

SOUTHERN REGION SCHOOLS COMMITTEE

28th January 2025

Online Meeting – Chessington

Chaired & hosted by Katie Feighan, Nick Day

Introductions

Katie introduced herself and welcomed in Nick Day who will be supporting Katie with schools. Nick has looked after many schools in differing local authorities all across the Region. Donna Spicer also introduced herself – she has been a member for over 25 years – and is the National Schools Chair and representative. At this meeting a request was made to discuss the SSSNB. Stacey Booth, National Schools Officer has been invited to update.

SSSNB

Stacey welcomed Nick and introduced herself as the National Officer for Schools and Academies. In 2009, the Labour Government took steps to create a separate body for support staff. While teachers already have their own bargaining unit for salary negotiations, the goal was to establish a similar unit for support staff. However, Michael Gove opposed the idea of staff having their own negotiating body.

The incoming Labour government committed to reintroducing the SSSNB through legislation. In October, this was formalized into law. The three trade unions—GMB, Unison, and Unite—sit on the board alongside employers. The bill is currently moving through Parliament and is expected to receive Royal Assent by the summer, though there is no constitution in place at this time. Back in 2009, there were few academies, and the current work aims to ensure that academies are included in the SSSNB. At present, only the three NJC unions are part of the SSSNB.

There is some resistance from certain academies, but minimum standards will be established for everyone. We are currently working on the formation of the constitution and the overall structure. Stacey will be part of the working groups with the DfE, focusing on job profiles and overseeing the transition from the NJC to the SSSNB. So far, one consultative exercise has been conducted. The survey, which concluded last year, has been submitted to the DfE, who are appreciative of the feedback.

Robert: Many people were affected by the last evaluations—what measures are in place now? The NJC has started addressing this and ensuring that transitional profiles are in place, with roles now being fit for their intended purpose. This should be reflected moving forward.

Stacey: Any role can be determined locally, and we must ensure that unions play a part in this. The goal is to improve both pay and conditions.

Robert: The issue last time was that each case was dealt with by different local authorities, which led to an imbalance. Pay must be negotiated nationally. Support staff in academies do not receive higher salaries; leadership staff do.

Nadine: There are different wages for the same job. Does London weighting affect this? Not all academies recognise unions. Do all academies in the Southern region accept GMB as a union?

Stacey: Improving Education Together has partnered with the government. We can now see policy changes and encourage members to provide feedback. The Secretary of State attends these meetings. Some academies do not recognizs unions, so we need recognition and legislation.

Joan: Regarding Robert's point about generic job descriptions, different job titles should be used, but they should remain generic. Since the employer is the same, we will submit recommendations. [National negotiations are important, but local negotiations might also feed into job profiles. Employers can create new job titles that align with national profiles. Joan understands that they use HAY. The NJC is the better scheme.]

Robert: The issues we faced with set job descriptions for single-status roles were narrow, leading to individual appraisals and long questionnaires. These were not suitable for school staff. In Lewisham, we had to fight to maintain pay levels as many people saw their pay decrease instead of increasing. We need assurance that this won't happen again.

Stacey: This should not occur. We are developing educational profiles. Profiling for education is still in progress, and this is key to our efforts. The NJC/GLPC scheme needs reform, and work has begun on this. Pay will be negotiated from 2027, but we need to lay the right foundations now. We will ensure that the views of members are central to the process.

Robert: We should aim for roles to reach the maximum pay, not just the average, with no levelling down.

Karina: Our school has a mix of LA and academy contracts, with more senior members of support staff employed by the council.

Stacey: The United Learning Trust employs both LA and academy staff, so the terms will differ. Pay negotiations are challenging, but we must ensure that TUPE is respected. There is also a lack of clarity regarding holiday pay, so we should follow up with Katie and Nick [Brazell-Harper to check holiday pay in the salary details]. The NJC provides guidance on this matter. Schools don't always itemise holiday pay, but Lib can also review and check the calculations.

Maria: Can LAs that are not part of the NJC opt out, as they are lobbying to do so?

Sandra has a meeting this week to promote the SSSNB, but some LAs are resisting being brought into line. Our members are unhappy with this, and we need a strong argument.

Schools cannot opt out of the Teachers' Pay Scheme, so support staff should be treated the same and not allowed to opt out of the SSSNB. There are also discussions about unqualified teachers in the Children and Wellbeing Bill. This should be circulated to the group.

Amendments are being pushed through, but they will not be able to opt out. Regarding pay awards and performance-related pay, many schools are looking at changing the dates. The new pay structure is just being implemented and is not performance related. However, schools may choose to make pay awards in April or September.

All staff should receive an April award to ensure no one misses out. The lowest grades are approaching minimum wage levels. Can the School Negotiating Board address this? We need an anniversary date for pay increases, and everyone should be moved over. Transitioning will take time, but the DfE is conducting a consultative exercise in the spring. Stacey will provide dates. This will raise several issues, but we need to ensure uniformity.

Sandra: I work at a faith school—will they be included in the scheme? They are term-time only (TTO) employees, and there are issues with sick pay. Five weeks are unpaid during the year. HR will explain the payment details. NJC has guidance on this issue.

Lib: We can look at national guidance and review it. Please send over any information.

Sandra: For the last two years, our Business Manager has not provided job descriptions. There are concerns that SLT is trying to change job roles, with more children with complex needs being assigned to us. Our members are becoming specialist carers in their roles with no recognition. SEN children are now placed in more mainstream schools, and this needs to be reflected in the SSSNB.

Lib: We can assist with local issues.

Robert: We've had trouble with specialist roles in the past, as qualifications within those roles were not standardized. It's difficult to argue for the appropriate level of qualification. [Skills and qualifications are a part of the SSSNB. Those with skills will be kept in their roles, but new entrants will need to meet a certain standard. There's a fine line in protecting those without certain skills.]

Katie: Regionally, we are tasked with reaching every school. We are working through each LA to ensure members are aware of the SSSNB. It's a regional target, and any help in encouraging SSSNB meetings would be appreciated. There is a two-year time frame to build engagement.

Donna: It's great to see engagement across the GMB regions. Would a webinar work? We could run regional conferences for school support staff and then a national conference. We want to ensure school support staff are aware and supported.

Katie: We need to find a balance between face-to-face meetings and webinars.

NJC Pay

Stacey: The joint committee met earlier this month and put forward a claim based on the pay survey. The national school committee and LA agreed on the headlines—support staff would now have the right to take a day off in term time for personal reasons. Some schools

already offer this, but not all. The committee discussed a £3k flat-rate increase, and Sharon Wilde and Stacey reviewed spinal points. There is also a demand for a reduction in the working week by two hours for local government workers, allowing them to take a day off within their contractual time.

Robert: How will this work for TTO support staff who take a day's annual leave during term time? Will they be required to make up for it during the holidays? [Calculations will be done locally. Stacey will follow up with Robert regarding TTO staff and full-time staff time off, ensuring that full-time staff are not disadvantaged.]

Sarah: How will we ensure the £3k increase per person? There is a campaign for additional funding for schools, hoping the government will provide more money for support staff again this year. However, schools cannot afford this without additional funding.

Stacey: If there is a change in government, everything could change. In education, we are making significant progress. We need to focus on the positives.

Robert: Why are we the only ones who can't attend special days? We need clarity on the language used. Schools have relied on the goodwill of staff, but we don't want to call it a "duvet day." It's not just about annual leave—it's about work-life balance. Schools need to show appreciation for staff, and employers need to be flexible to support our campaigns.

Donna: Looking at the pay claim, all staff would be able to take at least one day off during term time. Support staff should not be penalized for attending events. All three unions will adhere to the timetable so that support staff do not lose Universal Credit. We are aware that some councils stagger payments to prevent members from losing out.

Ava: There are concerns from members on Universal Credit regarding the timing of pay awards. Pay is often not agreed until later in the year, but authorities need to be informed in advance. This creates complications.

Lib: Employers must follow DWP policy, but the problem is that staggering payments creates difficulties. We are working to change these rulings, and the Labour government will hopefully take action.

Stacey: Questions about moving into the SSSNB will allow us to have a single bargaining unit, but we must continue working with the NJC for now.

Robert: Any movement on the strike threshold?

Stacey: This will be addressed in the Employment Rights Bill.

Katie: Thank you, Stacey, for your support and for attending today.

WhatsApp Group

Currently, there are 100 reps in the group. Please email Katie if you'd like to be added. A zero-tolerance statement will also be included in the group.

TA Level 5

Alison: Last week, we discussed Level 5 courses for support staff and how they would work. Once the SSSNB is in place, we can show progression for staff. Level 5 is a fantastic course, but we need to ensure that qualifications are reflected in their pay.

Marzenna: In Merton, we have Levels 1, 2, and 3, then HLTA, which is on the pay scale. Where do TAs at Level 4/5 fit into the pay scale? Katie will raise this at the next National Schools Meeting. This will help new support staff rather than existing staff.

Donna attended the initial meeting regarding pay levels and was told it was up to individual schools, but schools do not always pay according to trained levels. Under the SSSNB, job roles will be assessed, but many questions remain unanswered.

Karen: I agree with Marzenna. Where does Level 4 fit in? HLTA is a status, not a qualification. When did this change? This needs to be clarified. Schools should be willing to offer career progression, and the SSSNB will help with this.

AOB

Nadine: How can we encourage individuals to become union members and save money?

Robert: The national website needs updating—some information is outdated. Links will be provided in the chat to check that the links are correct. [School noticeboards should be up to date; Katie will check them.]

Sue: The Menopause Course is worth attending for reps.

Katie: The next meeting is likely to be at the end of April.

Meeting Closed at 11:55 am