



Union leaders support Ash Field Academy strikers

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UNISON general secretary Andrea Egan (l) and NEC member Louise Lewis (r) at Ash Field

Support staff at [Ash Field Academy in Leicester were on strike](#) from 3-5 June. This is part of a campaign to demand the reinstatement of victimised [union](#) rep Tom Barker.

Barker was suspended on 30 October 2025. After more than seven months, three separate investigations, and five investigation meetings, Discovery Schools Academy Trust [DSAT], which runs Ash Field, is still refusing to reinstate Barker.

Barker was suspended just three working days after [UNISON](#) members voted to strike over staffing cuts.

Andrea Egan, UNISON's general secretary, was in attendance at the Thursday 4 June picket. Addressing the strikers, Egan said:

Tom has shown through his leadership on the disputes that have happened over the last couple of years that there is power in the workers, and that has clearly worried management.

On a national level, I am here to say very clearly this union will not stand by when they [DSAT] attack our activists. We are not retreating; we're actually going to step up our action.

If they are going to take us on, they are not taking Tom on, they are not taking members on, they are taking on this union, and this is a strong message they will now get.

They have had it up to now, but theyâ??re clearly not listening, so we are going to up our side of it.

You have got the union behind you.

Louise Lewis, a member of the [National Education Union](#) national executive, also spoke at the rally. Lewis said:

Trying to silence reps instead of addressing the concerns raised does not solve the problem. It simply continues a culture where corners are cut and where both staff and students can be put at risk.

Today sends a different message. Today says that trade unionists stand together. That when a rep is targeted for standing up for staff and students, the wider movement responds with solidarity.

Because defending every workerâ??s right to organise, to speak up, and to fight for safe and fair places.

To Tom, and to every one of you taking action. Not standing alone. Thank you for your courage, your solidarity, and your determination.

An injury to one is an injury to all.

Chris Willars, secretary of Leicester and District Trades Union Council, addressed strikers, saying:

We saw the article in the Leicester Mercury of Wednesday 20 May 2026 about the anti-bullying award given to Ash Field Academy.

The Academy has received the Positive and Peaceful Places award for its commitment to â??creating a safe, inclusive and respectful environment for pupils, staff and the wider communityâ??.

Having met a number of the staff, I recognise the description of the staff and can confirm that they are caring and supportive of the pupils and their colleagues.

Itâ??s a shame that the management donâ??t seem to share these values.

After the conclusion of the Friday 5 June picket line, Sam Randfield, UNISON Leicester City branch secretary, added:

This weekâ??s picket lines have been well-attended, with members still in good spirits despite DSATâ??s stubborn refusal to end this dispute.

There is an obvious and easy route for them to do so. With a single email, they could bring Tom back to work and end all this disruption. Doing so would cost them absolutely nothing.

If they fail to do so, then this dispute is going to escalate. That isn't what anyone wants. But our members will not stand by while the Trust continues to pursue their anti-union vendetta. We call again upon DSAT leaders to bring Tom back to work and reset their relationship with UNISON.

Around 40 UNISON members and supporters attended the Ash Field picket, including members of the NEU, PCS, GMB, UCU, UNITE and Leicester and District Trades Union Council.

UNISON has now issued notice of further strike action on the following dates (inclusive):

15 - 19 June

6 - 9 July

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