



Support staff at Leicester school to escalate strike campaign

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Entrance at Ash Field Academy in Leicester, where support staff are planning to strike over suspended union rep Tom

Teaching assistants, residential workers, and other support staff at [Ash Field Academy](#), a Leicester SEND school, completed their third day of strike action on Thursday 14 May. They are demanding that Discovery Schools Academy Trust (DSAT), which runs the school, reinstates their [trade union](#) rep, Tom Barker.

DSAT suspended Barker from Ash Field on 30 October 2025. This was just four working days after the closure of a ballot in which UNISON members voted for strike action over staffing cuts. DSAT linked the suspension to unspecified conduct concerns.

Almost seven months on, DSAT has still produced no evidence to support any allegations against Barker. He remains suspended. Barker had led [a successful campaign against DSAT's attempt to cut around 10% of support staff](#)

Having completed three strike days, UNISON members have now decided to escalate their industrial action campaign. The union has given notice of further strike dates on (all dates inclusive):

- 3-5 June.
- 15-19 June.
- 6-9 July.

The reinstatement campaign, led by UNISON Leicester City, has received widespread support, including from Zarah Sultana MP and Andrea Egan, UNISON's general secretary. [Campaigners have initiated a TUC petition to demand Tom's reinstatement](#)

On 30 April, the first day of strike action, Leicester South MP Shockat Adam attended the picket line. Adam said:

Workers' rights don't exist without action to defend them. I stand with those on strike against union busting and was proud to join the picket line in solidarity.

Louise Lewis, a teacher and a member of the national executive of the National Education Union, visited the picket line on Thursday 14 May. Speaking in a personal capacity, Lewis said:

Underfunding and privatisation – including the academy model for schools – have been extremely destructive for school staff, as well as our students, families, and our communities.

Strong trade unions are the most effective defence against attacks on public services. The picket lines I visited at Ash Field were extremely strong. I was proud to have attended.

UNISON members are rightly going to escalate the fight to stand against attacks on their right to organise. Some workers might be afraid of standing up to union-busting employers. This is understandable. I want to send a message to these workers: you have nothing to lose and everything to gain by joining the pickets.

Like Tom, while serving as a rep in my previous school, I was suspended after standing up for members and challenging management.

What I remember most is the solidarity. NEU members stood together, took strike action in my defence, and closed the school in support. That collective action forced governors to reinstate me, and although I was later dismissed, members continued to stand with me throughout a successful tribunal case.

Only by standing together against injustice can we challenge union-busting employers.

Liz Robinson, UNISON East Midlands regional organiser, said:

Based on the information we have available to us, and the discussions regional officers have had with the trust, we are increasingly certain that this investigation, and Tom's suspension is related to his Trade Union role.

We understand that the school denies this. If they were to admit that this was motivated by Tom's Trade Union activities they would be admitting to breaching employment law.

Andrea Egan, UNISON's general secretary, said:

I stand in full support of Tom Barker who was wrongly suspended by Ash Field Academy in October 2025 following a successful industrial action ballot in opposition to cuts, which Tom played an instrumental role in securing.

If Tom is not reinstated we will have no hesitation in escalating this dispute.

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