

LET'S MAKE OUR PRIMARY SCHOOLS 'SATS FREE ZONES'!

NUT CONFERENCE VOTES FOR NATIONAL ACTION ON WORKLOAD AND CUTS

Since 'Classroom Teacher' was launched, we have been campaigning for the NUT and other teacher unions to launch national action on workload.

As we said in our leaflet handed to delegates at NUT Conference, "unions can't just act as giant 'casework' organisations. To really defend members, we have to bring teachers together to tackle workload through national action"

We're pleased to report that NUT Conference unanimously supported this policy. Now, we have to keep up the pressure to make sure that it is carried out!

The key amendment that was agreed confirmed the need for the NUT to fight for a National Contract for teachers that sets clear limits to class sizes, teaching hours and our overall working week. Crucially, it also laid out an action campaign to win such a Contract.

The agreed policy called for a programme of action that would draw teachers together across England and Wales. It should include strike action that would hit the headlines as teachers demonstrate together. (see over)

Following successful ballot results from both unions, the NUT and NAHT have jointly given the go-ahead for a boycott of May's Key Stage 2 SATs.

Heads and classroom teachers must now work together to build as widespread a boycott as possible. We can send a clear message to the next Government to listen to teachers and the clear advice from educational research: Ditch SATs and League Tables!

SATS damage education

Let's seize the opportunity we have to stop:

- Schools and staff in English schools being unfairly compared through League Tables that take no account of the many different challenges facing different schools.
- The 'fear of failure' enforcing a narrowing of the curriculum that leads much of Year 6 to be dominated by 'teaching to the test' to artificially boost SATs scores.
- Imposed targets being used to bully schools and teachers and prescribe what we teach.
- An unreliable assessment system condemned by educational research such as the Cambridge Primary Review.
- The annual waste of £23 million which could be so much better spent on schools.

Reports from around the country show that momentum for action is building. For example, 44 Heads voted to support a boycott at a meeting in Calderdale - only 6 were definitely opposed to action.

A Lewisham Headteacher quickly called an assembly for Year 6 to tell them that there would be no SATs this May. Children cheered!

Some staff will be worried about the short notice (see overpage) but a boycott is right for schools, children and parents. Let's do it!

How to build the boycott

- Call meetings of school staff and encourage your Head to announce a boycott.
- Call on your Head not to open the 2010 Maths and English SATs papers.
- Class teachers should make clear that they will not invigilate SATs – the Pay and Conditions Document states that teachers do not have to.
- Discuss with other schools to give each other confidence to spread the boycott.
- Get leaflets and letters to parents to explain why your school will be boycotting SATs.
- Organise leafleting and stalls in local shopping areas.

Action and Change for Teachers

What do you want in workload guidelines?

... It should also include 'non-strike action' which would allow teachers to refuse excessive demands and instead stick to clear union guidelines setting out limits on weekly workload.

The Conference agreed that we would urgently approach the new Government - whoever it turns out to be - to demand a clear and acceptable National Contract is introduced. If those talks fail, then the national ballot should be held.

However, Conference made clear that we shouldn't just wait for those talks. We agreed that preparation for the ballot should begin immediately, from the start of this summer term. **School groups and Local Associations should meet urgently to spread the news and to feedback what you would like to see in the union's workload action guidelines.**

Prepare for joint action on education cuts

NUT delegates also voted for joint action with other unions to defend our pay, jobs and pensions from the cuts that all the main parties are lining up for after the General Election.

Conference agreed that we should organise joint meetings with other local unions fighting cuts, and build together for a big national demonstration to warn a new Government of our determination to defend public services from cuts. That should be a preparation for strong joint action - approaching "other national trade unions to join with us in organising a co-ordinated ballot for a 24 hour public sector national strike as a swift response to any attempt by an incoming Government to impose a programme of public spending cuts".

Supply Teachers get organised

NUT Conference debated many other issues. It condemned OFSTED, bullying of staff, and the continued expansion of Academy, Trust and the proposed "Free" Schools.

Lucy Orchard, a supply teacher from Devon made a big impact at NUT Conference in lobbying delegates to support the rights of supply teachers. Qualified teachers are having their pay and jobs undermined as schools employ cheaper non-teacher qualified staff to cover for absences.

Over the Easter break, Lucy and other members of Supply Teachers UK got national press coverage for their cause with a march on the DCSF. You can find out more by joining the Facebook group: 'Support for Supply Teachers UK' or emailing Lucy at supplyteachersuk@hotmail.com.

What do we tell Year 6 after all that SATs preparation ?

Teachers would have liked the boycott announcement to have come much earlier in the year. But trade union legislation meant that for the NUT and NAHT ballots to be legally valid, they could only take place a few weeks before SATs week.

Teachers mustn't focus on the wasted effort of this year - think about all the wasted energy we can save in future! If - and only if - a boycott is launched this year, then teachers will at last feel confident to stop 'teaching to the test' with a new Year 6 from next September.

After months of telling Year 6 students that these SATs are so important, it's inevitable that some staff may have mixed feelings about suddenly announcing a boycott. But we won't be letting Year 6 down by boycotting! These tests are no use to them!

What do we report to parents?

It's time that we were honest with children and parents and explained that their education will be better off without SATs. Many parents are already unhappy about the pressure their children are being put under and will support the boycott. Schools can explain to parents that they will still be reporting teacher assessments - which will give a much better picture of achievement than one-off SATs tests ever could.

Boycotting SATS does NOT mean having to suddenly do lots of additional assessments or set alternative tests instead. Don't set tests in "SATs week" - send a clear message that you are boycotting and rely on your existing assessments !

Classroom Teacher

... is an initiative ...
by, and for, classroom teachers
... voicing the concerns and
experiences of classroom teachers
... so we can build action to win
change for classroom teachers

If you want :

... help organising a strong Union group in your school
... to share your views about the pressures teachers face
... to take action to defend teachers and education ...

Get in touch :

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