

The latest news and announcements from Derbyshire UNISON

Cost-of-living crisis in schools

Cash-strapped school support staff are using their own money to help pupils and their families cope with the cost-of-living crisis, says UNISON



School support staff are paying for pupils' food, skipping meals and taking on multiple jobs to survive

A UK-wide union survey of more than 6,000 school workers reveals staff - including teaching assistants, catering and cleaning workers, librarians and sports coaches - are buying food for hungry pupils, and contributing towards the cost of uniforms, shoes and stationery.

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The findings have been released to mark Stars in our Schools, UNISON's annual celebration of school support staff that is being marked in schools across the UK.

Almost all the staff (98%) said they are concerned their pay isn't enough to cover the spiralling

cost of living. But despite these financial pressures, more than a fifth (23%) are using their own money to buy books, pencils and pens for pupils, and three in ten (30%) are helping pupils with the cost of uniforms, says UNISON. One in eight workers (13%) have used food banks in the past year,

with many saying they may need to turn to them again or are relying on their families to provide meals.

The survey also found intolerable financial pressures are forcing many employees to consider leaving the education sector for better-paid jobs elsewhere.

More than a quarter (27%) had already taken second or third jobs to make ends meet and nearly half (49%) are actively looking for other jobs.

The exodus of support staff is heaping even more pressure on the colleagues they leave behind who find themselves stretched even more thinly, UNISON adds.

UNISON head of education Mike Short said: "Schools are struggling to hold on to their support staff. Better wages are available elsewhere and that's causing a recruitment crisis.

"These staff are crucial to the smooth running of schools and to the learning experiences of pupils in the classroom. Their pay should better reflect the invaluable support they provide.

"Even though education workers are experiencing tough times themselves, they're still helping less fortunate pupils and their families. That speaks volumes about their generosity and dedication, but it should never have come to this. The government should be hanging its head in shame."

- The survey report is available [here](#).
- Case studies (names have been changed):

Heather has worked as a teaching assistant for four years. She said: "I'm looking for a new home because my £725-a-month rent is going up by more than £100. I'll be left with around £50 a month to live on. I'm going to have to get another job to pay the bills. Staff have a food donation box for pupils. I've never seen things as bad."

Geoff supports children with special educational needs and has worked in schools for more than 20 years. He said: "I work two jobs to make ends meet and have one day off a month. I can't afford to put the heating on. Instead I bought an electric blanket that costs a penny an hour to keep me warm. There's no incentive to do this job apart from the love of education and the pupils."

Sue has been a teaching assistant for 10 years and is considering leaving the sector. She said: "I have a three-year-old and I'm struggling to pay for childcare. We live with my parents because we're trying to buy a house, but our mortgage offer was withdrawn because we couldn't afford the higher payments. I'm considering taking another job or quitting work altogether."