



Support Our Secretaries

News

Fórsa seeks negotiation on school secretary and caretaker pay

FÓRSA TRADE union has written to the Department of Education and Skills seeking to open discussions on a new agreement on school secretaries' and caretakers' pay.

A 2015 arbitration finding awarded four separate annual pay rises of 2.5 per cent for school secretaries and caretakers. The final pay adjustment was due in January 2019, and the agreement concludes this year.

In a letter to the Department sent last Friday (1st February), Fórsa's head of education Andy Pike said unions and the department had previously established a joint forum to consider pay arrangements for grant funded secretaries and caretakers.

Mr Pike suggested that the forum be reconvened for the purpose of discussing a new pay agreement to commence in 2020.

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This arrangement has led, in the most extreme cases the union has encountered, to school secretaries earning as little as €12,700 a year, with no entitlement to benefits such as sick pay or pension rights.

The union is currently campaigning to change the existing pay model.

Mr Pike advised the department of the union's aim to have public service pay and conditions applied to school secretaries and caretakers. He added, "This is consistent with our original claim which was not resolved by the 2015 arbitration finding."

"Fórsa has suggested regularising the employment status of school secretaries by establishing the ETB school secretary salary scale as the

Fórsa school secretaries branch chair Maria Dunne, Fórsa education divisional executive member Kathleen O'Doherty, and branch treasurer Marion Jackson.

common salary scale for all school secretaries."

Fórsa also addressed the issue in its December 2018 submission on the Department of Education and Skills strategy statement for 2019-2021.

Mr Pike said: "Fórsa has suggested that the new strategy statement should commit the Government to regularising the employment status of school secretaries by establishing the ETB (Education and Training Board) school secretary salary scale as the common salary scale for all school secretaries, with access to comparable pension provision."

ETB school secretaries are paid directly by the department ■

Fórsa campaign seeks fair conditions for school secretaries

IRELAND'S LARGEST public service union, Fórsa, has today (Thursday) launched a campaign seeking fair treatment for school secretaries. The union said that the current pay model

in place for the vast majority of school secretaries means that they are being treated like second class employees by the Government. The campaign, Support Our Secretaries, is seeking

respect and fair conditions for all school secretaries, and has the backing of the primary school teacher's union, the INTO, whose general secretary Sheila Nunan addressed today's campaign launch in Dublin.

The campaign is also backed by the two main secondary teachers' unions, the ASTI and TUI.

Fórsa lead organiser Joe O'Connor said the union estimates that 90 per cent of school secretaries are paid through their school's ancillary grant – leaving some with salaries as low as €12,000 a year.

"The campaign, Support Our Secretaries, is seeking respect and fair conditions for all school secretaries. There are school secretaries who have served their community for 20 or 30 years but who will retire into poverty without any occupational pension at all."

"There are approximately 3,500 school secretaries working in our education system. Roughly ten per cent of those are paid directly by the Department of Education and Skills, on salaries varying between €24,000 and €44,711 a year.

"The rest – the vast majority – are subject to a system which means their pay is determined by individual school boards of management. This has led, in the most extreme cases we've encountered, to school secretaries earning as little as €12,700, with no entitlement to benefits such as sick pay or pension rights," he said.

The two-tier secretarial pay system was created almost 40 years ago. School secretaries employed before 1982 were employed directly by the Department of Education. In some schools the union has found secretaries working side by side under the two different payment models.

Mr O'Connor said: "There are school secretaries who have served their community for 20 or 30 years but who will retire into poverty without any occupational pension at all."

Fórsa's senior general secretary designate Kevin Callinan said the time had come to address the issue.

School secretaries' campaign gaining momentum



Fórsa school secretaries branch committee members, Fórsa president Ann McGee and Fórsa staff pictured at the 'Support our Secretaries' campaign launch.

FÓRSA'S SUPPORT Our Secretaries campaign, calling for fair and equitable treatment for school secretaries, is beginning to intensify ahead of its official launch event on the 17th January.

The campaign aims to highlight the need for standardised and more secure employment terms for school secretaries, most of whom also work without any pension provision.

The official launch event for the campaign is taking place in the Members' Room at the Royal Irish Academy on Dublin's Dawson Street*, and will feature a number of speakers, aiming to highlight the issues schools secretaries face regarding pay and conditions.

The campaign's launch will also coincide with the delivery of packs to all schools around the country that contain key messages of the campaign.

Fórsa official Joe O'Connor says

groundwork for the campaign is already taking place and that the official launch is the next step of the campaign which will seek to gain public support for the pursuit of reforms.

He said the union is talking to a wide range of public representatives, including Labour's parliamentary party and Fianna Fáil representatives and the party's education spokesperson Thomas Byrne.

Meetings have also been held with members of the Oireachtas Education & Skills committee, independent Senator Lynn Ruane, Sinn Féin TD Kathleen Funchion and an upcoming meeting with Green Party deputy leader Catherine Martin TD.

Fórsa has made a presentation about the campaign to the INTO principals committee in order to grow support. Joe said the presentation was well received and a motion to formally endorse the campaign has been approved by the INTO's executive committee ■

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"The fundamental lack of respect is unjust, impractical and unsustainable. The time has come to end this arbitrary, and unfair system. Fórsa is calling on the Department of Education and Skills to implement measures to treat all school secretaries with fairness and respect," he said.

Mr Callinan said school secretaries should be provided with the same basic entitlements and protections equivalent to clerical staff on public service pay scales. He said this would reflect the workload and responsibilities taken on by every school secretary in the country.

INTO general secretary Sheila Nunan said the arrangements by which most school secretaries are employed are unacceptable. "The precarious nature of the work, and the lack of access to sick pay and proper pension provision are deeply unfair. INTO supports the call by Fórsa that all school



Fórsa school secretaries branch chair Maria Dunne.

secretaries be placed on a salary at the appropriate public service grade," she said.

The Fórsa campaign will lobby TDs and Senators to back a new payment model for school secretaries. The

union has been preparing for several months by engaging in talks with a wide range of public representatives. The campaign includes information packs that will be sent out to all school principals and school secretaries, seeking support for the campaign through an online petition, and the recruitment of more school secretaries to membership of the union.

Mr O'Connor added: "The first and most important step of this campaign is for school secretaries to stand together. They are the key to everything that happens in our schools. The school secretary looks after every appointment, every schedule, every crisis, every teacher and every parent, every single day.

"They are commonly the longest serving, the most trusted and an indispensable member of staff. Yet they are also the most neglected under the current model of employment. This must change," he said ■

RTÉ focuses on school secretaries

RTE'S DRIVETIME programme focussed on the precarious nature of work for most school secretaries in a special report recently. Journalist Barry Lenihan's report outlined the problems facing 90% of the country's 3,500 school secretaries, whose terms and conditions of employment are determined by individual boards of management.

Lenihan described the situation facing school secretaries as 'roulette', insofar as there are some schools where school secretaries are directly employed as grade III or IV civil servants by the Department of Education and Skills, working alongside school secretaries paid directly by the school.

The report, broadcast on Monday (12th November) was part of a series of reports on the programme about precarious work. Fórsa lead organiser Joe O'Connor spoke on the programme about the union's school secretary campaign, due to launch in January.

Joe highlighted the experience of some school secretaries working in schools that were slow to implement



Fórsa lead organiser Joe O'Connor.

the minimum pay terms set by the Department of Education and Skills.

He said the union has begun talking to a wide range of public representatives about the need for standardised and more secure employment terms for school secretaries, most of whom work without any pension provision.

The campaign, which is set to launch in January 2019, will include a campaign pack to be circulated to schools. Joe said the campaign would

also involve reaching out to win support from teachers, special needs assistants and, above all, parents of children attending school.

Drivetime reported that school secretaries who spoke to the programme emphasised three things: uncertainty, isolation and fairness.

Liz Phelan, who works in a school for 460 girls outside of Dublin has worked as a school secretary for 20 years. She said the current arrangement for school secretaries "isn't respectful, it's not healthy, and you're not getting the best from your workforce if you're not treating them fairly."

Maeve Hurrell is approaching retirement next year after 28 years of working as a school secretary. When Maeve retires next June she will have to sign on the dole as she won't reach the age to receive a state pension until August. She told Drivetime: "It's not about the money, it's about the treatment (of school secretaries)." ■

Should school secretaries have more power in the education system?



Thursday, September 27, 2018 - 12:00 AM

Unlike teachers, school secretaries have precious little power in a system in which power talks and those without it must do without, writes **Michael Clifford**.



Monday 12th November

'During the summer she has to sign on': Some school secretaries are paid €10,900 a year, others €35,000

There are around 3,000 school secretaries in Ireland – most of whom are in precarious employment.

Jul 15th 2018, 12:06 AM 37,030 Views 25 Comments Share 1047 Tweet Email 16

SCHOOL SECRETARIES ARE preparing a national campaign next year to address precarious employment issues and pay discrepancies.



'It's soul destroying': The school secretaries that don't get paid for the Christmas holidays

"I was in the dole office before Christmas to sign on, and it takes ages each year," one school secretary said.

Richard Boyd Barrett @RBoydBarrett · Jan 17
@pb4p totally behind #SupportOurSecretaries @forsa_union_ie campaign for proper pay & conditions for school secretaries across country. Disgraceful that most secretaries who hold schools together are paid so badly & denied basic rights and entitlements.



The Labour Party @labour · Jan 17
Labour reps are supporting the @forsa_union_ie #SupportOurSecretaries campaign. Time for all school secretaries to receive proper pay and conditions.



Brendan Howlin @BrendanHowlin · Jan 17
Today in the #Dail I raised the @forsa_union_ie #SupportOurSecretaries campaign. It's shocking that over 66% of school secretaries don't have access to pension entitlements. Time for school secretaries to be paid in the normal way as full time State workers.



Minister must address school secretaries two tier pay structure – Byrne

'Signing on the dole embarrasses them the most': School secretaries launch campaign for equal pay

Kathleen O'Doherty from Donegal has written to eight Education Ministers about school secretaries' pay.

The 5:10 PM 17,881 Views 21 Comments Share 335 Tweet Email 5

TRADE UNION FÓRSA has launched a campaign calling for all school secretaries to be paid equally, to be paid during the summer months and to receive sick leave.

Around 10% of school secretaries are paid directly by the Department of Education, Fórsa estimates. Between 1978 and 1982, the Department made school secretaries public servants, and look

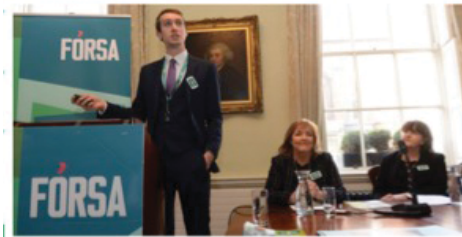


School secretaries 'treated like second-class employees' – trade union

Fórsa launches Save Our Secretaries campaign to end two-tier system in schools

Thu, Jan 17, 2019, 20:00

Elaine Edwards



Joe O'Connell, trade unionist Fórsa Trade Union with Marie Dunne, chairwoman, School Secretary Branch and Marion Jackson, treasurer at the launch of a nationwide campaign calling for respect and fair conditions for all school secretaries. Photograph: Dara Mac Dónaill/The Irish Times

School secretaries are being treated like "second-class" employees by the Government, with some earning as little as €12,000 a year and no entitlement to sick pay or maternity leave, a trade union has said.

Union in call for fair pay for school secretaries

Updated / Thursday, 17 Jan 2019 18:28



Fórsa's campaign is being backed by Ireland's three teacher unions

By Emma O'Kelly
Education Correspondent

Today with Sean O'Rourke

SOS - Support Our Secretaries

Broadcast: 17.01.19

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Trendmap Ireland @TrendsIreland · Jan 17
#supportoursecretaries is now trending

trendmap.com/r/IE_fmfrj



Anne Rabbitte TD @AnneRabbitte · Jan 17
@Jocser99 of @forsa_union_ie speaking passionately about the Support Our Secretaries SOS campaign. Campaigning for our school secretaries for respect & fair conditions, inequality, pay, impact on daily lives & what needs to happen. #SupportOurSecretaries #SOS



Catherine Martin TD @cathmartingreen · Jan 17
Delighted to meet @forsa_union_ie President Ann McGee this morning at Fórsa's campaign launch to #SupportOurSecretaries. @greenparty_ie support the campaign to respect and value all school secretaries.

Kathleen Funchion TD backs SOS: 'Support our Secretaries' campaign

17 January, 2019 - by Kathleen Funchion TD



Sinn Féin's Spokesperson for Education and Skills Kathleen Funchion TD has said that the 3,500 school secretaries working in our education system deserved pay and conditions that reflect the invaluable work they carry out for our schools and communities.



Roisin Shortall @RoisinShortall · Jan 17
Very happy to attend the launch and support the @forsa #SupportOurSecretaries campaign for decent pay and conditions for school secretaries who do valuable work.