

Welcome to the NEU Southern Derbyshire district secretary report for the November 30th meeting. This report aims to inform you about the latest news and developments in the education sector, and to highlight the work and achievements of our district. Our district is in a comparatively strong position and is a district looked up to by others. This is because of the hard work of the local officers and caseworkers, who provide excellent support and representation for our members, and due to the attendance and engagement of members, who participate actively in our meetings and campaigns. We are proud of our district and we hope that you will find this report useful and interesting.

Accountability Workload: - One of the main sources of workload and stress for teachers and support staff is the excessive and unreasonable accountability regime that is imposed by the government, Ofsted, and school leaders. The NEU has been campaigning for a reduction of accountability workload and for a more supportive and collaborative approach to school improvement. The NEU has produced a library of resources to help members reduce accountability workload in their workplaces. These resources include guidance on how to challenge data collection, marking, lesson observations, performance management, and inspection. The NEU also offers training and support for members who want to take collective action to reduce workload. I encourage all members to hold meetings use these resources and audits, and to contact me if they need any assistance.

Building Safety: - Another issue that has been affecting some of our members is the safety of school buildings. Recently, a school in Derbyshire was evacuated and closed over building safety concerns. The school was found to have structural defects that posed a risk to staff and students. The NEU has been supporting the members affected by this situation and has been calling for urgent action from the trust, local authority and the government to ensure that the school is repaired or replaced as soon as possible. The NEU has also been campaigning for more investment in school infrastructure and for a national audit of school buildings to identify and address any safety issues. The NEU believes that all staff and students deserve to work and learn in safe and suitable environments.

Ofsted's Annual Report: - Ofsted recently published its annual report for 2023, which provides an overview of the quality and standards of education and care in England. The report acknowledges some of the challenges and pressures that schools and early years settings have faced during the pandemic, such as staff shortages, remote learning, and mental health issues. However, the report also criticises some schools for not providing a broad and balanced curriculum, for not meeting the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils, and for not having effective safeguarding arrangements. The NEU has responded to the report by challenging some of its findings and recommendations, and by calling for a fundamental reform of the inspection system. The Beyond Ofsted campaign argues that Ofsted's approach is still too narrow, punitive, and inconsistent, and that it does not reflect the reality and diversity of schools and early years settings. The NEU also calls for a more supportive and collaborative model of school improvement, based on trust, dialogue, and peer review.

Autumn Statement: - The government recently delivered its autumn statement, which sets out its plans for public spending and taxation for the next year. The statement included some announcements that affect education, such as a £1.8 billion increase in school funding, a £1.5 billion increase in early years funding, and a £250 million increase in teacher training funding. However, the NEU has criticised the statement for not going far enough to address the long-term challenges and inequalities that the education sector faces. The NEU points out that the funding increases are still insufficient to reverse the real-terms cuts that schools and early years settings have suffered since 2010, and that they do not take into account the rising costs and demands that schools and early years settings face. The NEU also highlights that the funding allocation is still unfair and unequal, as some schools and regions will receive more than others, and that the funding does not cover the full range of education provision, such as post-16, SEND, and adult education. The NEU calls for a more ambitious and comprehensive funding plan that ensures that every child and young person receives a high-quality and inclusive education, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Facilities Time: - One of the issues that we face as a district is that the Derbyshire facilities time agreement is not committed to by some multi academy trusts. This means that some of our members who work in academies do not have the same level of support and representation as those who work in maintained schools. This is unfair and unacceptable, and we are campaigning to change this situation.

Facilities time is vital for supporting union duties, such as:

- Negotiating with employers on pay, terms and conditions, policies and procedures, and health and safety
- Consulting with members and employers on issues affecting the workplace, such as restructuring, redundancies, and equality
- Representing members in disciplinary and grievance cases, and providing advice and guidance on employment rights and other matters
- Promoting learning and development opportunities for members and other employees
- Recruiting and organising new members and activists, and building strong workplace unions

Facilities time benefits not only union members, but also employers and the wider society. Research has shown that facilities time can:

- Improve employee relations and engagement, and reduce conflict and disputes
- Enhance productivity and performance, and save costs and resources
- Promote health and safety, and reduce accidents and injuries
- Increase skills and qualifications, and improve quality and innovation
- Advance equality and diversity, and combat discrimination and harassment

We believe that all our members, regardless of where they work, deserve to have access to facilities time and to be represented by their union in a fair and equal way. We urge all multi academy trusts to respect and recognise the role and rights of union representatives, and to commit to the Derbyshire facilities time agreement. We also call on all our members to support our campaign, and to get involved in our district structures and activities.

We Are The NEU: - The NEU is a democratic and member-led union, which means that its policies and priorities are decided by its members through representative groups and national conferences. These are places where members can debate and vote on motions and amendments, elect officers and committees, and hold the union leadership to account. Southern Derbyshire NEU encourages and funds members to attend these meetings and conferences, and to consider a local officer role in order to report to district meetings, so that the views and voices of all members are heard and represented. NEU Southern Derbyshire also invests in merchandise to celebrate and empower members to attend meetings. This year we have invested in beanies, hoodies, pens, and an array of other merch. These items help to create a sense of identity and solidarity among our members, and we use this to be visual and to promote the union's values and campaigns.

Together, we can make a difference: - I believe that the more members get involved in the union's democratic structures, the stronger and more effective the union will be. The NEU is committed to representing its members and to campaigning for a better education system for all. We need the involvement and support of our members at every level. One of the ways that we can strengthen our union and our voice is by building strong local democratic structures for equalities, inclusion, learning, health and safety, and overall school representation. These structures, which can be simply developed through regular meetings and dialogue enable us to share information, ideas, and experiences, to identify and address local issues and concerns, and to organise and mobilise our members for collective action. I am happy to support any member in a school without a rep to find one, or additionally to help existing reps to build these union structures with their school or trust.