branch sort code

Banks and building societies may not accept Direct Debit instructions for some types of account

COLLECTIVE ROUND-UP

Here's a summary of the main collective negotiations the branch is involved in across West Sussex schools.

Worthing High School

The school recently consulted its staff on proposals to change existing school hours. This would have made slight changes to lunch breaks, resulting in the school day finishing 15 minutes earlier. Our workplace rep at the school Jackie Parkinson made representations to school managers, outlining the negative impact this could have on support staff. The school has decided to put the decision on hold for at least 6 months, possibly up to a year. They will then revisit the decision from a more informed perspective.

Littlehampton Academy

We have a new workplace rep at the academy: Matt Pollard. Supported fully by the branch, he recently attended his first joint consultative committee (JCC) between the union and academy management. They discussed how support staff might be able to spend more time with teachers, enabling them to discuss children they were supporting and sharing important information. They also raised the issue of staff using 'walkie-talkies' when working with children who have challenging behaviours. Matt is doing a great job supporting members in liaison with the branch office in Chichester. Could you do the same? See our story on page 4.

Religious-based academy trusts

St. Philip Howard Catholic High School, Barnham will become an academy managed by the new Bosco Catholic Education Trust. It converts – together with St Mary's in Worthing – in April 2017. One of the main reasons given for its conversion was the impact of the loss or reduction of council services. It's likely some schools would not choose this route had the previous level of support provided by the council been maintained.

It's an example of a growing trend: many church-based schools are converting to academies led by religious-based trusts. In this case, it's the Catholic Diocese of Chichester.

St. Andrew's School for Boys in Worthing is considering conversion with the Anglican

Diocese of Chichester. Central School, Chichester already has. We expect similar moves from many church schools as their academy trusts become established.

UNISON West Sussex believes such decisions are a hangover from the abandoned Tory policy of the mandatory conversion of schools to academies. By the time this policy was revoked, many trusts had already been established.

Sadly, one of the main incentives for schools to academise is to take advantage of an unfair tax break not available to local authority schools: academies are not liable to pay VAT on capital works, whereas state schools must.

Desmond Anderson Primary, Crawley

This school recently started its conversion to an academy within the University of Brighton Academy Trust (UBAT). Unlike Southgate Primary (see page 5), this school is not in special measures. The first staff meeting held by the union to discuss the matter went well, gaining more members as a result. TUPE transfers appear to be going smoothly, with no serious issues reported back from our members.



Rydon Community College

West Sussex County Council decided to close Rydon Community College, the last remaining middle school in the county. The plan is for Year 6 pupils to transfer to other local primary schools and for years 7 and 8 pupils to be absorbed by Steyning Grammar School (SGS), but with education to be 'substantially delivered' from the existing Rydon site. It's an unusual and complex situation because though the council decided to close the school, with a consequent number of redundancies, Rydon itself will hear the dismissal appeals.

The council decided that TUPE did not apply and therefore Rydon staff would not transfer to other local schools. UNISON

pressed for a protocol which would find staff at risk jobs in other schools, similar to the one used in Worthing's age of transfer change which helped that go smoothly. Most schools in the area signed up to the protocol except for SGS, the biggest school in the group.

UNISON believes the SGS decision was unnecessary and unhelpful. SGS has redeployed some staff but appear not to be holding over ALL vacancies for first refusal for staff at risk. The branch has taken legal advice and this has been significant, so if members are sacked where suitable vacancies had been available we hope to get some positive outcome for them.

Burgess Hill Academy

This University of Brighton Academy Trust (UBAT) school recently started a reorganisation, but after poor HR advice from the trust, decided to complete it themselves. UNISON is disappointed with the trust's HR support and will be raising this with its management team. We are keen to develop policy in this area with the trust to ensure there is no repeat.

UNISON West Sussex offered advice to the school and mutually agreed to postpone the reorganisation consultation, subject to a further workforce review. The school has a

falling roll and consequently less money, so a headcount reduction is likely to be necessary. However, there are statutory requirements which must be followed to ensure fairness.

The union advised the school against proceeding with an unfair process, negotiating a pause to make sure any future changes would be conducted appropriately. We wait to hear from the trust HR management team, and will report in future issues. Ongoing discussions with the school and members have been entirely amicable and constructive.



Summerlea Primary School, Rustington

The impact of school funding cuts resulted in the school deciding to save money by reducing the number of teaching assistants (TAs).

The subsequent restructure impacted on both TAs and higher-level TAs (HLTAs). Proposals were discussed with UNISON West Sussex. Branch officers attended the first consultation meeting with the headteacher and affected staff then held further discussions with members likely to be impacted. We were able to identify suitable alternative employment opportunities for the majority, but there were a handful of cases needing more detailed work.

One of the main issues was making sure the correct TA role profile (job description) was used as the basis for redesigned jobs. Initially, the wrong profile had been selected, but after union intervention, this was corrected. Work is progressing on this issue.

Should your school need to re-profile its job descriptions before re-allocating to support staff, it's important to involve the union as early as possible. This will prevent decisions being imposed, as we can then work with school managers to improve the situation.

TA disputes in Derby and Durham

Teaching assistants (TAs) across the country are starting to feel the pressure of local council savings inflicted by government funding cuts to schools. Here we look at two examples.

In November, Durham TAs took industrial action for two days in a long-running dispute over cuts to their pay. They were threatened with being dismissed and re-engaged by Durham County Council on inferior contracts. This would have meant a loss of up to 23% of their pay. Over 90% of employees who voted backed strike action. Consequently, almost 100 schools were closed for two days. UNISON authorised £150,000 from its strike fund to support those taking action.

Derby school support staff continued to stage strikes up to Spring half term in their latest round of action against contract changes that have seen some of them lose up to 25% of their wages. Teaching assistants, school supervisors, admin

staff and other support workers took strike action between 7am and 1pm every day during the week beginning 16 January. This followed a two-day strike on 4 and 5 January, after UNISON members voted to reject a proposal from the council late last year, saying it would only compensate some of the workers losing out because of the changes. Staff staged a city centre 'love-in' on 8 February to remind shoppers and workers on lunch breaks that the pay dispute with the council is far from over.

UNISON Derby City branch thanked the West Sussex branch for its contribution to their strike fund. We sent solidarity greetings to the Derby members taking industrial action to defend their pay.

WORKPLACE REP PROFILE

Patricia Barrett

Patricia works as a higher level teaching assistant (HLTA) at Kingslea Primary School, Horsham. She covers for teachers and is a key worker for 'pupil premium' children, ensuring they have access to the same opportunities as their peers. She supports teaching across all age groups from years 1 to 6.

Patricia has been a UNISON member for eight years, with three of those as a workplace rep.

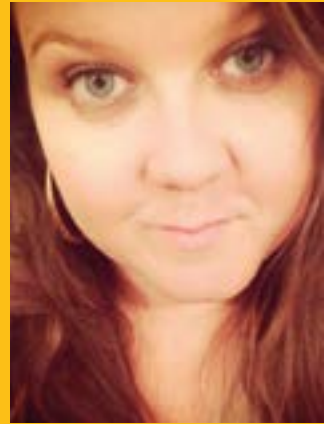
"I was greatly influenced by my Dad," said Patricia. "He was a hospital union steward when he worked for the health service, so being a union rep is in my blood!"

"I've been involved in collective negotiations involving terms and conditions of employment and changes to employee rights such as sickness absence. I go to preliminary discussions so I can advise

members before they attend important meetings. I find most problems can be tackled informally by having conversations between parties at a very early stage. It really prevents problems escalating into formal procedures.

"One of the main national issues for me at the moment is the government's failure to recognise the recently published professional standards for TAs. The government needs to make sure our pay reflects our skills and abilities.

"We don't yet know the impact of school funding cuts on Kingslea, but we do know the government is strangling school budgets. TAs are not a luxury. We have an essential role, especially in the education of SEND children."



Schools funding crisis impacts on UNISON too!

The increasingly desperate impact of the schools' funding crisis is not only affecting schools-based staff, but also our own resources.

The number of formal cases from schools lodged with the UNISON West Sussex branch between September 2016 and January 2017 has more than doubled to 25, compared to just 12 in the same period last year. These originate from some of the 53 'duties' recorded during the same period.

Duties include providing detailed face-to-face or telephone advice to

worried members, which can involve several hours' work. Formal cases can be very complicated, time-consuming and include the whole range of work-related problems such as grievances, disciplinaries and sickness absence.

Branch casework coordinator Dee Chauhan said: "We're seeing increasing numbers of sickness absence cases caused often

by increasing workloads as schools try to deal with severe funding pressures. As staff are made redundant, their workloads are devolved to those who remain, often with no increase in pay or allocated time allowance to perform those extra duties."

Branch secretary Dan Sartin said: "We will always support and advise our members, but we have noticed an increase in demand for our services as cuts begin to dig deep. Sadly, it's a sign of the times.

"It's always better if we have a rep we can link with in the school. All school members should elect a UNISON rep (see page 4)."



Overpayments? What to do.

The branch has received reports from a number of members who left schools last July and are only now in February receiving requests to repay overpayments made to them at the end of their previous employment.

In part this arises due to the confusion over how support staff are paid. Term-time staff are not paid when they are not working outside of terms (only their contractual holiday entitlement). Instead you receive your pay spread over 12 equal paydays. So staff who finish work at the end of the summer term will usually not receive payment for August, even when their contractual notice is given late and runs through August.

Late discovery of overpayments

And mistakes can be made. Sometimes this is due to the school not returning leavers' forms on time. Sometimes there are issues within the central admin of school payroll, which is undoubtedly a complex matter. But what has happened here is alarming because the overpayments have not

been picked up until January/February. So our members have reasonably assumed that payments made six months ago were theirs, and spent the money. The failure to administrate school payroll overpayment reclaims in a timely manner is down to both Capita and West Sussex County Council (WSSC) who manage the contract. But it is our members who are landed with repayment claims for overpayments made in distant memory.

'Estoppel'

In these circumstances, it is possible to make a defence against having to make repayments. A legal principle known as estoppel says that when someone can reasonably assume the money to be theirs and has spent it, they need not pay it back. If you're in

this situation, contact the UNISON office for advice and we will support you, as we are currently supporting a group of members. We have also told WSSC and Capita how their actions have upset staff, and of our belief that it's unnecessary to make reclaims at this very late stage.

Contract improvements?

We acknowledge that both parties are working hard to improve school payroll services, but clearly there were issues last summer which are still working through. Given we know schools are citing problems with payroll services as reason to academise, this is troubling. It's an indictment of county policy and performance. The new WSSC chief executive has pledged to improve the Capita contract. It will be five years old in October, so we will all be looking to see real improvement by that anniversary.