

PAY UP! SAVE OUR SCHOOLS

We're still buzzing from our one-day national strike on 1st February as members of the NEU struck and demonstrated across the country, including 40,000 on the London march. This issue of *Hackney News* reports from just some of our schools.

Berger Primary



WE'RE TAKING A STAND

After the news of the successful ballot of NEU teachers, the members at our school agreed that it was essential to communicate effectively with the local community about why strike action is taking place.

We wanted to outline how the underfunded pay rise is affecting children, education workers and the education system as a whole. The members at the school agreed that, due to the cost-of-living crisis and increased workload, we were left with no choice but to take a stand.

Support flooded in

We notified the parents/carers of school closures. I was apprehensive about the response but I needn't have been, messages of support flooded in.

We decided to make the strike a positive learning opportunity for the children. Each class learned about the history of protest and why teachers have voted in favour of strike action.

In addition to this, the music lead within the school compiled a playlist of protest songs to be played throughout the week. We invited parents into school to join their children, making posters and placards for our picket line. Many attended, and there was an overwhelming feeling of solidarity and community spirit throughout the school. Schools are a community hub and have been the first port of call to many in



need of support. With such an essential role in our communities, the parents and carers recognise that we have not taken this decision lightly and were compelled to stand alongside us.

Atmosphere was electric

On the day of the picket, we covered the gates with posters made by the children and music played in the background. The atmosphere was electric and many parents attended the picket line with the children as well as current and ex-pupils.

Every teacher in the school attended to show their support, as well as a fantastic turnout from support staff and SLT. It felt like a huge hug from the local

community. We invited a local reporter to the picket to interview teachers and parents and to spread our message.

Maintain momentum

Since the picket line, the main discussions have centred around what we will do next to maintain momentum. We were inspired by the creative placards at the demonstration, and we are hoping to hold a meeting to create some together.

The demonstration put everything into perspective. I was struck by the sheer number of people taking a stand. It sent a strong message; and it was impossible not to be moved by it.

Rushmore



WhatsApp, honks and beeps

When the strike days were announced, the mood at our school was determined but nervous – at least half of the teachers hadn't been on strike before, and weren't sure what it would mean in terms of relationships with the senior leadership team and parents. We'd worked hard to get every vote posted (the NEU rep dashboard was super-useful for this!).

Once the strike day was announced, some friendly parents forwarded a message from me as NEU rep to parents' WhatsApp groups, saying why we were striking, and to watch this space for more info. The initial response from parents in the playground was overwhelmingly positive, and set the tone for a really constructive, collaborative atmosphere as we built towards the strike action.

Keen to show support

Buoyed by this, members of the PTA helped me to contact each class WhatsApp group with a new, dedicated group for picket and strike support. Within a couple of days, this group had around 50 members, all keen to show support in verbal and practical ways. This did involve sharing my phone number with parents, but I already have two children at the school, so a good number of them already had it, and I've never experienced any issue with overstepping professional and/or private boundaries.

Knowing that our parents were on board massively encouraged the teachers to hold a picket line. Some had an image of stressful, confrontational picket lines from images of the miners' strike, and it was great for them to realise that this activity would bring the community together, not divide it.

Our Headteacher was also very supportive throughout, and agreed that non-striking staff would be free to give up a day's pay and join the picket. Once it was clear that the school would be totally closed, we communicated to all school support staff that we wouldn't begrudge them earning a day's wage – support staff pay is criminally low across the sector!

On the day of the picket, we agreed to start reasonably late – I was there to set up from 8am, and parents arrived for 8.30 or so. We had brilliant signs,



City Academy

Very excitable!

We started our day with a very excitable picket, including two dogs, a baby and some trumpets! We created our own banners that showcased the creative talents of our team whilst conveying the serious nature of what we want this government to do.

Once we got on the way to Hackney Central the buzz really started to kick in. We met some fellow schools at the Town Hall and headed to the overwhelmingly (in a good way) busy Oxford Circus. We managed to worm

stickers to give out, musical instruments to make noise responding to car honks, pavement chalks for children to show their support and decorate the space. Support staff coming to work got a cheer, a biscuit and a sticker, and our head came out to show support and appreciate the size of the demonstration (and to receive a sticker of his own).

Community takes our side

Our team of children counting beeps, honks and bike-bell dings got well past 250 signs of support before we finished. The atmosphere was incredibly positive – we had all 20 NEU teachers, joined by a massive crowd of around 120 parents and children, and five dogs. It was a brilliant atmosphere, and wonderful for the teachers to see their community take our side and show such support.

Riverside Academy & Mossbourne Federation



Thanks!

On behalf of all the NEU members at Riverside Academy and the Mossbourne Federation as a whole, we would like to thank all the members of staff that helped make the day a success.

We would also like to say a special thank you to the members of the local community who helped feed and water the picket line with hot coffee and pastries. However, we were mostly blown away by the encouragement of the parents and children who created their own impromptu protest outside the school!

We are all very proud of what we achieved together!

This was the first time many of the Riverside teachers were on a picket

line. The energy was a mixture of nervousness and excitement, but mostly excitement – we all felt the monumental importance of this moment.

As new teachers and new members to the union we were not entirely sure what to expect in organising a protest. So we decided to keep it simple.

Day of action planned

As elected representatives, we went around our respective Key Stages and asked who would like to join an NEU WhatsApp group.

Through the group chat we arranged

to get all the union members together in a room and were able to discuss all the details of the day.

From what time to start the picket line, what colours we should wear, suggested chants to sing, what placards to design, designating who was going to distribute flyers, to the route we would take to the march. Before we knew it, we had a day of action planned!

We look forward to gathering more support for the next round of strikes. We hope that this will inspire others to stand up for everyone's rights, good working conditions and fair pay.

Haggerston Secondary



Banners high

The banners were collected, the placards stacked, and the day was ready for us all.

We gathered in small numbers at the start but the weather brightened and we soon began to grow as an impressive number of staff joined our picket. Smiles and chilly weather welcomed members from different faculties and subjects, from each of the floors of our 1,000-strong school.

As we stood on our picket lines, we welcomed in support staff who had to chosen to come in and also asked teachers to join our action. The morning brought lots of opportunities for discussions and laughter as we waved our flags, sang our songs and lifted our banners. We felt like a united and cohesive NEU school membership.



