

The latest news and announcements from Derbyshire UNISON

NJC local government and school pay

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Schools risk support staff exodus over pay

More than two in five (42%) teaching assistants, caretakers, cleaners and other school support staff are actively looking for better paid jobs because of the rising cost of living and persistent low pay in education, according to a UNISON survey.

The survey responses paint a bleak picture of school employees living with no heating or hot water because of broken boilers they can't afford to fix, worrying about how to pay for dental treatment, relying on their children for money, or going to food banks.

The findings reveal an overwhelming majority (96%) say the rate of pay for their school job isn't enough for them to cope with increasing prices. Three in ten (31%) say they only take home

between £1,000 and £1,199 each month. A similar proportion earn less than £1,000 a month.

The findings are released to coincide with the launch of Stars in our Schools, UNISON's annual celebration of the invaluable contribution made by all support staff in schools across the UK.

While the survey reveals how only half of school support staff (49%) feel valued at work, many say they do feel appreciated by their colleagues and children in school.

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Seven in ten (71%) are worried about paying their utility and council tax bills and more than four in ten (47%) are anxious about paying their mortgage or rent.

As money is so tight, a quarter (25%) have resorted to taking second or even third jobs simply to make ends meet and stay in the job they love. Four in ten (41%) say they've had to cut back on spending and 35% have borrowed money from friends and family just to get by.

Some say they've had to sell possessions online, others are working in nail bars, call centres, bars, restaurants and supermarkets, in addition to their job in school.

UNISON assistant general secretary Jon Richards said: "School support staff are a dedicated workforce who go the extra mile every day and work incredibly hard. Schools couldn't operate without them. But many have reached a point where they simply can't afford to stay in the job they love.

"Schools risk an exodus of support staff, as people reluctantly seek better-paid jobs. This is a terrible state of affairs, given the tireless work of support staff throughout the pandemic, ensuring schools remained open and free school meals were still provided.

"But the rising cost of bills, food and travel means many of the stars in our schools risk falling into serious debt or losing their homes. They simply don't earn enough for the incredible job they do. The government must make extra money available to enable schools to keep the support staff they're so dependent upon by paying them properly."

School support staff who took part in the survey highlighted the impact that the rising cost of living was having upon them and their families. Comments included:

"I cannot even pay my rent on my wages. I am renting a tiny two-bedroom place for £1,100 a month with my husband who has cancer and cannot work full time."

"As a single person, I am just over the threshold for any financial help from the government and struggle to keep on top of bills. I panic whenever I have to visit

the dentist or optician."

"I can only cope financially as my youngest son, who is 25, is still living at home. He contributes 50% towards all the bills and groceries. When he eventually moves out, I have serious fears about how I'll cope."

"I am struggling to keep my home, pay my bills and feed my children as I'm a single mother. I'm living on a credit card, which I can't afford to pay off."

"Childcare is half of my wages. With everything else increasing, I can't even cover the bills."

"I am being more careful with heating and buying food. I have told the children they won't be getting as much for Christmas this year as can't afford it."

A short report summarising the survey findings is [here](#)