

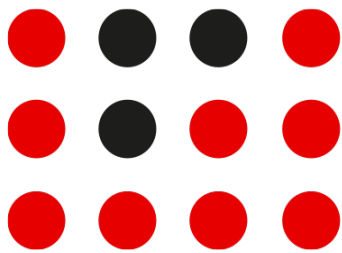
Time to value School Support Staff



The case for a Wales Negotiating Body



**Labour Research
Department**



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Foreword from Jess Turner, UNISON Cymru regional secretary



A School Support Staff Negotiating Body for Wales can free thousands of women from poverty

You may be shocked to learn that many of those entrusted with our children's welfare and supporting their learning in schools are trapped in in-work poverty.

I'm talking about the biggest group of employees in schools, the thousands of support staff. Many take second jobs to survive or are forced to rely on benefits to keep their heads above the water.

They are overstretched and underpaid. Schools couldn't function without them and I think Wales is letting them down. This is a gender issue; support staff are predominantly female.

They are trapped by term time only pay that calculates their monthly wage based on the 39 weeks they are in school, unlike teachers and head teachers who are paid for the full year.

Career development and training opportunities are limited, and job descriptions can be vague. Support staff are regularly doing tasks above their grade for no extra pay.

If we want an education system that delivers the best for young people, we need to talk about how best to ensure the whole education workforce is treated and rewarded fairly.

This Labour Research Department report commissioned by UNISON expertly concludes the best way to do that is through a School Support Staff Negotiating Body for Wales. We ask for your support in lifting support staff and their families out of poverty.

Jess Turner

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Introduction

School support staff are vital to the success of Wales's education system. They help children learn, keep them safe and included, support those with additional needs, and allow teachers to teach. Yet despite their importance, this workforce is among the lowest paid in the public sector. Low wages, fragmented conditions and a lack of national recognition make it increasingly difficult for schools to recruit and retain the staff they need.

Foregrounding the voices of support staff, supported by survey data (including one of 1409 support staff undertaken for this paper), interviews with stakeholders, reviews of the literature and Welsh policy priorities, this report sets out the case for creating a Wales School Support Staff Negotiating Body (WSSSNB).

It lays out the contribution made by support staff, the challenges created by the NJC framework that sets their terms and conditions, and the risks of continuing with the current unsustainable system. It also considers the financial implications of a pay uplift, the funding mechanisms available to government, and the wider benefits of reform.

These benefits are not only educational, but also economic and social: reducing staff turnover, narrowing the gender pay gap, lifting families out of in-work poverty and strengthening local economies. The report argues that a national negotiating body would give school support staff a proper voice, deliver consistency and fairness across Wales, and ensure that the investment already made in schools achieves the best possible value for pupils, parents and communities.

1. The value of School Support Staff

“...they’ve become foundational in our schools, in helping our children to stay safe and to learn and to be educated in buildings that function properly” – Councillor Hunt, Leader of Torfaen Council

Teaching assistants make up the largest part of the support staff workforce, working directly with pupils to provide one-to-one and small group support, deliver interventions for children with additional learning needs, and help classrooms run smoothly. Alongside them, technicians, administrative staff, catering teams, cleaners, midday supervisors, librarians, and other staff all play critical roles in creating a safe, functioning, and welcoming school environment. Together, they ensure that teachers can teach, pupils are supported, nourished and cared for, and that schools operate as effective communities for learning.

1.1 Mapping the schools workforce

TABLE 1: SCHOOL WORKFORCE COMPOSITION 2024-25

	Total Teachers	Higher Level Teaching Assistants	Teaching Assistants	Special needs support staff	Pastoral support staff	Total frontline SSS	Total technical/ admin staff	% that are female	% Part-time	Total Support Staff
Whole of Wales	26,575	2,300	14,375	4,195	1,235	22,195	4,655	90.8%	43.3%	26,850
North Wales	5,875	585	2,895	1,110	300	4,900	1,055	92.0%	57.5%	5,965
Isle of Anglesey	580	65	230	195	10	505	95	94.2%	48.8%	605
Gwynedd	1,045	120	360	285	25	790	140	91.9%	64.0%	930
Conwy	925	95	450	110	50	705	165	89.1%	61.7%	875
Denbighshire	920	90	420	130	70	710	195	89.6%	42.1%	915
Flintshire	1,325	110	710	205	100	1,125	245	93.8%	64.5%	1,380
Wrexham	1,080	105	730	180	45	1,060	195	92.8%	57.4%	1,255
South West and Mid Wales	7,330	495	4,505	1,255	325	6,605	1,315	90.9%	46.6%	7,925
Powys	1,040	70	530	120	35	755	220	91.3%	57.9%	975
Ceredigion	590	55	260	140	15	470	80	92.0%	33.0%	560
Pembrokeshire	950	85	560	205	50	900	195	91.7%	33.9%	1,090
Carmarthenshire	1,605	90	935	275	55	1,355	270	89.6%	32.8%	1,630
Swansea	1,990	125	1,315	425	140	2,010	355	91.8%	74.6%	2,365
Neath Port Talbot	1,150	70	905	90	30	1,110	195	90.0%	20.8%	1,300
Central South Wales	8,430	795	4,335	1,220	395	6,770	1,400	89.9%	36.6%	8,165
Bridgend	1,295	65	630	200	70	970	230	91.6%	39.5%	1,190
Vale of Glamorgan	1,385	130	735	295	55	1,230	215	90.0%	33.8%	1,450
Rhondda Cynon Taf	2,035	230	925	280	120	1,555	360	93.5%	43.6%	1,915
Merthyr Tydfil	470	80	315	70	20	485	60	90.0%	19.1%	550
Cardiff	3,245	285	1,730	375	135	2,525	525	86.9%	35.6%	3,060
South East Wales	4,940	425	2,640	610	215	3,910	885	90.7%	31.7%	4,795
Caerphilly	1,485	130	815	165	65	1,185	240	91.9%	33.7%	1,425
Blaenau Gwent	535	45	285	110	25	465	75	89.9%	19.3%	545
Torfaen	760	95	385	115	55	650	140	88.7%	27.7%	795
Monmouthshire	660	55	350	65	25	495	110	92.6%	31.1%	610
Newport	1,505	100	800	160	50	1,110	300	90.1%	37.0%	1,420

Source: StatsWales, LRD calculations based on the Pupil Level Annual School Census 2024-25: Support staff and teachers by local authority, region and category¹

Majority of the schools workforce

The table above shows the composition of the school workforce across the 22 counties of Wales as of July 2025. There are 26,850 support staff in schools in Wales according to the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC). Note that the figures in the table above do not include cleaning, grounds and catering staff.

Three in five (62.1%) school support staff are employed as teaching assistants, 13.8% of whom are higher level teaching assistants. There are 4,195 Additional Learning Needs (ALN) support staff, and a further 4,655 who have admin or technical roles.

In 2024-25 there were more support staff in schools than teachers, underlining the importance of school support staff to delivering children's learning in schools across Wales. The majority of school support staff work in primary schools (59.1%) or secondary schools (24.1%), with the rest being employed by Special or Middle schools and nurseries.²

Education Workforce Council data reveals large proportion in supply roles

Learning support workers must register with the Education Workforce Council (EWC) each year. There were 35,996 registered in-service learning support workers in Wales in 2025. By comparison, there were only 31,048 registered in-service teachers. The number of registered learning support workers in Wales overtook the number of teachers in 2018.³

The breakdown of the 2025 EWC registration data shows that 26.0% of registered school learning support workers are in supply roles and 21.6% were "out of service", meaning they were not employed in a school at the time of registering. (This compares to 11.4% and 12.0% respectively for those registered as teachers.) This reflects the precarity experienced by the school support staff workforce. The figures also show that 3,697 people are registered as both teachers and school learning support workers.⁴

There are three different datasets that record the number and composition of school support staff in Wales: the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), the School Workforce Annual Census (SWAC), and the registration data gathered by the EWC. This report primarily uses PLASC data.

PLASC and SWAC are both annual censuses of the school workforce, but there are some differences in the methodology. For instance, PLASC includes staff employed on a contract of a term or more, whereas SWAC includes staff who are employed on a contract of 28 days or more. PLASC data is collected in January, whereas SWAC data is collected in November.⁵

The higher number of school support staff recorded as in-service by the EWC (35,996) as compared to PLASC (26,850) or SWAC (29,250) is due to the EWC's inclusion of workers in supply roles. The EWC notes: "For the school sector in particular, unlike SWAC, our data includes all supply staff, peripatetic workers, freelance workers, and others who provide education or training in a school, as well as other education settings."⁶

Overwhelmingly female workforce

The workforce is overwhelmingly made up of women. Women make up 90.8% of school support staff compared to 74.3% of teachers. The working conditions of school support staff are therefore also a gender equality issue.

The new UNISON Cymru survey of more than 1400 school support staff found that more than half of them were in single-income households.⁷

"A lot of school support staff are women and a lot of them are single parents as well, because the role fits in with looking after the children." – Anne, UNISON rep

Outsourced and agency workers

Some school support staff are employed through outsourced contractors or agencies, rather than being employed directly by the school or local authority. Catering and cleaning staff are an important section of the schools' workforce, but their employment conditions and the day-to-day reality in schools can set them apart from their colleagues.

A typical arrangement for delivering catering and cleaning services is for schools to have a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the council, and the council delivers the service. Employees are therefore direct council employees. Alternatively, the council may contract a private company to fulfil the SLA, in which case the support staff will be employed by the private company rather than the local authority. Some schools go directly to a contractor or self-operate their services, bypassing the council SLA.

A new survey of UNISON branch secretaries identified ten councils in Wales where at least some schools are outsourcing cleaning services to a private contractor, and five councils where catering is similarly outsourced. These contracts may be organised by the council or directly by schools. Outsourcing companies taking on these contracts include Chartwells, Sodexo, Mitie, Solo Services Group and Aramark.⁸

For example, in Cardiff, the council has a SLA with several dozen schools and provides a range of services (including cleaning, catering, school management, HR, security and waste) under the name Cardiff Education Services. Schools that do not take part in the SLA use contractors (Aramark or Chartwells) or self-operate their catering and cleaning.

In some cases, councils have established a local authority trading company (LATCo) to provide cleaning and catering services in schools. For example, Newydd Catering & Cleaning and the Big Fresh Catering Company were established by Flintshire County Council and Vale of Glamorgan Council respectively. However, LATCos are relatively uncommon in Wales.⁹

Cleaning and catering workers employed by the local authority are already covered by the NJC. LATCo employees may be covered directly or indirectly by the NJC; pay at the Big Fresh Catering Company is linked to council rates, for instance.¹⁰ Some facilities workers were transferred to private employers from council contracts, and so their pay and conditions may have some indirect connection to the NJC. However, many facilities workers in schools who are employed by a private company are not covered by any collective agreement.

Similarly, some teaching assistants are employed through agencies. Councils spend tens of thousands of pounds on agency supply staff each year, including teaching assistants. There are more than forty Education Recruitment Agencies in Wales, and Freedom of Information requests found that sixteen councils spent a total of £78 million on agency teachers and teaching assistants in the 2023-24 school year. Cardiff Council, Wales' largest education authority, spent more than £20 million.¹¹

1.2 The 'glue' that holds schools together

“Schools cannot function without teaching assistants – find me a teacher who will say they can manage without!” – Helen, teaching assistant

When schools closed in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic, support staff kept them running. They opened classrooms for the children of key workers, supervised online learning, and were often the first line of safeguarding for vulnerable pupils. Many took on unfamiliar roles: catering teams delivered meals to vulnerable pupils, cleaning staff implemented enhanced hygiene protocols, and 49% of teaching assistants covered staff absences, with 51% managing or leading classes on their own.¹²

The same workforce that made education possible during the pandemic is now central to delivering the new curriculum, the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code and wider Welsh education reforms. The question is whether their role will be properly valued in the years ahead – or left invisible until the next crisis.

“Following on from the pandemic, a lot of children have different anxieties and school attendance is lower. Learning support assistants do a lot of bespoke work with individual children – they’ve never had training on this before. Covid has changed the complexity of the role and the range of skills needed has changed.” – Gerard McNamara, headteacher

1.3 Supporting teaching and learning

Research shows the contribution of school support staff has a real impact. The Deployment and Impact of Support Staff in Schools (DISS) study (2009) found that support staff reduced teacher workload and stress and improved job satisfaction. Over three-quarters of teachers working with teaching assistants reported a positive effect, rising to even higher levels among those working with administrative and technical staff.¹³

Evidence also confirms benefits for pupils. A University of Manchester review (2010) found that teaching assistants (TAs) helped pupils with learning difficulties make substantial gains in literacy. International studies, including OECD reviews (2015), highlight support staff as a pivotal but often overlooked part of school systems, extending teachers' capacity and sustaining classroom quality.¹⁴ School leaders and teachers consistently describe TAs as indispensable. As one headteacher commented:¹⁵

“Support staff are crucial for schools, from an operational point of view but particularly in terms of helping with pupil progress and helping individual pupils.”

The evidence is equally clear about what makes support staff effective. Studies by Blatchford et al. (2011) and Farrell et al. (2010) found that using teaching assistants as substitutes for teachers could actually harm learning. By contrast, research by Rubie-Davies et al. (2010) and Whitehorn (2010) shows they are most effective when trained to support pupils' understanding and independence.¹⁶

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) set out the conditions for success in 2018¹⁷:

- Deploy TAs to add value to what teachers do, not replace them.
- Prepare and train TAs thoroughly for their role.
- Use TAs to deliver high quality one-to-one and small group interventions.
- Base interventions on robust, evidence-based approaches.
- Make explicit links between targeted interventions and whole-class teaching.
- Support TAs to help pupils manage their own learning and develop independence.

“With investment in planning and professional development, TAs reported higher morale, teachers valued the additional capacity, and pupils benefited from more independent learning.” – Education Endowment Foundation¹⁸

Support staff themselves echo these findings. Research by Vardy et al. (2025) shows that teaching assistants see their effectiveness as tied directly to access to training, joint planning time with teachers, and constructive feedback. They described their role as central to pupil progress and wellbeing, but voiced frustration that a lack of preparation time and inconsistent professional development undermined their potential.¹⁹

In summary, support staff are a vital part of the education workforce. Their impact depends not on their presence alone, but on how they are valued, trained and deployed. For Wales, the challenge is to align pay and conditions with what is already professionally expected of these staff.

2. Underpaid, under-valued and over-worked

School support staff have diverse roles in schools, but across job types they are faced with the pressures of low pay, job insecurity and heavy workloads. Staff struggle to make ends meet while working in the school system, fuelling difficulties for recruitment and retention and impacting on children's education.

Hourly pay rates are low, and this is compounded by term-time only contracts that decimate workers' income. Schools are often obliged to employ staff on fixed-term contracts due to budgeting pressures, and redundancies are on the rise. Workers on outsourced contracts or hired through agencies are often not covered by NJC pay and conditions, and pay is generally low.

Teaching assistants in particular have seen the nature of their role and responsibilities change dramatically in recent years. Most report working overtime and being asked to undertake responsibilities outside their job description, often requiring different skills and competencies. However, the increase in responsibilities has not been matched by pay, there are barriers to accessing training, and progress on professionalisation has been slow.

School support staff feel undervalued for the work they do, but this is more than a question of morale. The way to value school support staff is through concrete improvements to their pay and conditions.

2.1 Endemic low pay

“Wages usually last the first two weeks of the month. I can now only afford to do two weekly shops a month, the other two weeks I often go without meals in order to feed my children. The cost of living has shot up over the last few years horrifically, which sadly our wages haven't.” – Kate, teaching assistant

Low pay is the central concern voiced by school support staff in Wales. The impact of low pay can be damaging both for workers and the wider education system. As a consequence of term-time only pay, school support staff in Wales are overwhelmingly taking home a lower income than they would earn on a minimum wage full-time job and are not earning enough for a decent standard of living. Among facilities workers, pay rates are becoming compressed as the living wage increases pay for junior staff such as kitchen assistants and eroding the differentials with more senior roles.

Survey data gathered by UNISON in 2024 found that 8% were taking home less than £1000 a month, 18% took home between £1000 and £1199, and 38% (a plurality) took home £1200 to £1399. The chart below shows the full range reported in the survey.²⁰ A 2018 UNISON survey of school kitchen staff found that one in five were earning the minimum wage.²¹

What is your monthly take-home pay?

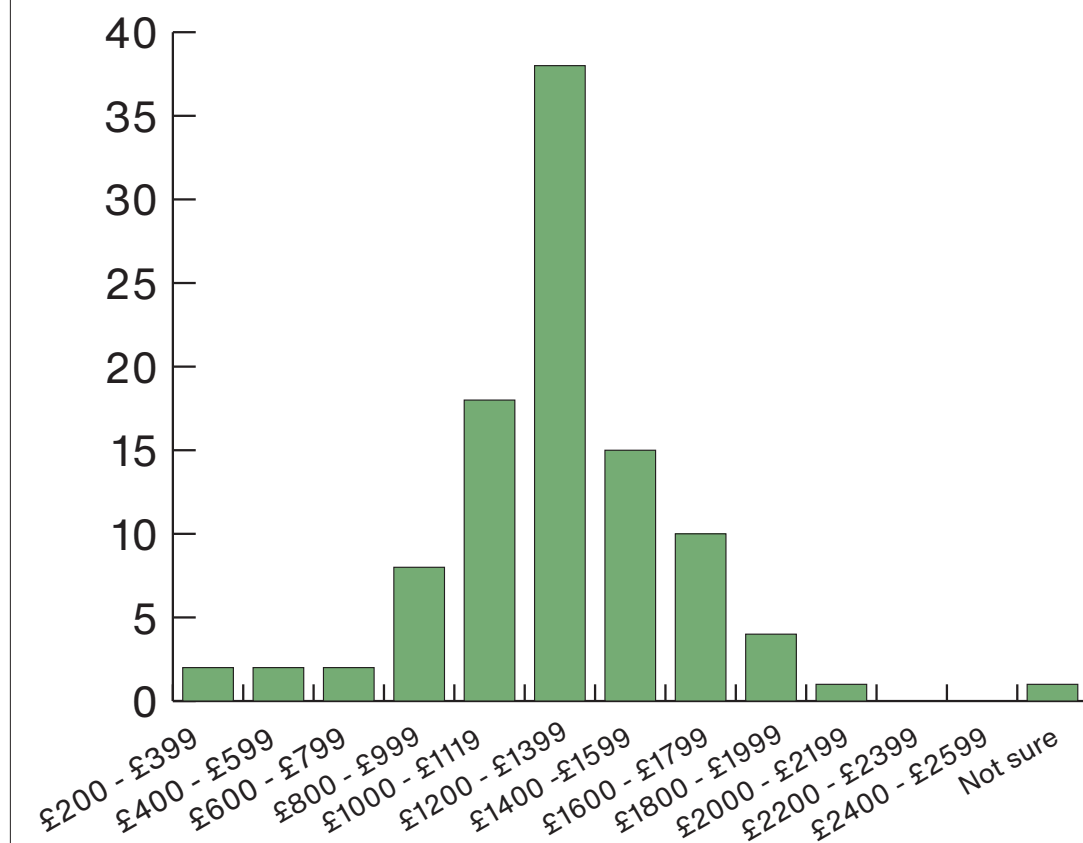


CHART 1: TAKE HOME PAY OF SCHOOL SUPPORT STAFF

As a rough benchmark, a full-time employee on the minimum wage in 2024 would take home £1,543 a month. The minimum income standard of £28,000 calculated by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation is equivalent to £1,973 monthly take-home pay, meaning that almost every single school support staff worker surveyed is not reaching this standard.²²

“Our pay is so poor for the role we have. It certainly does not reflect the expectations of our role.”

In a 2024 UNISON survey covering school support staff across the United Kingdom, the overwhelming majority of respondents expressed anxiety about paying essential bills. Respondents in Wales reported markedly worse cost-of-living concerns than the UK-wide figures. 85% of Welsh respondents were worried about meeting food costs, 80% were concerned about energy bills, and 60% were worried about their mortgage or rent commitments. According to a 2018 UNISON survey of 1200 school kitchen staff, 43% said they were struggling with debts (other than a mortgage).²³

In-work poverty is now a reality for many school support staff. In 2023, UNISON Cymru found that one in six school support staff had used food banks in the past year. In a 2025 survey of school support staff in Wales, UNISON found that 14% were receiving Universal Credit.

“In-work poverty for TAs is a reality. Support staff are using food banks set up to support local families. Indeed, there is a school in Cardiff which runs a food bank for staff in that school. Parents would be shocked to learn those who are caring for their children are not able to afford to put food on the table for their own family.” – Rosie Lewis, UNISON Cymru

2.2 Term-time only contracts

Most school support staff are only paid for work during term time, which makes up nine months of the year. School support staff are in a unique predicament in this regard; teachers have the same term-time working pattern but receive a full year's salary.

“There are lots of negatives. You're paying for holidays outside term time, which are extortionate. If you were sick over the six weeks holiday and you were in hospital for whatever reason, you don't get your holidays back. In this job, we don't take time off during term. I know loads of people who book medical operations to be in the summer holiday.” – Anne, UNISON rep

Salaries are advertised as if the pay covered the whole year, but the actual salary that staff receive is about 20-25% lower. The lower pay due to term-time contracts is compounded by part-time hours and a low hourly wage rate.

There are no generally accepted standards for term-time contracts. The Green Book, which lays out support staff terms and conditions, notes that there are “a range of methods of calculating pay for term-time employees” but that methods should be “fair, accurate and consistent”.²⁴ However, UNISON has previously found a lack of consistency in their implementation, even within the same local authority. Leave and pay calculations are sometimes made on an incorrect basis, for instance dividing the year by the number of school weeks to reach the pro rata annual salary, which does not account for the fact that year-round workers do not work 52 weeks of the year.²⁵ The lack of a coherent national framework allows for errors and inconsistencies.

As well as impacting heavily on pay, it is usually very difficult for workers on term-time contracts to reclaim leave or claim sick pay if they are sick or have to recover from an operation during a school term break.

This is a longstanding issue. A 2009 research report from London Metropolitan University, *Aspects of school workforce remodelling: strategies used and impact on workload and standards* found great dissatisfaction among support staff in relation to pay and contractual arrangements, particularly in relation to the use of term-time only and “split” contracts (where staff are paid extra just for the hours they do ‘higher level’ work).²⁶

2.3 Rising workloads and working ‘above grade’

School support staff routinely face heavy workloads that require them to work overtime, generally without additional pay. During working time, staff are often expected to take on all kinds of tasks that go beyond their job description. As well as managing overwhelming workloads, teaching assistants are often employed at a lower level than reflected by their actual working responsibilities and capabilities.

In a survey of almost 1000 teaching assistants in Wales undertaken for this report, 44.7% of respondents said they were required to work at a different level than they are employed at on a daily basis, with a further 29.5% indicating this was a weekly occurrence. Only 12.4% said they were never required to do this. However, a shocking 82.5% of those who sometimes work at a higher level said they were never paid extra. Only 4.5% said they were always paid appropriately for working at a higher level.

Do you receive extra pay for working at a higher level?

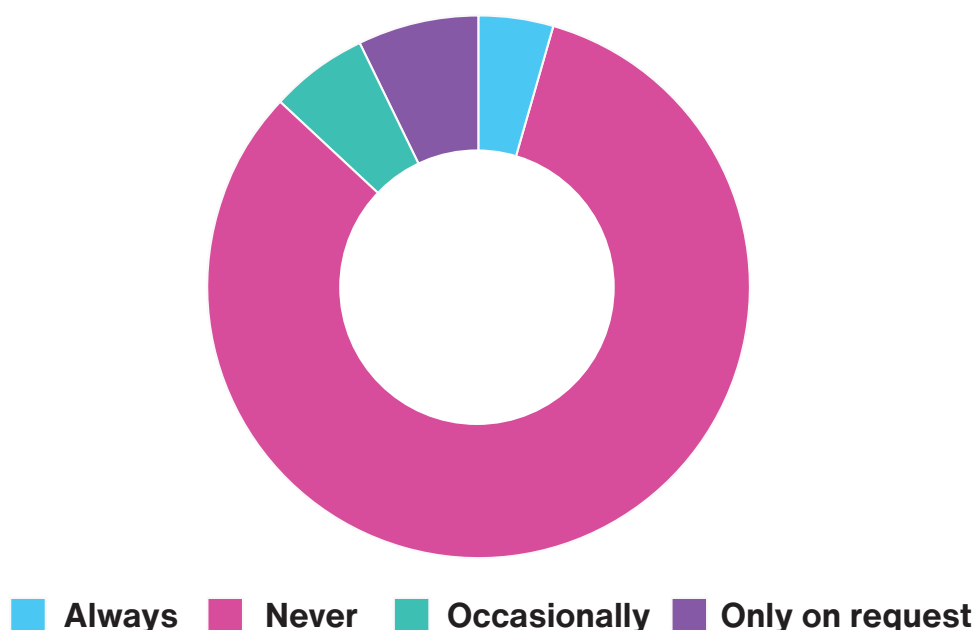


CHART 2: PAY FOR WORKING ABOVE GRADE

A 2024 UNISON report *Teaching on the Cheap?* based on a survey of over 6000 teaching assistants across the UK found that schools were often relying on TAs to deliver lessons, sometimes covering classes for whole sessions, which goes beyond their intended support role. As schools face funding shortfalls and staffing pressures, they are increasingly deploying TAs to plug gaps.²⁷

Staff are paid for the school day, but typically have to arrive early and leave late to prepare materials, clear up, wait for parents to arrive and so on. In the 2025 survey, 32% of teaching assistants reported working above their contracted hours on a daily basis, with a further 22% reporting this happened weekly, and 16% termly. Similarly, a 2024 UNISON Cymru survey of school support staff found that 72% of respondents said they worked more than their contracted hours without extra pay, including 22.4% who reported doing four hours or more each week unpaid overtime. In 2014, a UNISON survey found that almost half of school kitchen staff said they it would be impossible to do their job within their allocated hours.²⁸

“I go into work early, I am not expected to however I simply would not get everything done in my working day without putting extra time in.” – UNISON member

“I don’t get paid for my breaks or lunch. I’m often dealing with issues with my pupils during these times. I also don’t have time to complete admin tasks, therefore, I often stay over my hours to finish the tasks.” – UNISON member

The situation has worsened in recent years, with a majority of school support staff reporting a sharp increase in workloads as staff numbers are cut and the profile of learners’ needs changes. In a 2024 survey, 82% of school support staff said their workload increased in the past year. Tasks becoming more demanding include toileting, one-to-one support, class or lesson cover, and behaviour management.²⁹

“The amount of staff has stayed the same but the expectations and responsibilities has increased.” – teaching assistant

There has been a marked increase in challenging and disruptive behaviour in schools in Wales. A 2025 survey of teachers and support staff undertaken by the Welsh Government found that nearly all respondents reported that the variety (94.3%), range (94.0%), magnitude (93.8%) and frequency (95.4%) of challenging or disruptive behaviours had increased since the pandemic. Seven in ten respondents felt poorly supported by their local authority.³⁰ School support staff interviewed by the LRD reported feeling that they bear the brunt of behaviour issues, including violence.

“Staff across all levels are firefighting and babysitting. They’re not in a position to provide a quality education, because they’re too busy. At the same time they’re worrying about their job security, their wellbeing, their safety. Within the school day, we’re often not able to do any proper educating, because we’re pulled into too many other things that need doing. I’m not doing the job now that I trained to do 28 years ago.” – Anne, UNISON rep

2.4 Precarious contracts

“Every year you are on edge thinking, do I have a job next year or not? There’s no stability in the job, nobody wants to do it anymore.” – Sally, UNISON rep

School support staff are often “the first to go” when schools reduce staffing levels due to budget constraints, leaving the remaining staff stretched ever further. Redundancies and fixed-term contracts are a source of uncertainty and instability for school support staff.

In the 2023-24 financial year, at least 245 school staff were made redundant in schools in Wales, with the vast majority being school support staff. The figure was four times higher than the previous year.³¹ In Merthyr Tydfil, plans were underway to cut 55 posts, including 44 learning support assistants.³²

“Schools are restricted in making permanent appointments because they are working within a tight budget – schools have to be really cautious. Having staff on rolling temporary contracts is not good for staff morale or job security. And it makes it much harder for learning support assistants to buy a house or gain more security.” – Gerard McNamara, headteacher

Councils are operating within severe budget limitations, but job cuts are quickly self-defeating as skilled and experienced school support staff are pushed out of the role. Pembrokeshire County Council drew attention to this dynamic in their response to the provisional local government settlement 2024-25, noting the impact on individual learners.³³

“Real school pressures continue to exist where more learners than ever need support and to ensure progress. The most vulnerable learners are being impacted as headteachers are being forced to reduce support staff and intervention programmes to maintain teacher: pupil ratios. This results in more learners struggling to maintain their school place, increased exclusions with greater financial pressure on councils to fund the costly alternative provision and budgetary pressure.”

Over 70% of respondents in Wales to UNISON's 2024 school support survey indicated that there were fewer support staff or early years staff at their school compared to the year before. Only 7% said that staffing had increased. 89% of respondents in Wales indicated that they were somewhat or very worried about the impact of budget cuts on their school in the next year.³⁴

Similarly, facilities staff on outsourced contracts face some of the difficulties that are typical of such arrangements. The school as the client may request a change in staffing levels or personnel, and the outsourcing company as the employer may then dismiss staff rather than find them alternative work with a new client. A UNISON branch rep told the LRD that it was hard to establish any accountability mechanism in such cases.

2.5 Barriers to career progression and professionalisation

“Registration was sold as a key step towards professionalisation of the role and improvement in the standing of TAs. Yet, it simply hasn't delivered the training and development opportunities or the improved pay that you would reasonably expect would accompany registration with a professional body. Meanwhile, there is a fee every year for the privilege.” – Rosie Lewis, UNISON Cymru

Progress towards professionalisation of school support staff roles has been slow, and support staff feel they have few progression pathways open to them. The problem of progression is linked to the question of access to training, inadequate job descriptions and insufficient funding. If staff have a high workload and schools are on a tight budget, then there will be a pressure to keep school support staff on lower level job descriptions and to put off making time for training opportunities.

The new survey undertaken for this report found that the overwhelming majority of teaching assistants believe that they are employed at the wrong level. Overall, 65% of teaching assistants believe that they are employed at the wrong level, and the figure rises to 80% for Level 1 teaching assistants. The Workforce Group in the Schools Social Partnership Forum recommended that the Level 1 role should be phased out, since it does not reflect the role as it is actually performed, however local authorities have overwhelmingly decided not to adopt this recommendation.³⁵

The chart below shows teaching assistants views on whether they are employed at the correct level, based on almost 1000 responses. In the same survey, 61% of respondents reported that they did not feel they had opportunities for progression within their school.

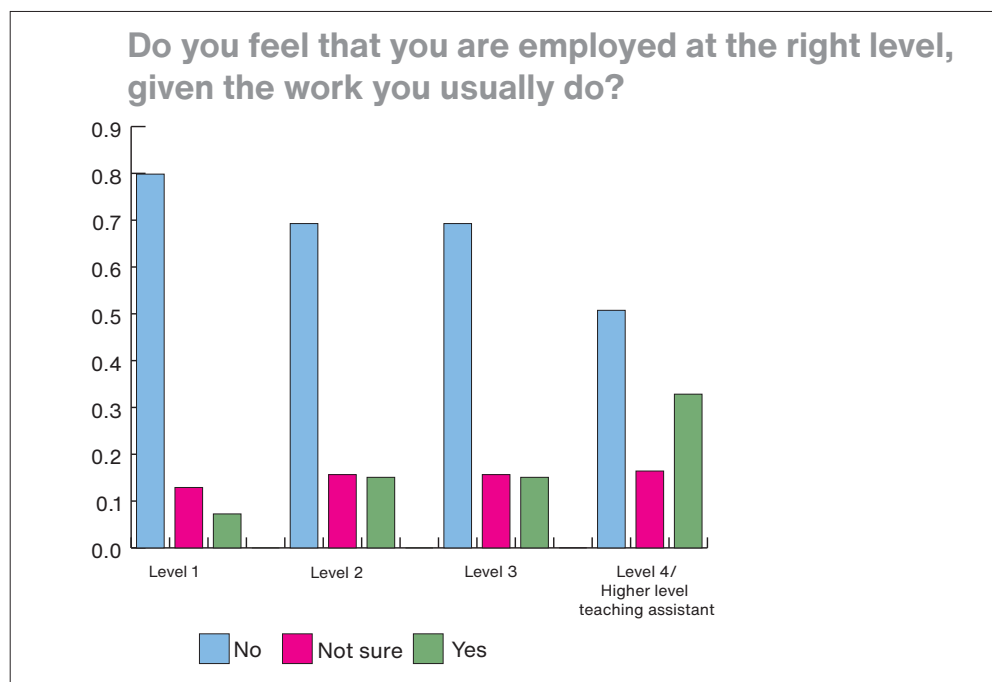


CHART 3: TEACHING ASSISTANTS' VIEWS ON THEIR JOB LEVEL CATEGORISATION

The Education Workforce Council (EWC), established in 2014, is the independent regulator for the education workforce in Wales. One of the EWC's core objectives is to support professionalism and learning, and promote careers within the education workforce.³⁶ In 2024-25, the EWC delivered over 300 support sessions and presentations, in addition to national events, a mentoring scheme and a podcast.³⁷

Despite this provision, school support staff face substantial barriers to taking part in training opportunities. Attendance is usually at the discretion of the headteacher or line manager who may decide against releasing them. School support staff interviewed by the LRD reported a double standard compared to teachers in accessing training opportunities, and concerns that they would be seen as "not a team player" for taking time away from school for training.

UNISON Cymru members tell their union they want training but cannot get access, so the union organises professional development courses, like behavioural management, outside of school hours and in weekends, to allow support staff to attend in their own time. Unlike other professions, this time cannot be claimed back. There are long waiting lists for these courses, which illustrate the appetite and dedication of support staff.

"The EWC offers training, but unless your headteacher or line manager is willing to release you to go on training, then most of our members don't access any of that." – Rosie Lewis, UNISON Cymru

An EWC survey and discussions at the Schools Social Partnership Forum confirm that access to these professional pathways and performance management have never been consistent.³⁸ While some local authorities and schools actively support training and career development, others do not, and performance reviews often fail to translate training into progression. Many school support staff do not benefit from training on inset days, which are meant to be used for staff development.

2.6 Process of professionalisation has brought additional pressures

"The level of accountability for some teaching assistants now compared to the salary they earn is unbalanced. The role has become very pressured." – Gerard McNamara, headteacher

While the EWC has taken positive steps towards professionalisation, these have often been overshadowed by the cost of registration and the stress caused to staff due to the risk of being struck off the register.

The EWC maintains a list of education practitioners, publishes a code of professional conduct and practice, provides training to the education workforce, and hears serious complaints.³⁹ All staff in schools with a role in delivering education must register with the EWC, including teaching assistants. Caretakers, catering staff, administrative staff and so on are not required to register.⁴⁰

EWC registration costs £45 a year which has been subsidised each year, meaning TAs pay £15.⁴¹

“I love my job but just surviving financially has become harder and harder. Not having to pay the full registration fee is one less thing to worry about.” – Natalie, teaching assistant

The EWC has a statutory remit to carry out regulatory work, including responding to concerns raised about individual practitioners. Any individual or organisation can make a complaint to the EWC about an education worker, and employers and agents have a positive duty to refer cases to the EWC in cases of termination of a contract due to misconduct or incompetence.⁴²

Accountability mechanisms are an important aspect of professionalisation, but there is a widespread feeling that the EWC has delivered on a form of accountability without a wider programme of professionalisation. The EWC disciplinary procedures are a source of stress for school support staff, and can duplicate school-level processes.

“If you lose your job because of an accusation of an incident at work, then you also have to go to the EWC and perhaps be struck off. In some cases, you could end up answering to the police, to your employer and to the EWC. It feels like another stick to beat us with.” – Carys, UNISON rep

2.7 Recruitment and retention crisis

“I know in a number of schools they have had teaching assistants leave to work in supermarkets – you can get extra shifts and a discount on your shopping. A lot of staff say they love their job within the school, but financially they’re not able to continue.” – Gerard McNamara, headteacher

Many schools struggle to fill vacancies, since the pay rates on offer are not competitive compared to jobs in hospitality and retail. School support staff themselves report struggling to stay on in the role due to financial pressures, and there is a high level of turnover. When staff leave the profession, their skills and experience are lost, and schools have to rely on workers who are new to the role or use agencies as a stop gap.

EWC figures show that of the 37,325 school learning support workers registered with the EWC in March 2019, only 53.2% were still registered as such in 2024, with a further 7.6% registered in another category. Almost 40% of learning support workers had left the role within that five-year period. The school workforce census shows that over 2,000 support staff left the profession in the 2023/24 academic year.⁴³

The number of school support staff has fallen for two consecutive years. There was a 3.0% decrease in the number of school support staff from November 2023 to November 2024, according to the school workforce annual census. The full-time equivalent fall was greater at 3.4%.⁴⁴

The fall in numbers is partly due to the phasing out of the Recruit, Recover and Raise Standards (RRRS) Programme, which was introduced in August 2020 to support schools by increasing staff capacity. The scheme distributed extra budget of £165.5 million by July 2022. The phasing out of the scheme has seen staff leave the workforce, having been employed on a temporary basis.⁴⁵

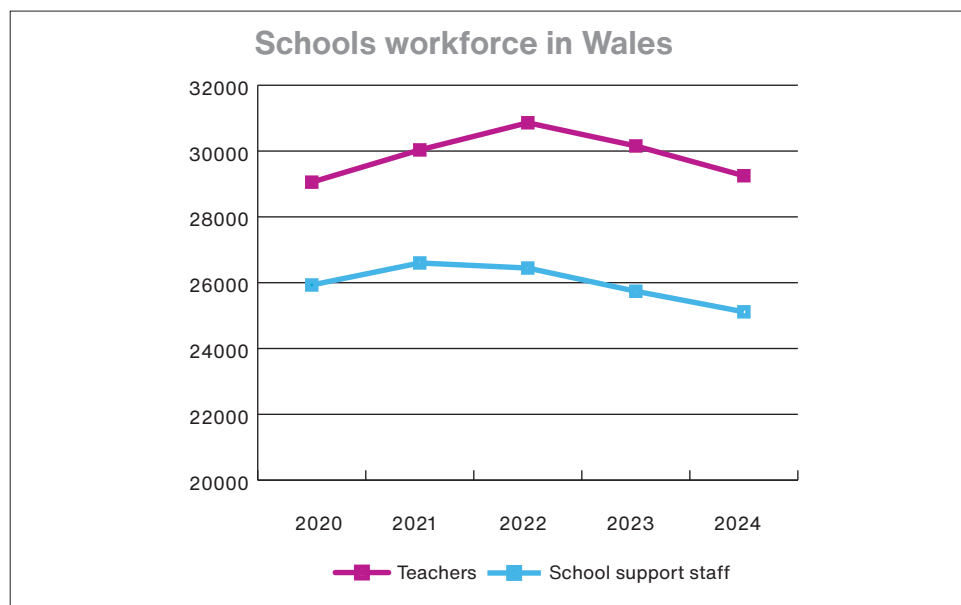


CHART 4: SCHOOL WORKFORCE ANNUAL CENSUS DATA 2020-24⁴⁶

Pay is a key driver of recruitment and retention problems. The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) explored the relationship between pay and recruitment in schools in England in a 2023 report. The report found that 45% of secondary and special schools and 34% of primary schools reported that the salaries they were able to offer were the single biggest barrier to recruiting TAs, with a large number of vacancies remaining open for more than two months. Over 70% of senior leaders said that TAs were leaving the school because they could earn more in another job, particularly retail and hospitality.⁴⁷

“Support staff are leaving because they can get higher paid jobs in other sectors. TA vacancies remain unfilled due to a lack of suitable applicants. Lack of TAs impacts on teacher workload and teacher well-being. ALN children are increasingly more complex, so need more support. It feels like a vicious cycle.” – Mainstream senior leader

In a 2024 UNISON survey, almost half (46%) of school support staff were actively looking for better paid work elsewhere; for respondents in Wales specifically the figure was 54%.

“If I took on a job on minimum wage at full time, I would take home more money. I would live like a queen compared to what I take home now!” – teaching assistant

The survey undertaken by this report found that 20% of school support staff already have a second job outside of the school context to make ends meet, such as a supermarket role. A further 10% were looking for a second job.⁴⁸ The 2023 NEFR report also found that 72% of senior school leaders of primary schools were aware of school support staff taking up second jobs for the first time.⁴⁹

There is a stark contradiction: this workforce is increasingly professionalised, relied upon, and essential to delivering national education priorities, yet undervalued and underpaid to the extent that staff struggle to stay in the role. The shortcomings of the current system for determining school support staff's pay and conditions is hampering progress on recruitment and retention.

“We are putting children at risk. People aren’t becoming teaching assistants anymore – it’s no longer financially viable. People would rather go and work for any supermarket.” – teaching assistant in evidence to the Low Pay Commission

3. A system no longer fit for purpose

The shocking conditions many Welsh school support staff face are unlikely to change whilst they remain tied into a pay and grading system that is no longer fit for purpose. Their pay and conditions are currently set by the National Joint Council (NJC), an arrangement that covers the entire local authority workforce (other than those for whom there are alternative arrangements), and that is negotiated across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

This framework, which is focussed on the priorities of councils rather than schools, has produced fragmented and inconsistent outcomes: pay levels and grading vary across local authorities, role profiles are outdated, and the issue of term-time only contracts has not yet been properly addressed.

Over the years, successive reforms, reviews and working groups have acknowledged the shortcomings of this system and its impact on school support staff. In England, this led to the creation of a short-lived negotiating body in 2009, whilst in Wales, most recently, the issues were taken up by the School Social Partnership Forum (SSPF).⁵⁰ However, so far progress on the core issues has been piecemeal.

Without a new statutory mechanism that gives these critical staff a voice, any reforms rely on voluntary agreement and local interpretation. As a result, support staff continue to face undervaluation and instability, with consequences for fairness, recruitment, and school delivery.

3.1 A framework designed for councils, not schools

The National Joint Council for Local Government Services (NJC) has set the national framework for local government pay since 1997 through its Single Status Agreement, known as the Green Book.⁵¹ While the agreement is negotiated centrally across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, its implementation is devolved to councils, which decide how to apply job evaluation schemes and grading structures locally. This was intended to balance national consistency with local democratic control, but for school support staff it has created systemic problems that are widely recognised and have lasted for years.

Although most school support staff are employed by local authorities, recruitment, deployment and day-to-day management rest with headteachers and school governing bodies. This blurs accountability and disconnects pay and grading decisions from actual job demands.

Moreover, school staff are a distinct employment group. Their pattern of work is determined by the school year and is not a matter of choice. Hours are shaped by the school day and tied to the academic year, meaning most support staff work around 29.5-33 hours per week instead of the NJC’s full-time 37 hours, with salaries that are further reduced by being term-time only.⁵²

Councils have challenged whether the NJC is still fit for purpose. In its 2024 official response to the funding settlement from the Welsh Government, Ceredigion Council noted: ⁵³

“The council requests that... [the Welsh Government] challenge whether the existing NJC Pay process is still fit for purpose for non-teaching public sector employees in Wales.”

3.2 There are no national job descriptions just outdated profiles

Currently there are no national job descriptions for school support staff jobs, but there are 59 model role profiles which schools can use should they wish to as a basis for forming job descriptions. These were developed in 2013 by the NJC and are still in use today. They group job profiles across five job families:

- Facilities roles⁵⁴
- Administration and management roles⁵⁵
- Pupil support and welfare roles⁵⁶
- Specialist and technical roles⁵⁷
- Teaching and learning support roles⁵⁸

These profiles superseded a 2003 agreement known as *School Support Staff - The Way Forward*⁵⁹, which had begun to ‘drift’ out of step with the evolving nature of the jobs.⁶⁰ There are several problems with the continued use of the 2013 role profiles:

- **Outdated:** The School Social Partnership Forum found that whilst the current NJC role profiles are “broad enough to reflect the main responsibilities of each allocated level”, they were not detailed or school-specific enough, and they do not reflect the increased accountability and responsibility of actual Teaching Assistant jobs. They also found that the lowest level should be removed. While *The Way Forward* agreement stipulated that: “every member of staff needs a comprehensive job description reviewed on a regular basis”⁶¹. In practice, schools rarely undertook reviews or updated job evaluations.
- **Voluntary and inconsistent:** The NJC model role profiles were only ever meant to be guidance. The School Social Partnership Forum found in 2024 that the job descriptions created in 2013 are not being consistently used by the 22 local authorities in Wales⁶². Identical roles can be evaluated completely differently depending on the local authority and on whether the school uses the national profiles or creates their own.

The fact that job profiles have never been updated means they do not reflect the expanded curriculum delivery role of support staff, their additional responsibilities for supporting pupils with additional learning needs (ALN), or Welsh language duties.

A Wales SSSNB could produce a separate handbook or guide that lays down minimum conditions of service appropriate to their roles in schools, as well as an agreement around working time.

3.3 Challenges with job evaluation

“Creating role profiles and agreeing a job evaluation scheme is a really important area of the work to be done. We’ve been making do with NJC role profiles for school support staff jobs, but this has been crying out for change. We’ve needed it for years.” – Mike Short, UNISON National Secretary for Education

Although job evaluation schemes are designed to be ‘gender neutral’⁶³ when the NJC Job Evaluation Scheme is applied to school support staff jobs, it creates problems because⁶⁴:

- **Technical skills** are heavily weighted, but many school support skills are interpersonal which score less.
- **Formal qualifications** score highly, but much school support work requires experience and emotional intelligence that is weighted much less highly.
- **Supervisory responsibility** gets high scores, but supporting vulnerable children carries enormous responsibility that doesn’t involve line management.

Support staff roles often combine low-level administrative work with high-responsibility tasks such as one-

to-one support for children with complex needs. Seasonal workload peaks, varied qualification requirements, and high accountability for safeguarding make these roles hard to evaluate fairly, especially against other council roles. The SSPF has acknowledged that comparison with other local government jobs leads to undervaluation of school-based roles.⁶⁵

When the single status scheme was first rolled out, union representatives in Wales raised concerns that some job evaluation outcomes actually eroded existing terms and downgraded staff, particularly nursery nurses.⁶⁶

A Wales School Support Staff Negotiating Body could address these issues by:

- Creating a school-specific job evaluation scheme that properly captures educational support work
- Ensuring consistent application of both role profiles and evaluation across all state schools
- Developing new evaluation factors that recognise emotional labour, child-focused responsibilities, and the unique demands of educational environments

Years of inconsistency under the NJC

The absence of a clear national framework for school support staff has produced inconsistent – and sometimes illogical – contractual arrangements that have persisted for years. School support staff, particularly teaching assistants, have often been asked to undertake work “above their grade” (see section 2.3), yet the NJC system for rewarding this is entirely inadequate.

Evidence submitted to the Schools Social Partnership Forum (SSPF) has noted that local authority pay policies reference secondments and honoraria as short-term rewards when staff are asked to take on higher-graded work.⁶⁷ However, these are temporary measures. Where duties change permanently, UNISON believes posts should be re-evaluated to reflect the new responsibilities – but this is not consistently happening.

This is a persistent problem. Back in 2009, a study found examples of teaching assistants being paid at a higher rate for part of their week and a lower rate for the rest, depending on the proportion of time allocated to specific duties.⁶⁸ The local authority job evaluation schemes continue to give rise to grading anomalies.

3.4 Failure to address longstanding issues

The union side of the NJC requested that the body review term-time only contracts in 2016. However, it has so far delivered only limited changes, such as updated guidance on annual leave and sickness absence in March 2024.⁶⁹ The core issue of term-time only pay itself and the wider reform of roles, grading and job evaluation remain unaddressed. Many staff still work unpaid overtime, cover for absent teachers, or take on responsibilities far beyond their job description.

3.5 Pay disparities of up to 35% between authorities

While the NJC framework is national, each of Wales’s 22 local authorities applies its own job evaluation and grading system. This has led to significant disparities in pay and terms for school support staff carrying out equivalent roles. A Task and Finish Group under the Welsh School Social Partnership Forum identified a pay disparity of up to 35% between local authorities for equivalent support roles. Its recommendations included harmonising grading systems and standardising job descriptions to tackle pay inequality and lack of progression opportunities⁷⁰

A look at job advertisements available in July 2025 highlight the variations and the multiple ways in which salaries are described.⁷¹

TABLE 2: TEACHING ASSISTANT JOB ADVERTISEMENTS JULY 2025

Local authority	Role advertised	Salary as presented in advert
Cardiff	Teaching Assistant	Grade 3 SCP 3–6 (£24,796–£25,989) Pro Rata
Monmouthshire	Teaching Assistant Level 2	£24,027 – £24,790 pro rata
Swansea	Level 2 Teaching Assistant	Grade 4 – £25,583 – £25,989 pro rata, per annum
Torfaen	Level 2 Teaching Assistant	£26,403 – £27,694 Pro Rata Grade 4
Denbighshire	Teaching Assistant (no level given, responsible for behaviour support)	Grade 5 – £23,794 – £25,796
Denbighshire (same school)	Teaching Assistant	Grade 3: £16,375 – £16,634 (pro rata)
Caerphilly	Primary School Teaching Assistant Level 3	£9,122 SCP7 – £9,722 SCP11
Rhondda Cynon Taff	Cynorthwy-ydd Addysgu (Lefel 3) – YGG Evan James	Grade 6 – £27,269 (Amser llawn) × 68.25%
Neath Port Talbot	Temporary Level 2 Teaching Assistant + Lunchtime Supervisor	TA: Grade 3, SCP 3–5 £15,429 – £16,427 per annum / Lunchtime Supervisor: Grade 1 SCP 2 £1,598 per annum
Rhondda Cynon Taff	Teaching Assistant (Level 4) Learning Recovery	Grade 6 £30,060 plus SEN Allowance £1,491 × 77.15%

Source: eTeach.com adverts⁷²**TABLE 3: GROSS SPEND PER FTE AND HEADCOUNT SUPPORT STAFF IN WALES 2023-24 IN £,000S**

	Total gross spend on Schools	Gross Spend on SSS	Pupil numbers	Number of SSS	FTE SSS	Average spend on SSS (headcount)	Gross spend per pupil	Spend on SSS per pupil	% of per pupil spend on SSS	Average FTE SSS spend
Whole of Wales	3,081,543	744,864	465,840	27,675	25,020	26.915	6.615	1.599	24.2%	29.771
North Wales	668,924	152,088	99,363	6,350	5,630	23.951	6.732	1.531	22.7%	27.014
Isle of Anglesey	71,252	12,256	9,549	640	590	19.150	7.462	1.283	17.2%	20.773
Gwynedd	117,381	26,967	16,772	995	810	27.103	6.999	1.608	23.0%	33.293
Conwy	105,025	21,909	15,466	940	740	23.307	6.791	1.417	20.9%	29.607
Denbighshire	99,404	21,972	15,974	965	850	22.769	6.223	1.375	22.1%	25.849
Flintshire	151,096	35,879	22,591	1,470	1,495	24.407	6.688	1.588	23.7%	23.999
Wrexham	124,766	33,105	19,011	1,340	1,150	24.705	6.563	1.741	26.5%	28.787
South West and Mid Wales	841,843	215,661	126,956	8,205	7,095	26.284	6.631	1.699	25.6%	30.396
Powys	112,327	23,885	16,391	1,085	855	22.014	6.853	1.457	21.3%	27.936
Ceredigion	63,599	22,749	9,369	600	580	37.915	6.788	2.428	35.8%	39.222
Pembrokeshire	121,035	28,825	16,998	1,145	1,040	25.175	7.121	1.696	23.8%	27.716
Carmarthenshire	178,137	51,291	27,210	1,660	1,485	30.898	6.547	1.885	28.8%	34.539
Swansea	235,439	52,022	36,247	2,410	1,930	21.586	6.495	1.435	22.1%	26.954
Neath Port Talbot	131,306	36,889	20,741	1,305	1,200	28.267	6.331	1.779	28.1%	30.741
Central South Wales	988,767	265,432	149,791	8,210	7,680	32.330	6.601	1.772	26.8%	34.561
Bridgend	149,540	43,864	22,553	1,270	1,180	34.539	6.631	1.945	29.3%	37.173
Vale of Glamorgan	152,605	37,516	23,071	1,305	1,240	28.748	6.615	1.626	24.6%	30.255
Rhondda Cynon Taf	240,671	56,688	38,097	1,990	1,795	28.486	6.317	1.488	23.6%	31.581
Merthyr Tydfil	64,435	18,607	9,080	530	540	35.108	7.096	2.049	28.9%	34.457
Cardiff	381,516	108,757	56,990	3,115	2,925	34.914	6.694	1.908	28.5%	37.182
South East Wales	582,007	150,494	89,730	4,910	4,615	30.651	6.486	1.677	25.9%	32.610
Caerphilly	179,346	49,771	27,061	1,430	1,280	34.805	6.627	1.839	27.8%	38.884
Blaenau Gwent	67,608	16,947	9,479	610	590	27.782	7.132	1.788	25.1%	28.724
Torfaen	95,120	23,014	14,135	835	775	27.562	6.729	1.628	24.2%	29.695
Monmouthshire	74,176	17,292	11,408	635	580	27.231	6.502	1.516	23.3%	29.814
Newport	165,757	43,470	27,647	1,400	1,385	31.050	5.995	1.572	26.2%	31.386

Source: statswales Education revenue outturn expenditure, by service (£ thousand)⁷³

Another way of looking at the variation in pay is by looking at the gross spending per FTE school support staff across Wales' 22 counties (see table above).

There are very large differences between local authorities:

- Ceredigion consistently records the highest figures, spending £2,428 per pupil on support staff, devoting 35.8% of per-pupil budgets to them, and paying the highest average FTE cost (£39,222). Its gross cost per support staff member is nearly £38,000, compared with the Wales average of £27,000.
- Anglesey sits at the other extreme, with support staff spend per pupil of just £1,283, support staff taking only 17.2% of per-pupil budgets, and average FTE costs of £20,773 -nearly half the Ceredigion level. Its gross cost per staff member is also the lowest at around £19,150.

Some of these differences reflect real variations in local needs: rural authorities like Ceredigion face higher costs to maintain small schools. But the disparities also suggest that some authorities are maintaining lower grading and pay practices, leaving their support staff significantly worse off than colleagues elsewhere.

This fragmentation undermines workforce mobility; staff moving between authorities often lose income despite holding the same role. It also hampers recruitment and retention, especially in lower-paying areas. By setting a fair national pay floor and role profiles, a negotiating body would ensure that investment in support staff delivers consistently across Wales, rather than being diluted by undercutting in the lowest-paying areas.

3.6 Funding and pay-setting cycles are misaligned

The current system for determining school support staff pay in Wales places additional pressure on school budgets. Pay awards negotiated through the National Joint Council (NJC) are often on a timetable that does not match the education funding cycle.⁷⁴ By contrast, teacher pay is set by the Independent Welsh Pay Review Body (IWPRB) to a more regular annual schedule.

A Wales School Support Staff Negotiating Body (WSSSNB) would allow support staff pay decisions to be better aligned with school budgeting processes. It would also provide a more transparent and predictable framework for local authorities and school leaders.

NJC pay awards are due at the beginning of the financial year, but the outcome of negotiations is often not confirmed until later in the year. In recent years, these negotiations have been delayed or disputed, leaving schools uncertain about future costs after budgets have been set.⁷⁵ Where awards are agreed late or exceed expected inflationary uplifts, schools may be forced to make in-year adjustments to remain within budget.⁷⁶ The IWPRB process, whilst also subject to disputes, is however, more aligned with the academic year, running September to September, and is based on a consistent framework, enabling better forward planning.⁷⁷ NJC pay awards are not always fully funded and in these years must be funded from existing budgets.

Having the Welsh Government directly involved in negotiating support staff pay would also help ensure that any agreed uplifts are fully considered in future funding allocations. This approach mirrors the model proposed for the English School Support Staff Negotiating Body, in which government participation is seen as essential to linking pay decisions with wider education funding priorities.⁷⁸

Bringing support staff into a parallel process would allow teacher and support staff pay to be considered on the same timeline, leading to more coherent funding decisions and enabling schools to allocate resources with greater certainty (See Section 6).

3.7 Voluntary partnership is not enough to deliver consistency

The Schools Social Partnership Forum (SSPF) has already brought together employers, trade unions and Welsh Government to discuss workforce matters in education.⁷⁹

The sub-group working on support staff has created revised job descriptions that meet the modern demands of assisting teaching in Welsh schools. These are intended to align better with the roll out of the Curriculum for Wales and the Additional Learning Needs Code.⁸⁰

However, without a dedicated bargaining structure, there is no mechanism to ensure that these updated profiles are implemented consistently across all 22 local authorities. Under the current NJC-based system, any new job descriptions must go back to each authority for re-evaluation through its own job evaluation scheme. This can lead to variation in the grades and pay attached to identical roles, undermining the intention of having a national set of role profiles.

“We did some good work on job descriptions through the SSPF but implementation was another matter. We went out to the local authorities to implement the job descriptions, but they weren’t taken up because of the cost implications. It would have had to be 22 separate conversations under the current system, while everyone is still tied into the NJC and the corresponding job evaluation schemes.” – Gerard McNamara, headteacher

Moreover, support staff we interviewed found getting time off to engage regularly with the partnership forum difficult.

“We’re limited in what we can do. People are scared to take time off to participate in the forum. They haven’t got time to do the job; they feel like they shouldn’t be asking. We have seen really active reps drop off because they feel that they can’t come anymore.” – Anne, UNISON rep and SSPF participant

A WSSSNB would provide the structure needed to embed the SSPF’s work within a national pay and grading framework, ensuring that agreements on roles and responsibilities are applied consistently in every part of Wales.

“In a sense Wales is ahead of the curve compared to England, because they have had social partnership in education a lot longer.” – Mike Short, UNISON National Secretary for Education

4. Why a SSSNB is right for Wales

Wales has a proud tradition of delivering public services differently, with a focus on fairness, inclusion and partnership. Establishing a Wales School Support Staff Negotiating Body (WSSSNB) offers a unique opportunity to co-design a structure rooted in social partnership and tailored to the needs of Welsh schools. It would recognise the distinctive skills and responsibilities of the workforce, align with the national education mission and priorities, and help deliver Welsh Government commitments on fair work and wellbeing.

Importantly, failing to establish an SSSNB risks undermining these national objectives. Without a dedicated statutory mechanism, inequalities in pay, access to training and career progression will persist – reinforcing gendered and social inequalities, limiting the effectiveness of educational reforms, and weakening progress on national commitments such as fair reward, equal pay, and reducing the gender pay gap.

4.1 The call for a national structure is not new

The Welsh Government has taken important strides over the past two decades toward recognising and professionalising school support staff. In 2019 the government released the *Professional Standards for Assisting Teaching in Wales* report building on the 2013 *School Support Staff Action Plan*, which introduced professional pathways backed by performance management and continuous professional development.⁸¹ The Education (Wales) Act 2014 established the Education Workforce Council (EWC), and the EWC implemented professional registration for learning support staff in April 2016.⁸² These reforms have helped raise the status of support staff and established a more coherent structure for training and standards.

However, the focus on training and professionalisation has failed to address all the issues that a dedicated national structure could. The idea of a national structure for school support staff is not a new idea in Wales. Back in 2007, during the launch of the *One Wales* programme, the Welsh Government discussed the creation of a national structure for classroom assistants,⁸³ and subsequent research identified persistent additional issues that a national body could address such as: low pay and poor workforce planning.⁸⁴

A further 2018 report commissioned by the Welsh Government recommended that it “explore the possibility of working with other interested parties to consider a national structure” to look at job titles, roles and deployment, and address the persistent link between low pay, limited career opportunities and reduced motivation to pursue professional development.⁸⁵ This suggests that while some professionalisation measures have been successful, the continued reliance on the NJC for pay and grading has prevented these reforms from delivering their full potential.

Timeline of Welsh reforms for school support staff

- Early 2000s: Growing recognition of teaching assistants’ contribution; initial moves towards professionalisation.
- 2003: NJC role profiles for teaching assistants introduced in *The Way Forward* agreement (advisory only; four levels).
- 2007: *One Wales* programme: Commitment to explore a national structure for classroom assistants.
- 2008: Welsh Government research identified low pay, limited career pathways, minimal CPD, and poor workforce planning as key issues.
- 2009-11: England’s SSSNB created. Wales chose to retain NJC and focus on professionalisation instead. The English body was abolished in 2011 after a change of government.
- 2013: New job profiles created by the NJC. In Wales, the *School Support Staff Action Plan* introduced professional pathways, performance management, and CPD goals.
- 2015: Education Workforce Council: Registration of support staff began, giving the profession official status.
- 2018 onwards: Surveys and studies continue to highlight inconsistent access to training and career progression.
- 2019 release of the *Professional Standards for Assisting Teaching in Wales*
- 2021–2025: SSPF discussions developed updated national role profiles, but no statutory framework to ensure consistent implementation.

4.2 A lever for education policy particularly the ALN Code

“The role of the TA in all schools setting have become integral to ensuring learner progress and wellbeing. The demand of an effective skill set for a TA has grown exponentially in recent years. The role has increased accountability and responsibility. Coupled with Welsh Government’s national mission to achieve high standards and aspirations for all pupils, schools require the best qualified staff, teaching and assisting learning in Welsh schools. To ensure the Welsh economy has an effective multi-functional, literate and numerate workforce in the future, school provision must be provided by appropriately and highly qualified staff.” – Schools Social Partnership Forum Workforce Board report (January 2024)⁸⁶

Wales is undergoing a generational shift in education policy, including implementing the Curriculum for Wales, the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code, and a Whole School Approach to mental health and wellbeing.

Both Estyn and the Welsh Government have recognised that support staff are vital for the delivery of the new Curriculum for Wales.⁸⁷ Guidance stresses that implementation requires the full contribution of “all practitioners, including support staff” to design and deliver learning that meets the needs of every learner. The new ALN Code also explicitly recognises that support staff play a critical role in “ensuring teachers are supported and the needs of all learners are met.”⁸⁸

“Support staff in many schools and settings that we visited facilitated and supported the inclusion of pupils with ALN successfully. In the few most effective cases, support staff were skilled and knowledgeable and complemented what teachers were doing. They knew the needs and interests of pupils well. In these cases, they liaised well with teachers in preparing for their role in the classroom or within an intervention activity. Where it was most effective, enabling adults adapted learning skilfully, ensuring that it was accessible and engaging for pupils with ALN” – Estyn Report 2024

Under the ALN Code, all learners identified with ALN must have an Individual Development Plan (IDP), outlining in detail the Additional Learning Provision (ALP) needed, this often includes staff training.⁸⁹ As Estyn has reported, the number of pupils with statutory ALP through IDPs or statements has continued to rise, increasing professional learning demands on the workforce.⁹⁰ Figures show the numbers doubled from 10,499 in 2023 to 21,319 in 2024⁹¹ and one report estimates that by 2035, 17.5% of children in Wales will have complex needs.⁹²

Despite this, the number of special needs support staff is decreasing (see table below). Evidence from the Children’s Commissioner for Wales already shows systemic gaps in Welsh-medium ALN provision, with shortages of Welsh-speaking staff, particularly in neurodiversity and sensory support.⁹³

TABLE 4: NUMBER OF SPECIAL NEEDS SUPPORT STAFF

Year	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
No. of special needs support staff	5,250	5,055	4,830	4,705	4,375	4,195

Source: StatsWales, PLASC, Support staff by local authority, region and category⁹⁴

With policy placing extra demands on support staff, including highly skilled interventions and training expectations, more needs to be done to recognise this in pay, conditions, standardised roles and consistent access to training. Otherwise, there is a risk of a worsening recruitment and retention crisis.

A Wales SSSNB could help deliver this, as well as boost recruitment of Welsh-speaking staff. Without it, there is a risk that the issues outlined in Section 1; under-trained, mis-deployed and undervalued staff, will make it harder to achieve education goals, undermining the inclusivity and equity the reforms are designed to deliver.

4.3 Contributing to Wales' Fair Work commitments

“Fair work is where workers are fairly rewarded, heard and represented, secure and able to progress in a healthy, inclusive environment where rights are respected. We recommend Welsh Government take all measures possible within its sphere of competence to support and promote trade unions and collective bargaining.” – Fair Work Wales report, 2019⁹⁵

The Fair Work Commission has set out a comprehensive vision for how devolved institutions can promote secure, equitable and rewarding work through social partnership. A theme of the original *Fair Work Wales* report was the importance of developing sector-specific mechanisms to translate the principles of fair work into practical outcomes.⁹⁶

School support staff and the Fair Work indicators

The current conditions of school support staff risk the government falling behind in its commitments to the following core objectives:⁹⁷

- **Fair reward:** Rates of pay and other terms and conditions are appropriate, commensurate with skill etc. Work is evaluated fairly, including revaluing of work generally performed by women.
- **Reducing the gender pay gap:** “...non-discriminatory pay systems...[ensuring] that pay and reward are equitable as between different groups (e.g. through transparent gender and ethnicity pay audits) and that there is an action plan to deliver this.”
- **No disadvantage** ... in terms of opportunities for progression/career paths arising from particular contractual status or personal characteristics. Occupational segregation is addressed.
- **Workers have access to training for current job**, for progression and for organisational change; there is re-skilling of older and lower qualified workers.

Sector-specific solutions

The Commission recommended the creation of dedicated forums to identify sectoral issues and develop solutions through dialogue between unions, employers and government.⁹⁸

While the School Social Partnership Forum has grown from this process, its scope is broad, spanning the entire education workforce. Despite making progress on some of the issues facing support staff, their recommendations are not mandatory. A dedicated School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB) would complement this structure by providing a focused space with statutory underpinning that gives this undervalued section of the workforce a consistent voice.

A Wales SSSNB also aligns with other objectives of the Commission. For example, its statements stress that fair work must be adapted sensitively to the realities of different occupations and employment models.⁹⁹ It highlights the limits of ‘one size fits all’ approaches and calls for tailored arrangements that respond to the needs of different parts of the workforce.

A meaningful voice

The Commission defines fair work as including not just decent pay and conditions but also meaningful voice and collective representation.¹⁰⁰ The Welsh Government continues to support these principles, and the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023 now embeds them in statute.¹⁰¹

A WSSSNB would give clearer institutional expression to these duties, enabling a more ‘fit-for-purpose’ and coherent national dialogue on workforce planning, professional development, and service delivery in schools.

Putting Fair Work on firmer statutory basis

Finally, the Fair Work Commission recommends that: “steps be taken to put social partnership on a firmer statutory basis in order to embed social partnership more securely and provide assurance of continuity”¹⁰² and “the active use of section 60 of the Government of Wales Act 2006 to promote economic and social wellbeing, including through public sector workforce policy.”¹⁰³

The WSSSNB would be an appropriate and proportionate use of these powers, offering a practical route to deliver national consistency and improved outcomes in an area already under Welsh Government responsibility.

In sum, the WSSSNB would give a formal and focused voice to a group of predominantly female workers whose concerns are often marginalised within existing arrangements. Its creation would align directly with the Welsh Government’s wider fair work commitments, offering a dedicated mechanism to ensure this part of the education workforce is heard, valued and fairly treated.

4.4 Progressing the aims of the wellbeing agenda

The creation of a dedicated Wales School Support Staff Negotiating Body (WSSSNB) would also directly support the objectives of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and contribute to measurable progress against national well-being indicators and milestones. It would help deliver several of the Act’s seven overarching well-being goals¹⁰⁴, particularly:

- A more equal Wales, by addressing gender-based pay inequality and occupational segregation
- A prosperous Wales, by raising household income and improving job quality
- A Wales of cohesive communities, by supporting a secure and valued local workforce embedded in schools

In the Teaching Assistant Job Descriptions Review (January 2024), the Schools Social Partnership Forum wrote:

“Generally, TAs and other school support staff often live within the school’s catchment area, more so in primary settings. TAs can help connect community action plans; these often focus on the improvement of social well-being and involves the community working together in pursuit of their general interests. This power is manifested in the ability of individuals to come together and work toward common goals. The local school can be an anchor point to promote community cohesion.”

Recent assessments by the Welsh Government and the Future Generations Commissioner show that Wales is not on track to meet key well-being objectives. The *Well-being Wales 2024* report identifies flatlining progress on persistent poverty, growing gender pay gaps (which is at 11.8% when part-time work is included), and reductions in the proportion of people experiencing fair work.¹⁰⁵ The Future Generations Commissioner has warned that “progress is too slow and inconsistent” across many national indicators, and called for “targeted structural interventions” to embed the well-being goals in practice.¹⁰⁶

The WSSSNB would help drive improvements in several areas identified as national milestones and support other indicators, including:

1. Improve gross disposable household income (GDHI) per head in Wales by 2035 and commit to setting a stretching growth target for 2050
2. Eliminate the pay gap for gender, disability and ethnicity by 2050
3. At least 75% of working age adults in Wales will be qualified to level 3 or higher by 2050
4. Percentage of people in employment (with an emphasis on fair work)
5. Percentage of people who speak Welsh

In summary, the creation of a Wales School Support Staff Negotiating Body would act as a targeted and practical intervention to help Wales meet its legally binding well-being goals. It would provide a clear, measurable contribution to national indicators and milestones that are currently off track, and demonstrate how devolved governance and social partnership can be used to embed fairness, inclusion and sustainability in the education workforce.

5. What would a negotiating body look like?

“A dedicated pay and reward system would ensure school support staff are fairly paid for what they do, as well as provide a career structure and opportunities for professional development. In line with the red Welsh way of social partnership, UNISON looks forward to take part in discussions on what the new body should look like. This could be a significant step towards achieving fairer and more consistent contracts for school staff across Wales.” – Jess Turner, UNISON Cymru Secretary

Wales has an opportunity to create a negotiating body that is tailored to the Welsh school system and that is based on social partnership principles. The England SSSNB is taking shape, but Wales can choose to chart its own course.

Social partnership is at the heart of the Welsh Government’s approach to workforce policy. But school support staff currently have no permanent and regular mechanism for shaping the decisions that affect them. A national negotiating body would change this, embedding support staff voices into decision-making with employers, alongside Welsh Government participation.

5.1 Wales has the power to craft its own negotiating body

Wales has the legislative competence to establish its own SSSNB and to structure this differently from the England SSSNB, which is still taking shape.

In May 2025, Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson confirmed to UNISON that the Welsh Government could bring forward primary legislation in the Senedd to establish a SSSNB for Wales, as education is a devolved matter. Furthermore, any implications for employment legislation could be addressed with the Secretary of

State for Business and Trade to develop a section 150 order under the *Wales Act 2006*.

The *Employment Rights Bill (ERB)* is the flagship legislation that will establish the school support staff negotiating body for England. Since the legislative basis for a Wales SSSNB would be separate from the ERB, the negotiating body in Wales could be structured differently from its counterpart in England. However, it remains a very useful point of reference.

5.2 An expansive and clear remit

The issues facing school support staff – low pay, workloads, changing expectations, training access and progression – are connected. It is vitally important that the remit of a new negotiating body is both expansive and clearly defined.

The short-lived 2009-10 SSSNB in England faced setbacks due to confusion over the remit. The Department for Children, Schools and Families at one time advised the parties that “the majority of terms and conditions under negotiation within the core contract were outside the remit and only job title, remuneration and working hours remained.” However, it was later agreed that “all support staff terms and conditions could be presented in a single handbook which clearly set out their status.”¹⁰⁷

The ERB stipulates that remuneration, terms and conditions, training and career progression be within the remit of the body, and the Secretary of State has the power to determine whether a given matter should come under this remit.¹⁰⁸ There would be advantages to allowing the parties themselves to agree between themselves whether a matter is in scope, as this would maximise the effectiveness of the body.

5.3 An inclusive definition of school support staff

“Any national body for school support staff must reflect the whole workforce, not just a shrinking core.” – UNISON

School support staff perform diverse roles in schools and have different employers and contracts. UNISON strongly supports extending coverage of a WSSNB to workers in facilities, technical, welfare and administrative roles, and to include workers who are employed by a third party such as an outsourcing facilities company or agency.

Agency workers and outsourced workers generally have lower pay, fewer rights and less job security. Excluding agency and outsourced workers would embed a two-tier system in schools, undermining the key ambition to recognise the whole schools workforce. In the context of budgetary pressures, local authorities and schools would have a perverse incentive to reduce their staff costs by hiring workers not covered by nationally agreed pay and conditions.

The *Employment Rights Bill* as currently drafted contains a narrower definition of school support staff, restricting this to those employed by local authorities, schools or academy trusts.¹⁰⁹ In its response to a consultation on the England SSSNB, UNISON noted:

“The SSSNB is designed to be a national mechanism for ensuring fair, consistent standards for school support staff. Leaving out agency workers would create a major loophole that undermines its purpose, allowing employers to bypass negotiated terms by shifting more roles to agency supply.”

“[O]utsourced staff are vital to school life and deserve parity of pay and treatment. If the SSSNB only covers directly employed staff, this will incentivise even more outsourcing, allowing schools to bypass national standards.”

The Local Government Association (LGA) has indicated that local authorities would be concerned that the inclusion of agency workers in the England SSSNB would increase administrative burdens on schools, agencies and local authorities.¹¹⁰ While the inclusion of outsourced and agency workers brings some added complexity, the clear benefit is that the negotiating body would address the schools workforce as a whole.

The LGA further noted that it would need to be considered whether and how agencies should be involved in the negotiating body, suggesting that they provide “evidence or input on an ad-hoc basis.” It is worth noting that third party companies need not be represented on the negotiating body in order to cover the workers they employ. Private companies have different incentives compared to schools and local authorities, meaning their inclusion could significantly change the dynamics of the body. The negotiating body should have the authority to dictate the pay and conditions required for work based in schools regardless of employer type.

For many school support staff employed by third parties or agencies, there are no pay bargaining or union recognition arrangements in place. Therefore, implementing an inclusive school support negotiating body would *expand* the coverage of collective agreements, rather than only restructuring the existing coverage.

“Including facilities workers would be a massive change. It would mean workers can see that we are directly involved in those processes, addressing their priorities. It could be an open and transparent conversation.” – Peter Garland, UNISON Newport Branch Secretary

5.4 Meaningful negotiations between the parties

The negotiating body should enable the employer side and the union side to have meaningful negotiations to agree concrete and enforceable outcomes. Wales has a strong record of social partnership. The negotiating body could build on the foundations of the Schools Social Partnership Forum, which has worked out solutions through dialogue but lacks the enforcement power of a negotiating body.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) distinguishes between tripartite social dialogue and collective bargaining.¹¹¹

- “Tripartite social dialogue involves three groups: employers’ organizations, trade unions and governments. It includes negotiations, consultations or exchanges of information and views between representatives of these three groups.”
- “[Collective bargaining] is a substantive process involving negotiations between one or more employers or employers’ organizations and one or more trade unions, with a view to reaching a collective agreement that regulates the terms and conditions of employment and relations between the parties.”

The ILO emphasises that tripartite social dialogue can “complement” collective bargaining. The move towards a negotiating body can be seen as integrating a collective bargaining component into the established tripartite social dialogue approach.

Wales has an opportunity to create a negotiating body focused on delivering improved pay and employment conditions for school support staff, that is a mechanism for meaningful negotiations between the employer and union side. The remit and procedures of the negotiating body should enable both of these functions. The Minister has a clear and active role to play in enabling that alignment.

Who are the negotiating parties?

The basic composition of the negotiating body will likely be determined by the Cabinet Secretary through regulations. To support the negotiating function, it would be sensible to maintain a principle that the union and employer sides should each have a level of autonomy to determine how they are represented on the negotiating body. For instance, participants should not be selected by the Cabinet Secretary or pre-determined in the legislation.

On the worker side, the negotiating parties will be the three unions recognised for collective bargaining purposes for school support staff in the NJC: UNISON, GMB and Unite the Union. The unions can jointly determine the composition of the delegation.

On the employer side, the main body uniting local authorities in Wales is the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). In the earlier iteration of the England SSSNB, the employer side was represented by the Local Government Employers, the Foundation and Aided Schools National Association, and the Catholic and Church of England Education Services, but this does not easily map to Wales in 2025. Consultation would be needed to determine whether any organisations other than the WLGA could be included on the employer side.

6. The financial case: spending implications

Any uplift in support staff pay would have clear costs, but these are measurable, fundable through established mechanisms, and more controllable under a national negotiating body than under the current fragmented system.

Decisions on pay for school support staff ultimately depend on how funding flows through Wales' education system. The Senedd determines overall financial settlements for local authorities, but Education spending is not ringfenced within this. Councils then set their own education budgets, which are delegated to schools on a per pupil basis via local funding formulas. Pay and grading decisions for school support staff currently flow from how each local authority applies the NJC pay framework, resulting in wide local variation.

When government has wanted to fund workforce pay uplifts or improve standards in the past, it has done so in two main ways: by adjusting the local authority settlement or by providing targeted grants. Recent teacher pay rises, for example, were supported by additional in-year allocations to local authorities. A future pay uplift could be funded in the same way, either through settlement or grant mechanisms.

This section looks at current spend on support staff on a per pupil basis and models the implications of pay rise scenarios. It also considers how any increases could be delivered through the funding system.

6.1 School support staff currently make up 24.2% of per pupil spend

Looking across all schools in Wales, the data confirm that school support staff are a central investment in the system, not an add-on. In 2023–24 (the most recent year for which we have full data), schools spent an average of £1,599 per pupil on support staff, making up 24.2% of per-pupil education spend. The average FTE gross cost of a support staff member was £29,771 (see Table 2), and the pupil-to-support staff ratio was 17 (for all Wales data see Appendix).

6.2 Spending on support staff in primary schools

TABLE 5: PUPILS, SCHOOL SUPPORT STAFF (SSS) AND SPEND IN WELSH PRIMARY SCHOOLS 2023-24

Figures for 2023-24	Pupil numbers	Total SSS	% Female	% Part-time	Frontline SSS share (%)	Admin/technical share (%)	Gross cost per SSS (headcount) (£,000)	Pupil to frontline staff ratio	SSS spend per pupil (£,000)	SSS share of per-pupil spend
Whole of Wales	257591	16,620	96.1%	51.3%	89.5%	10.5%	24.069	17	1.553	26.4%
North Wales	55251	3,935	97.0%	70.8%	90.0%	9.9%	20.523	16	1.462	24.1%
Isle of Anglesey	5450	410	97.6%	61.0%	89.0%	11.0%	19.990	15	1.504	22.1%
Gwynedd	8607	585	97.4%	78.6%	93.2%	6.0%	19.701	16	1.339	20.7%
Conwy	8484	550	96.4%	94.5%	88.2%	12.7%	17.787	17	1.153	20.2%
Denbighshire	8022	505	97.0%	47.5%	87.1%	12.9%	18.663	18	1.175	22.9%
Flintshire	12859	965	96.9%	76.2%	90.7%	9.8%	22.489	15	1.688	26.5%
Wrexham	11829	920	96.7%	62.5%	90.8%	9.2%	21.878	14	1.702	28.5%
South West and Mid Wales	69247	5,025	96.1%	51.2%	89.7%	10.2%	23.015	15	1.670	28.0%
Powys	8399	670	98.5%	60.4%	87.3%	11.9%	17.737	14	1.415	23.9%
Ceredigion	4223	300	96.7%	43.3%	90.0%	6.7%	34.347	16	2.440	41.2%
Pembrokeshire	9011	695	97.8%	28.1%	89.2%	10.1%	22.108	15	1.705	26.5%
Carmarthenshire	15241	1,040	94.7%	35.1%	88.5%	11.1%	27.359	17	1.867	31.3%
Swansea	21117	1,575	95.2%	79.7%	91.1%	8.6%	19.679	15	1.468	24.7%
Neath Port Talbot	11256	740	96.6%	31.1%	87.8%	10.8%	25.201	17	1.657	29.2%
Central South Wales	82068	4,685	95.6%	46.1%	89.5%	10.4%	27.035	20	1.543	26.9%
Bridgend	12524	665	96.2%	49.6%	88.0%	12.0%	27.720	21	1.472	26.6%
Vale of Glamorgan	12478	735	95.9%	50.3%	89.1%	11.6%	27.469	19	1.618	28.6%
Rhondda Cynon Taf	19546	1,120	98.7%	59.4%	90.2%	10.3%	25.056	19	1.436	25.9%
Merthyr Tydfil	5279	325	93.8%	20.0%	90.8%	7.7%	33.151	18	2.041	31.1%
Cardiff	32241	1,835	94.0%	40.1%	89.9%	10.1%	26.811	20	1.526	26.2%
South East Wales	51025	2,975	96.1%	33.4%	88.6%	11.3%	25.870	19	1.508	26.0%
Caerphilly	15750	930	95.7%	35.5%	90.3%	10.2%	24.354	19	1.438	24.5%
Blaenau Gwent	4886	275	94.5%	21.8%	90.9%	7.3%	29.531	20	1.662	27.0%
Torfaen	8198	495	94.9%	24.2%	88.9%	9.1%	22.745	19	1.373	23.3%
Monmouthshire	6273	400	97.5%	35.0%	88.8%	8.8%	26.868	18	1.713	28.0%
Newport	15918	875	96.6%	40.0%	84.6%	14.9%	27.641	22	1.519	28.0%

Source: StatsWales, LRD calculations based on PLASC 2023/24 data on school support staff and pupil numbers for primary schools¹¹² and education revenue outturn¹¹³

Wales-wide baseline (primary)

Across Wales, primary schools spend an average of £1,553 per pupil on support staff, accounting for 26.4% of all per-pupil spending. Nearly nine in ten staff are frontline (teaching assistants, ALN, pastoral), with an average gross cost of £24,069 per staff member and an average pupil-to-frontline staff ratio of 17.

What this means: over a quarter of all primary school spend already goes on support staff, yet pay is determined locally and inconsistently. A WSSSNB would lock in this investment by ensuring government and councils know that a major share of education spending is being used effectively and predictably.

Regional variation (primary)

Different regions allocate resources to primary support staff in distinct ways. Gross cost per support staff ranges from £20,523 in North Wales to £27,035 in Central South. Support staff spend per pupil ranges from £1,508 in South East Wales to £1,670 in South West & Mid Wales (Wales average £1,553). Pupil-to-frontline staff ratios vary from 15 in South West & Mid Wales to 20 in Central South (Wales average:17).

This means some regions can afford closer support (1:15) while others stretch staff thinner (1:20). This matters for fairness and consistency: a national pay floor wouldn't be about forcing equal ratios,¹¹⁴ it would ensure that staff in every region are fairly rewarded for the work they do.

Local authority variation

At local authority level, contrasts are stark. Ceredigion has the highest support staff spend per pupil (£2,440) and the highest share of per pupil spend (41.2%), alongside a very frontline heavy workforce (90%) and gross cost per support staff of £34,347 (with a slightly lower pupil-to-frontline ratio than average at 16). At the other end, Conwy records the lowest support staff spend per pupil (£1,153) and one of the lowest shares of per pupil spend (20.2%) (pupil-to-frontline 17, gross cost per support staff £17,787).

Powys has the lowest gross cost per SSS (£17,737) and one of the best pupil-to-frontline ratios (14), while Newport has the highest pupil-to-frontline ratio (22) and the lowest frontline share (84.6%). Anglesey combines relatively low gross cost per staff member (£19,990) with a midrange per pupil spend (£1,504) but has more staff per pupil; a ratio of 15.

Taken together, the primary school data show two truths: first, that support staff are a core element of primary school spending across Wales; and second, that pupils' access to well-paid, fairly graded staff varies significantly depending on where they live. Some variation is inevitable, reflecting genuine local needs. But the current system also allows pay to be held down in ways that undermine recruitment, retention and fairness.

A Wales School Support Staff Negotiating Body would not remove local flexibility, but it would give all authorities a fair national baseline to build from, reducing the risk of undercutting, stabilising budgets, and ensuring that every pound invested in staff pay delivers better value.

6.3 Scenarios: how a new national wage floor could work

UNISON estimates that school support staff are underpaid by 20–25% compared to equivalent roles because of the widespread use of term-time only contracts. A Wales School Support Staff Negotiating Body would not be able to close this gap overnight, but it could set a path for bridging it over time by establishing a fair national pay floor.

Scenario 1: status quo (baseline)

Local authorities continue to set grading and pay locally using NJC, producing wide variations in pay for work of equal value. In the lowest-paying areas, staff are forced into poverty wages, reliant on benefits or juggling second jobs just to stay afloat. The result is an unstable workforce where schools struggle to recruit and retain the staff they need and pupils suffer.

Scenario 2: A hypothetical 12% uplift in support staff pay

To illustrate what a new national pay floor could mean in practice, we model a 12% uplift in school support staff pay. This is not a prediction of what the Wales School Support Staff Negotiating Body would set, but a worked example based on recent data.

In 2023–24, the total spend on school support staff across all schools in Wales was £745 million. With 465,840 pupils enrolled, this equated to £1,599 per pupil (see Appendix).

A 12% uplift in pay (which could be weighted more towards lifting up the lowest paid) would add approximately £89.4 million to this spend, raising the total to £834.4 million. Set against the total delegated school budget which exceeds £3 billion, this is a relatively modest additional cost, though not one policy-

makers would regard as insignificant.

At a pupil level, the nominal uplift translates into an increase from £1,599 per pupil to £1,791, an extra £192 per pupil, if pupil numbers remained constant at 2023–24 levels.

However, this calculation shows the effect of a one-off 12% uplift in nominal terms. In practice, rising prices will erode the value of this increase: with RPI currently running at 4.4%, the real benefit to staff would be smaller unless further up-ratings were applied.

Scenario 3: A phased national uplift

Rather than a single large uplift, a Wales School Support Staff Negotiating Body (WSSSNB) could agree a phased approach to raising pay. For example, the Body could target closing the 20–25% pay gap over a five-year period. This might mean annual increases of 4–5% above inflation, ensuring that staff gradually reach parity while giving local authorities and schools time to plan and budget.

On 2023–24 spending levels, even a 5% increase each year (compounded) would add around £23 million in the first year, £48 million by year three, and £65–70 million by year five. Spread across Wales's 465,840 pupils, this equates to around £50 more per pupil in year one and £150 per pupil by year five (although this figure will likely be higher if pupil numbers continue to fall). These costs would still represent a small fraction of the schools' budget but would transform pay for the lowest-paid workers in the system.

The benefit of a phased approach is predictability. Schools and local authorities would not face a sudden shock to their budgets, and central government would be able to allocate additional funding through the annual settlement process. However, the value of phased uplifts would depend heavily on inflation. If RPI remains at or above 4.4%, then an annual 5% nominal increase translates into little more than pay maintenance rather than catch-up. To genuinely close the 20–25% gap, up-ratings would need to run ahead of inflation (see box).

Two illustrative paths based on the 2023–24 baseline

The following scenarios model the gross cost of different uplift pathways for school support staff. Figures are system-wide and expressed per pupil using 2023–24 rolls; real-terms values use a 4.4% RPI assumption.

Note that these figures should not just been seen in terms of additional cost: in reality, Barnett consequentials, in-year grant top-ups, and the flow-back of Welsh Rates of Income Tax would reduce the net cost to the Welsh Government (see next section). These examples should therefore be read as illustrations of the order of magnitude involved, rather than as precise forecasts of the final cost.

Plan A: 6% + 7% + 7% (around 20% compounded over three years)

- Year 1: total support staff spend £789.70m; £1,695 per pupil (up £95.96 vs baseline £1,599). Real terms (RPI-adjusted) per pupil £1,623.77, up £24.51
- Year 2: £844.98m; £1,813 per pupil (up £214.62). Real per pupil £1,664.21, up £64.95.
- Year 3: £904.13m; £1,940 per pupil (up £341.59). Real per pupil £1,705.66, up £106.39.

In terms of gross per staff member cost, the Wales-wide average gross cost per SSS rises from about £29,776 to £36,136 nominally; in real terms that's about £31,757, a gain of roughly 6.6% after three years.

Plan B: 7% + 7% + 6% + 5% (around 27% compounded over four years)

- Year 1: £797.15m; £1,711 per pupil (up £111.95). Real per pupil £1,639.09, up £39.83.
- Year 2: £852.95m; £1,830 per pupil (up £231.73). Real per pupil £1,679.91, up £80.65.
- Year 3: £904.13m; £1,940 per pupil (up £341.59). Real per pupil £1,705.66, up £106.39.
- Year 4: £949.33m; £2,038 per pupil (up £438.64). Real per pupil £1,715.46, up £116.20.

In terms of gross per staff member cost, the average gross cost per SSS reaches about £37,943

nominally by year four; in real terms about £31,940, a gain of roughly 7.3% after four year.

Demographic considerations

Pupil numbers fell in 2024-25 and projected to continue to fall.¹¹⁵ The most recent 2024–25 data shows enrolment at 460,091 pupils, down by nearly 6,000 from the year before. When the same uplifted pay bill is spread across this smaller pupil population, the cost per pupil rises slightly further to £1,814, an increase of £215 per pupil compared with 2023–24.

This demonstrates two important dynamics. First, even a significant pay rise for support staff results in an additional cost that is manageable relative to the size of the total schools' budget, but that would make a real difference to staff pay, morale and retention. Second, falling pupil numbers increase the per-pupil cost of any given pay bill. This means that while the absolute cost of employing support staff is stable and predictable, the way it is measured on a per-pupil basis can rise faster than expected if pupil numbers fall.

Wales School Support Staff Negotiating Body would provide a transparent national framework, allowing Welsh Government to model such scenarios and plan accordingly.

These illustrative scenarios show that even relatively ambitious phased uplifts (20% over three years or 27% over four) would not fully bridge the estimated 25% underpayment caused by term-time-only contracts. However, without a national body, there is no clear pathway to address this gap at all. A WSSSNB would be able to negotiate and plan towards closing it in a sustainable way, setting milestones, spreading costs across years, and giving certainty to local authorities and ministers.

6.4 How would it be funded?

Any sustainable pay uplift for school support staff must be fully funded if schools and local authorities are to avoid destabilising other budgets.

Part of the funding would come from Barnett consequentials

The creation of an English School Support Staff Negotiating Body, expected to come online in 2027, is likely to result in nationally negotiated uplifts to pay and grading in England. If those uplifts are fully funded by the Department for Education (DfE), they will raise departmental spending and feed into the Welsh block grant via the Barnett formula – just as teacher pay awards already do.

- Example: if England spends an additional £250m on a 5% uplift (5% of the £5bn SSS spend in 2023–24),¹¹⁶ Wales would receive around £13.7m.
- But Wales's own gross spend on SSS is £745m, meaning a 5% uplift here would cost £37.25m. Barnett would therefore cover just over a third of the true cost.

Notes/caveats

- This assumes the £5bn is the England SSS pay bill (it's the total spend) and the 5% rise is fully funded (it isn't always) in the DfE budget (and not offset elsewhere).
- If the pay award is part-year or staged, the "change to budget" would be lower in year one.

This gap arises because the Barnett formula is based on population, not workforce size. Wales employs proportionally more support staff per head due to smaller schools, rural provision, Welsh-medium education, and specific needs. As a result, consequentials underestimate the real pay pressure. Crucially, this is not unusual: teacher pay uplifts in Wales have repeatedly required Barnett consequentials plus Welsh Government top-ups.¹¹⁷

TABLE 6: RATIO OF SCHOOL SUPPORT STAFF TO POPULATION ENGLAND AND WALES

	Population (2022)	SSS FTE	Ratio
Wales	3,132,700	25,020	9.1:1000
England	57,112,500	517,496.3	8:1000

Source: ONS Population estimates for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: mid-2023 ¹¹⁸

In-year and targeted grants, as happens for teacher pay

Teacher pay awards in recent years have been backed by specific funding injections. For the 2025–26 teacher pay award, the Cabinet Secretary pledged additional funding to help schools manage the 4% increase, acknowledging that the timing meant it could not be fully included in the initial settlement.¹¹⁹

In previous years, teacher pay was supported by teacher pay grants; for example, a £22 million per year top-up to back teacher pay increases outside of the core settlement.¹²⁰ These examples show that the Welsh Government can and does use targeted, in-year grant funding to deliver full pay settlements when standard allocations fall short.

Additional funding via the local authority settlement, School Standards Grant or the Pupil Development Grant

The 2025–26 budget includes a 4.5% increase in the Welsh Government Revenue Support Grant, which explicitly recognised the budgetary impact of pay awards for teachers and local authority staff. It announced:¹²¹ “...additional funding to support Authorities and schools with the budgetary impacts of the difference between the planned pay uplift and the increased pay award for the seven months falling into 2024-25. This funding of £18m has been baselined in the 2025-26 Settlement and an additional £13m allocated for the full year costs. [The Minister has] again taken the decision to provide all the available funding up front and not hold back funding for in-year recognition of the 2025-26 teachers’ pay deal.”¹²² The government also announced additional funding in support of pay pressures following higher than planned NJC pay awards, of £52m.

In the previous year, the government provided an additional £20 million for schools, allocated through the School Standards Grant to provide targeted support to schools facing particular challenges, including those in special measures.¹²³

The Pupil Development Grant is another potential source of funding, as this is directed at schools with higher levels of deprivation that tend to require more support staff to improve attainment.^{124 125}

This shows that uplifts in pay can be financed by targeted increases within existing school funding envelopes.

Some funding can come from increased Welsh Rates of Income Tax (WRIT)

Any pay uplift for school support staff would not be a pure cost to the Welsh Government. A proportion of the extra wages will flow back into the Welsh budget through Welsh Rates of Income Tax (WRIT).

Under the devolution settlement, Welsh taxpayers pay the same overall income tax rates as in England (20%, 40% and 45%). But those rates are split: for the basic rate band (20%), 10p in every taxable pound is WRIT (paid directly to the Welsh budget) and 10p goes to the UK Exchequer. In other words, half of the basic rate tax paid by Welsh workers accrues to Wales.

To make this concrete: if a Welsh support staff member earns £20,000 a year, their taxable income is £7,430 (after the £12,570 allowance). They pay £1,486 in tax at 20%. Of this, £743 is WRIT and flows back to Wales.

When wages rise, the same principle applies. For every additional £1 of taxable pay, 20p goes in income tax, of which 10p flows back into the Welsh budget via WRIT. So, around 10% of any taxable pay rise returns automatically to Wales.

However, at system level not all of the gross cost of a pay rise translates into taxable earnings:

- some of the uplift consists of employer pension and National Insurance contributions, which are not taxed;
- some staff earn below the tax-free personal allowance, so part of their uplift generates no income tax.

If we assume that 50–70% of the gross cost of a pay uplift shows up as taxable earnings across the workforce, then around 5–7% of the gross uplift flows back to Wales via WRIT.

For example:

- A 5% pay uplift on the £745m support staff pay bill costs £37.25m.
- If 60% of that is taxable earnings (£22.35m), then WRIT at 10% of taxable pay equals £2.24m.
- This means roughly 6% of the gross cost is automatically returned to the Welsh budget.

This mechanism does not cover the full cost of pay awards, but it shows that the headline cost overstates the net cost to Wales, because higher wages also expand the devolved tax base.

The key question is not *whether* uplifts can be afforded, but whether Wales can continue to afford the costs of low pay and its impact on a fragile workforce, schools and pupils. The example of teacher pay awards, funded through targeted injections, as well as increased settlements, provides a clear and credible path for how a WSSSNB-related uplift could be paid for. That makes creating a national pay floor both politically feasible and fiscally responsible.

7. Why the benefits outweigh the costs

Investing in school support staff is not only fair, it is also cost-effective. Raising pay delivers benefits that extend well beyond the workforce itself. International evidence, economic research and Welsh data all show that better pay for undervalued, low-paid staff improves educational outcomes, narrows gender inequality, reduces in-work poverty, strengthens local economies, and provides a framework for efficient governance. In each case, the benefits significantly outweigh the costs.

Benefits at a glance:

- Stronger recruitment and retention of support staff, reducing turnover and staffing shortages.
- Improved pupil outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged and ALN learners, through more effective use of support staff.
- Narrowing of the gender pay gap, as 90% of support staff are women.
- Reduction in risk of costly equal pay claims against councils.
- Lower levels of in-work poverty among school support staff households.
- Local economic multipliers, as additional income is spent in Welsh communities.
- Greater predictability in school workforce costs, avoiding unmanaged pay drift.
- Alignment with teachers' pay system, creating a coherent and fair framework across the school workforce.

7.1 Protecting educational investment and improving outcomes

The Review of School Spending in Wales (published in 2020) set out four priorities for ensuring funding decisions deliver on the national mission of raising standards and reducing inequalities. Each of these themes underlines the case for a Wales School Support Staff Negotiating Body (WSSSNB).¹²⁶

Spending decisions based on empirical evidence. The review highlights a strong international consensus that increased school spending produces positive effects, particularly for disadvantaged learners and where investment is made early. In Wales, the main way in which deprivation funding is used is by employing additional teaching assistants:

“A large element of deprivation funding has been used to employ extra teaching assistants. How they are deployed and used is therefore very important in determining the overall effectiveness of deprivation funding in Wales.” – Review of School Spending in Wales

While the evidence on the impact of increasing spending on non-teaching staff is more limited than it is for teachers, what is clear is that support staff are central to how resources are deployed in disadvantaged schools. A national body would ensure this investment is used effectively.

Fairness and transparency in funding. The review found that similar schools often receive very different levels of per-pupil funding, with differences of up to 35%. It recommended simpler, more consistent funding formulae across local authorities. A WSSSNB provides a parallel mechanism on the workforce side – ensuring fair and transparent pay for support staff in similar roles, regardless of where they are employed.

Effective scrutiny through consistent and transparent data. The review noted that meaningful accountability requires clear, comparable data on how resources are allocated and used. This logic also applies to the workforce: a national body for support staff would require transparent role profiles, pay scales and deployment information, enabling local authorities, schools and the Welsh Government to scrutinise value for money.

Clear expectations on future costs. The review recommended that the Welsh Government publish rolling multi-year cost assessments to link funding decisions with underlying pressures. For school support staff, a dedicated national negotiating body would provide the same clarity: forward planning on pay, linked to role requirements such as ALN responsibilities and Welsh-medium skills, would give schools and local authorities certainty while avoiding the unmanaged drift that risks equal pay liabilities.

Implication for Wales. In Wales, schools already recognise the advantages of directing funding towards school support staff, particularly in disadvantaged areas. Around half of schools report using their Pupil Deprivation Grant to fund additional TAs, with spending averaging about £200 per pupil eligible for free school meals in primary schools in 2019.¹²⁷ A WSSSNB would strengthen this investment by providing national consistency and transparency, ensuring that the funds schools direct to support staff translate into lasting gains for pupils and the system as a whole

“The funding question is crowding out the possibility of genuine progress – it’s the sword of Damocles over our heads. We need to bridge the financial and educational responsibilities; councils must balance our budgets, but we can find ways to deliver better. We want to have a proper conversation about term time pay, job descriptions and progression, and the SSSNB could be a forum to really move those conversations on.” – Anthony Hunt, Torfaen County Borough Council Leader

7.2 The gender equity and economic dividend

School support staff in Wales are predominantly women. Around 90% of the workforce is female (see Section 1). Raising their pay goes beyond just being a question of fairness: it addresses systemic gender inequality in roles that are undervalued and underpaid despite carrying important educational responsibilities. Gender-equitable remuneration means compensating people based on the value of their work, regardless of whether the work is concentrated in female-dominated occupations.¹²⁸ A WSSSNB would help correct this imbalance and narrow the gender pay gap within the Welsh public sector.

Investment in female-dominated sectors generates wider benefits. Research shows that women are more likely to spend additional income on household essentials, childcare, food and education, creating stronger local economic multipliers. Expanding employment in education and social care stimulates job creation

more effectively than equivalent spending in male-dominated industries.¹²⁹ Modelling using the related care economy demonstrates that increasing public investment can drive inclusive employment and GDP growth.¹³⁰

A WSSSNB would reduce equal pay claim risks. Councils across the UK have faced major financial liabilities where women in school support, catering or cleaning roles successfully claimed that their work was undervalued compared with male-dominated roles such as refuse collection.

7.3 International evidence: sectoral bargaining delivers for undervalued workforces

Experience from Australia and New Zealand shows that sectoral bargaining can transform outcomes for low-paid, predominantly female workforces.

Australia: early childhood education and care and the Fair Work Commission. In December 2024, Australia's Fair Work Commission approved the first national multi-employer agreement for the early childhood education and care sector. Supported by government funding and negotiated by the United Workers Union, the agreement delivered a 15% wage rise across the workforce, which is more than 90% female. This reform addressed fragmentation across thousands of small providers and was designed to improve staff retention, reduce turnover and recognise the professional value of educators.^{131 132}

In Australia, the Fair Work Commission undertakes gender-based undervaluation reviews of sectors where there is long-standing low pay in predominantly female workforces and promotes bargaining arrangements for these sectors. The resulting reforms have sped up the narrowing of the gender pay gap.¹³³

New Zealand: school support staff. Since 2020, a series of pay equity settlements have transformed school support roles.¹³⁴ Teacher aides received a settlement raising wages by 19–30% and improving job security for around 22,000 staff.¹³⁵ This was followed by national agreements for school administration staff in 2022, and librarians and science technicians in 2023, delivering increases of up to 40%. These settlements replaced postcode variations with consistent national pay scales, better training pathways and recognition of skills, negotiated between unions and the Ministry of Education.

New Zealand: care and support workers. Previously, unions, employers and government in New Zealand achieved a landmark 2017 Care and Support Workers (Pay Equity) Settlement covering 55,000 aged care, home support and disability care staff. It provided pay increases of 20–40% over five years, linked pay to qualifications, and was enacted in law to guarantee permanence. Although pay has begun to drift again since 2022 when the settlement ended, it has been credited with improving recruitment and retention, professionalising care roles, and reducing gender pay inequality in a workforce overwhelmingly composed of women.¹³⁶

These examples show that the returns outweigh the costs. Governments backed the investment in low paid female workforces because the benefits, improved recruitment, retention, service quality and gender equity – were greater than the fiscal outlay.

7.4 Poverty reduction

Raising wages in low-paid sectors such as school support not only lifts individual households, it helps families move out of in-work poverty. Recent data show that around 21% of people in Wales are living in relative income poverty (after housing costs), meaning their household income falls below 60% of the UK median. This has remained relatively stable for nearly two decades.¹³⁷ Within that, child poverty features even more prominently: nearly 45% of children in Wales are affected.¹³⁸ A vast majority of those living in poverty are part of working households demonstrating the prevalence of in-work poverty, driven by low hourly pay rather than lack of employment.

Living wages, which are calculated to meet basic living standards (and exceed statutory minimums), are increasingly recognised as effective policy tools for promoting decent work and reducing inequality.¹³⁹ Case study evidence on their use, such as when they are implemented by accreditation schemes, show reductions

in in-work poverty and staff turnover, with minimal negative employment impact.¹⁴⁰ Research also shows the living wage can reduce stress and increase productivity.¹⁴¹

Academic reviews into more broad minimum wage hikes, including the UK's National Living Wage (NLW), show that these do not lead to significant job losses overall. While there may be small effects on hours or employment for certain groups, the net impact is to raise worker earnings without harming employment levels.¹⁴²

Together, these findings indicate that a sector-specific wage floor for support staff would meaningfully reduce poverty risk and raise living standards without undermining employment security.

7.5 A high value reform

The evidence shows that a Wales School Support Staff Negotiating Body would be a high value reform. It would protect the effectiveness of the more than three billion pounds already invested each year in schools, address gender inequality and reduce the risk of costly equal pay claims. It would also deliver measurable social and economic benefits by helping to lift households out of in-work poverty and by supporting stronger local economies, particularly in disadvantaged and rural areas.

Experience from Australia and New Zealand demonstrates that when governments invest in low paid, predominantly female workforces through sector level bargaining, the results are positive. Staff have seen significant pay increases, improved job security and professional recognition, while services have benefited from better retention and reduced turnover.

A School Support Staff Negotiating Body in Wales would not be an experiment but the application of a proven approach. It would provide national consistency, transparent reporting and predictability in future costs. By bringing support staff onto a similar footing to teachers, it would create a more balanced and stable school workforce and ensure that investment in education delivers the greatest possible value.

8. The time is now

This report has set out the value of school support staff, the problems created by the current NJC framework, and the strong case for a Wales School Support Staff Negotiating Body. The evidence shows that reform is necessary and achievable, and that support for change is shared by staff, schools, councils and government.

8.1 Broad support for reform

Across Wales, there is a growing consensus amongst stakeholders that the current framework for school support staff is unsustainable. Indeed, Welsh Labour committed to the creation of a SSSNB at its June 2025 conference. Support staff themselves are majority in favour of a dedicated Wales negotiating body. In a 2025 survey, they indicated a negotiating body is their preferred way to have a collective voice in decision-making about their working lives. Headteachers and councillors have stressed that current pay and conditions undermine recruitment and retention and make it harder to deliver for pupils. Even local authorities, in responses to funding consultations, have questioned whether the NJC is still fit for purpose for schools. The Welsh Government has also indicated willingness to consider alternative approaches. Taken together, these voices show that momentum is building for change.

8.2 Why a Wales School Support Staff Negotiating Body

The case made throughout this report is that a WSSSNB is the most effective way to:

- give support staff a proper national voice;
- deliver consistent and fair pay across Wales;
- align pay and conditions with the professional responsibilities staff already carry;
- remove the ongoing risk of equal pay claims;
- and ensure that public investment in schools achieves maximum value.

“There needs to be representation from both the councils and the unions, in a spirit of social partnership. A negotiating body would mean we could work together and learn from each other to get a better deal for schools and the support staff.” – Anthony Hunt, Torfaen County Borough Council Leader

8.3 Recommendations

To achieve these aims, the report recommends that the Welsh Government:

- Bring legislation to establish a statutory Wales School Support Staff Negotiating Body with an explicit remit covering all school support staff roles, including outsourced groups and agency staff; and
- Align the body’s work with Fair Work and Well-being duties, ensuring monitoring of gender pay impacts, poverty reduction, and consistency with Welsh Government policy priorities.

Once established, the negotiating body should:

- Develop national job descriptions and evaluation schemes specific to schools, to replace outdated NJC role profiles. These could build on work undertaken by the Schools Social Partnership Forum and ensure that child-centred working, ALN responsibilities, and Welsh-medium duties are properly valued;
- Introduce a national pay floor for school support staff, with spine points linked to role requirements to remove postcode lotteries in pay; and
- Publish a School Support Staff Handbook setting out minimum conditions of service, working time arrangements, and clear career progression pathways.

Methodology note

All paybill scenarios presented in this report are based on the 2023–24 Wales totals for school support staff:

- Gross support staff paybill: £744.864 million
- Pupil headcount: 465,840
- Support staff headcount: 27,675
- Support staff FTE: 25,020

Two scenarios were modelled on this baseline:

- Scenario A: 6%, 7%, 7% (three consecutive years)
- Scenario B: 7%, 7%, 6%, 5% (four consecutive years)

Nominal totals were calculated by applying the annual uplift sequentially to the baseline paybill (e.g. $£744.864\text{m} \times 1.06 \times 1.07 \times 1.07$).

Per-pupil and per-staff averages were derived by dividing the resulting totals by the 2023–24 pupil headcount and support staff FTE respectively.

Real-terms figures were estimated by deflating nominal totals using a 4.4% annual Retail Price Index (RPI) factor. This was compounded for each year of the scenario (e.g. Year 2 deflated by 1.044^2 , Year 3 by 1.044^3).

These calculations are intended to show the approximate order of magnitude of costs and averages under different uplift trajectories. They do not constitute formal forecasts.

List of acronyms

ALN: Additional Learning Needs

ERB: Employment Rights Bill

EWC: Education Workforce Council

NJC: National Joint Council for Local Government Services

SSPF: Schools Social Partnership Forum

SSSNB: School Support Staff Negotiating Body

TA: Teaching Assistant

WSSSNB: Wales School Support Staff Negotiating Body

Appendix: Gross spending on Welsh schools and support staff per pupil in £,000s (2023-24 data)

£,000	Nursery	Total Spend Nursery	Primary SSS spend	Total Spend Primary	Secondary SSS spend	Total Spend Secondary	Special SSS spend	Total Spend Special	Middle SSS spend	Total Spend Middle	Total gross spend on Schools	Total gross spend on SSS	Pupil numbers	Number of SSS	FTE SSS	Average spend on SSS	Gross spend on SSS per pupil	Spend on SSS per pupil	% of per pupil spend	Average FTE spend
Whole of Wales	2,542	5,732	400,030	1,513,918	227,572	1,204,661	77,899	166,921	36,821	188,290	3,081,543	744,864	465,840	2,7675	25,020	26,915	6,615	1,599	24.2%	29,771
North Wales	0	0	80,759	334,609	51,837	280,416	16,672	36,677	2,820	16,681	668,924	152,088	99,363	6,350	5,630	23,951	6,732	1,531	22.7%	27,014
Isle of Anglesey	0	0	8,196	37,139	2,710	30,852	1,350	3,261	0	0	71,252	12,256	9,549	640	590	19,150	7,462	1,283	17.2%	20,773
Gwynedd	0	0	11,525	55,588	11,525	48,163	2,522	5,525	1,395	8,106	117,381	26,967	16,772	995	810	27,103	6,999	1,608	23.0%	33,293
Conwy	0	0	9,763	48,476	8,487	48,124	3,639	8,426	0	0	105,025	21,909	15,466	940	740	23,307	6,791	1,417	20.9%	29,607
Denbighshire	0	0	9,425	41,096	8,311	43,051	2,811	6,662	1,425	8,575	99,404	21,972	15,974	965	850	22,769	6,223	1,375	22.1%	25,849
Flintshire	0	0	21,702	81,769	11,321	63,401	2,856	5,926	0	0	151,096	35,879	22,591	1,470	1,495	24,407	6,688	1,588	23.7%	23,999
Wrexham	0	0	20,128	70,541	9,483	46,825	3,494	6,857	0	0	124,766	33,105	19,011	1,340	1,150	24,705	6,563	1,741	26.5%	28,787
South West and Mid Wales	0	0	115,649	413,120	66,238	320,844	16,873	30,632	16,737	74,893	841,843	215,661	126,956	8,205	7,095	26,284	6,631	1,699	25.6%	30,396
Powys	0	0	11,884	49,697	6,354	41,300	3,390	8,192	2,257	13,138	112,327	23,885	16,391	1,085	855	22,014	6,853	1,457	21.3%	27,936
Ceredigion	0	0	10,304	25,038	7,806	22,032	0	0	4,639	16,529	63,589	22,749	9,369	600	580	37,915	6,788	2,428	35.8%	39,222
Pembrokeshire	0	0	15,365	57,889	7,403	41,078	3,050	5,624	3,007	16,444	121,035	28,825	16,998	1,145	1,040	25,175	7,121	1,696	23.8%	27,716
Carmarthenshire	164	549	28,453	91,008	19,307	83,213	3,367	1,562	0	0	178,137	51,291	27,210	1,660	1,465	30,898	6,547	1,885	28.8%	34,539
Swansea	0	0	30,994	125,600	18,170	102,387	2,858	7,452	0	0	235,439	52,022	36,247	2,410	1,930	21,586	6,495	1,435	22.1%	26,954
Neath Port Talbot	0	0	18,649	63,888	7,198	30,834	4,208	7,802	6,834	28,782	131,306	36,889	20,741	1,305	1,200	28,267	6,331	1,779	28.1%	30,741
Central South Wales	1743	4172	126,660	470,557	93,044	384,560	33,154	71,697	10,831	195,937	988767	265432	149,791	8,210	7,680	32,330	6,601	1,772	26.8%	34,561
Bridgend	0	0	18,434	69,358	18,434	66,586	6,996	13,597	0	0	149,540	43,864	22,553	1,270	1,180	34,539	6,631	1,945	29.3%	37,173
Vale of Glamorgan	0	0	20,190	70,609	7,792	50,546	7,898	17,001	1,636	152,605	152,605	37,516	23,071	1,305	1,240	28,748	6,615	1,626	24.6%	30,255
Rhondda Cynon Taf	0	0	28,063	108,414	13,903	81,826	7,361	14,610	7,361	35,821	240,671	56,688	38,097	1,990	1,795	28,466	6,317	1,488	23.6%	31,581
Merthyr Tydfil	0	0	10,774	34,629	3,716	17,703	2,283	4,591	1,834	7,511	64,435	18,607	9,080	530	540	35,108	7,096	2,049	28.9%	34,457
Cardiff	1,743	4,172	49,199	187,547	49,199	167,899	8,616	21,898	0	0	381,516	108,757	56,990	3,115	2,925	34,914	6,684	1,908	28.5%	37,182
South East Wales	198	468	76,962	295,632	52618	218861	13006	28113	7810	38934	562007	150,494	89,730	4,910	4,615	30,651	6,486	1,677	25.9%	32,610
Caerphilly	0	0	22,649	92,608	22,649	72,200	3,299	8,264	1,174	6,274	179,346	49,771	27,061	1,430	1,280	34,805	6,627	1,839	27.8%	38,884
Blaenau Gwent	0	0	8,121	30,063	1,591	9,742	2,876	7,037	4,359	20,766	67,608	16,947	9,479	610	590	27,782	7,132	1,788	25.1%	28,724
Torfaen	0	0	11,259	48,252	8,396	36,559	2,466	4,418	893	5,891	95,120	23,014	14,135	835	775	27,562	6,729	1,628	24.2%	29,695
Monmouthshire	0	0	10,747	38,366	5,161	29,807	0	0	1,384	6,003	74,176	17,292	11,408	635	580	27,231	6,502	1,516	23.3%	29,814
Newport	198	468	24,186	86,343	14,721	70,553	4,365	8,394	0	0	165,757	43,470	27,647	1,400	1,385	31,050	5,995	1,572	26.2%	31,386

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