

The latest news and announcements from Derbyshire UNISON

Education parliamentary white and green papers

Pivotal roles should be recognised and rewarded



Education plans won't work if support staff are ignored

School catch-up plans will fail if the concerns of teaching assistants and other support staff aren't urgently addressed.

Commenting on the education white paper published this week, UNISON head of education Mike Short said:

"They're a key element in tackling the education backlog for every school. But without a clear plan to recruit and hold on to them, out-of-touch ministers are hobbling the chances of millions of pupils in need.

"Schools can't function without the dedication of support staff – like teaching assistants, caretakers, cleaners clerical and admin workers. Often the lowest paid, many put their lives at risk to

continue going into schools during the pandemic, ensuring vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers could carry on learning.

"By not mentioning them, ministers have shown that helping schools and pupils bounce back as quickly as possible is not their priority. Instead they're wasting vital time and energy pushing through unnecessary programmes to create more academies.

"For the white paper not to recognise the pivotal role support staff play in the catch-up

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programme - or tackle their low pay as living costs soar - beggars belief."

Commenting on the government's green paper on special educational needs and disability (SEND), Mike said: "The commitments are welcome, but much of this has been said before. What's needed is proper funding to put these measures into practice.

"Thousands of children are being let down because parents and schools struggle to access the support that's required in good time.

"To have any hope of improving the system, the government must tackle the huge shortage of teaching assistants and other support staff who barely get a mention in the green paper.

"TAs with appropriate training underpin all schools' work with pupils who have special educational needs. Unless they're paid significantly more, recruiting them in sufficient numbers won't improve any time soon."