

The latest news and announcements from Derbyshire UNISON

School staffing shortages

Of UNISON members surveyed, 92.3% reported their school was experiencing shortages of support staff and 83.4% that there were shortages of teaching staff.



Children with special needs feeling the brunt of staffing shortages

Primary school children with special educational needs are not getting the help to which they are entitled, because of support staff and teacher shortages, according to a new UNISON survey.

This is the most disturbing finding among many in the survey, which was conducted across schools in England in January this year.

UNISON members are among those attempting to keep things running in the face of the shortages.

Just over 3,000 members took part in the survey. Around two thirds (65.2%) of the respondents were from primary schools and just under one fifth (18.4%) from

secondary schools.

The majority work as learning support assistants in the classroom, with half providing whole class support and a further quarter providing support for learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Of these respondents, 92.3% reported that their school was experiencing shortages of support staff and 83.4% that there were shortages of teaching staff.

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The figures were slightly higher in primary schools.

The results of these shortages include:

- Mixing of class groups leading to large classes (19.3%)
- Difficulty running essential services, for example kitchens and tech support (27.4%)
- Children with additional/special needs left without support (56%)
- Individual children unable to attend school due to a lack of teaching assistant support (9.3%)
- Classes sent home (14.9%)
- Whole settings closed (2.4%).

More than half of support staff (57.6%) said that they were taking on extra responsibilities. Many respondents said that teaching assistants were being used to cover whole classes in lieu of an available teacher.

In the same period, public health data reported COVID-19 infection rates were higher in the primary school age group than in any other - creating yet another burden on beleaguered staff and children alike.

Leigh Powell, UNISON national officer for education and children's services, said:

"Support staff have stepped up to the plate as staff shortages in schools bite. The government needs to turn its attention to the impact of this - staff are exhausted, and are doing too much and for too little pay.

"Staff are starting to question whether they can continue to do this job," she added. "If they don't, who then suffers? The children, particularly young children and particularly those who need extra support at a vital stage in their development."