

NATIONAL UNION OF TEACHERS

FAIR PAY FOR TEACHERS

A message for parents, carers, school governors and the public from Christine Blower, Acting General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers (NUT)

BACKGROUND

You may have heard that the National Union of Teachers (NUT) is to ballot its members in schools for further strike action, following on from the action taken on Thursday 24 April 2008. This leaflet explains why the NUT has decided to ballot its members in schools and gives details of the NUT's ongoing campaign Fair Pay for Teachers.

PUTTING CHILDREN FIRST

The NUT's campaign Fair Pay for Teachers is in the interests of children as well as teachers. The NUT has always put the interests of children at the centre of our campaigns. We recognise that the interests of children and the interests of teachers are the same.

Protecting teachers' pay is the only way to protect education. If we allow teachers' pay to continue to fall in value, schools will not be able to attract and keep the teachers they need to deliver the first class education service that all children deserve.

The NUT uses strike action as a last resort. The decision to hold a one-day strike on 24 April 2008 was taken only because all other options to protect teachers' pay had been exhausted. The NUT is still prepared to talk to the Government about teachers' pay at any time.

PAY CUTS IN REAL TERMS

The NUT's decision to ballot our members for strike action was taken after the Government announced that teachers' pay would increase by 2.45 per cent from September 2008.

As you will know from your own experience, inflation is far higher than this. The overall inflation rate stands at 4.8 per cent at the time of writing. The increases for many essential items – such as food, housing, electricity and petrol – are much higher than 4.8 per cent.

Average pay settlements are at 4 per cent. The combination of high inflation and higher pay increases for other jobs means that teachers face reduced pay in real terms and a reduction in the value of their pay compared to others.

This is the fourth year in a row that teachers have been offered below-inflation pay rises. The NUT campaigns for better pay for all public sector workers including teachers. Also, teaching needs to attract a high number of graduates each year in the teeth of competition from private sector companies as well as other public sector employers.

TEACHERS' PAY – THE FACTS

The NUT always bases its case on the facts and our campaign *Fair Pay for Teachers* is no exception.

It is true that teachers' pay increased in value up until 2004, though not by as much as the pay of other professions. These increases did, for a time, make it easier for schools to recruit and retain teachers – you may have noticed this in your local schools.

In recent years, however, the value of teachers' pay has been reduced. Teachers have been given pay increases lower than the value of inflation in every year since 2005. The cost of living has increased significantly faster than pay. Individual teachers have already lost out on hundreds and, in many cases, thousands, of pounds. If the Government's proposals to reduce the value of teachers' pay are implemented, teachers will lose out even more.

Reductions in the value of teachers' pay will lead to greater recruitment and retention problems for schools. Your children's school may find it more difficult to recruit and retain the teachers needed to support your child's education.

When schools experience recruitment and retention problems, teachers may have to teach outside of their subject specialism to cover the lack of teachers qualified to teach certain subjects. There are now problems in recruiting teachers in a wide range of subjects such as English, mathematics, science, history, foreign languages and information technology. This shows that recruitment problems affect the whole curriculum. These problems will only get worse if reductions in the value of teachers' pay are not reversed.

Teaching is a graduate profession and needs to compete with other graduate employers. When potential teachers consider their career options at university, they are likely to be put off teaching when they see that they can earn more in other graduate professions. They can see that, on average, other graduates not only start on higher pay than teachers but receive further pay increases much more quickly.

The NUT wants to prevent the "boom and bust" in teachers' pay that has been a problem in previous decades. Teachers have seen their pay increase, only to have those gains wiped out as pay was subsequently held down. These "boom and bust" periods create teacher shortages, sap teachers' morale and make teaching unattractive to potential recruits. The end result is damaging to the education service and to the interests of your children.

YOUNG TEACHERS

Schools make decisions on the pay of individual teachers that are often influenced by the school's financial position. This means that teachers have to overcome a number of hurdles to access higher levels of pay. It will normally take a newly-qualified young teacher at least a decade to reach the highest pay point for a classroom teacher.

Young teachers face other significant problems. In addition to struggling to get on the housing ladder and facing high increases in essential items like energy and transport, young teachers also have to pay off their student loans at an interest rate pegged to inflation despite below-inflation pay rises.

The problems faced by young teachers mean that they are less likely to stay in the teaching profession. Independent evidence shows that pay in other graduate professions is much higher than in teaching, so young teachers will be lost to teaching if teachers' pay continues to fall in value. The investment in the training of those young teachers will be lost to the education service, as will the benefits to children of that training.

CONCLUSION

At the same time as the value of their pay has been cut, teachers face a heavy workload. Recent research has shown that teachers work more than 50 hours a week – hard work for the benefit of children. Surely the least they can expect is appropriate recognition for this work in terms of their pay?

The Government has said that we have a teaching profession to be proud of, but at the same time tries to reduce the value of teachers' pay. The Government has welcomed the rise in educational standards, but refuses to reward teachers for the part they have played in this.

The NUT hopes you will agree with us that to create a first class education service for the benefit of our children, we need to make sure that teachers receive proper, professional pay levels. We expect a lot from our teachers: dedication, commitment, long working hours. The least they should expect from the Government is fair pay for their work.

The NUT is determined to protect teachers' pay, for the benefit of children as well as of teachers.

Thank you for taking the time to read this leaflet.

Please support us

We would welcome your support for our campaign. Read more on our website www.teachers.org.uk/fairpay If you support us, tell your children's teachers; tell your MP; tell your friends and tell your local paper.