




Stars in our schools

A guide to
celebrating school
support staff



“We now have over 50 staff working at my school, and three quarters of them are support staff. It would be impossible for us to offer the provision that we are so proud of without the dedication and commitment of such fantastic people. We really are incredibly fortunate, and it is only right that their contributions are celebrated.”

Head teacher, primary school in Suffolk

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"Without us the school couldn't open and operate on a daily basis. We keep the staff and pupils warm by maintaining heating supplies. We are responsible for any emergencies that arise such as floods, power failure, fires etc..."

**Caretaker, secondary school,
Yorkshire and Humberside**





Working with pupils can be very challenging but the pleasure of seeing them learn and improve, not just with subjects but as young people as well, is very gratifying.

Design & technology technician, Scotland

About UNISON

UNISON is the largest education trade union in the UK and represents the whole school support team from facilities, catering and cleaning, to business management and learning support. We represent more than 250,000 staff working in schools.

UNISON provides expert professional advice and guidance for school support staff on issues such as managing behaviour, supporting children with health needs and continuing professional development.

We are involved in the creation and development of professional standards for the school food workforce, teaching assistants and school business managers. Much of this work can be explored on our website www.skillsforschools.org.uk

In UNISON we believe in:

Equality – we are all different, but we all deserve to be treated with respect and fairness. All of our voices should be heard

Solidarity – we work to support each other at work and in society

Democracy – our members have a right to make the decisions that shape their union

Participation – we aim to share our skills, commitment and creativity to build a stronger union.

“We owe school staff a debt of gratitude for their tireless, highly professional work.”

Christina McAnea, UNISON general secretary

About Stars in Our Schools

Stars in Our Schools is a celebration of school support staff. UNISON has organised the day to celebrate the wonderful work support staff do every day and to make sure the world knows just how vital they are to children's education.

School support staff – the Stars in Our Schools

It takes a whole team to make a school a safe and happy place for children to learn. School support staff help children learn, keep children safe and healthy and make sure schools run smoothly. They are the caterers, the admin staff, the finance officers, the early years practitioners, the teaching assistants, the librarians, the ICT technicians, the parent support advisers, and more.

“Sometimes we are the only stable influence in children’s lives. We make a difference to them, by supporting them both academically and emotionally. We give them unconditional care. We listen to them, give encouragement, build up their self-esteem.”

Learning mentor, UNISON member

School support staff – the unsung heroes

School support staff are vital to the effective running of a school, but this is not often recognised as they are usually tucked away behind the scenes. They are the unsung heroes of our children's education.

Let's celebrate school support staff

Once a year, schools taking part in Stars in Our Schools hold award ceremonies, special assemblies and tea parties in schools across the UK to say thank you to support staff for all they do.

An event for staff, children and families

This is for everyone to get involved in: parents, carers, grandparents, teachers and head teachers, as well as the support staff themselves.

How to get involved

All year, school support staff play their part in helping children learn, keeping children safe and healthy and keeping schools running smoothly. Stars in Our Schools is the perfect opportunity to recognise and celebrate their contributions.

Here are some ideas about how to get involved – but you may well have your own.

Give children an opportunity to get to know school support staff better

- Invite all support staff to join the children for a special lunch – include cleaners, ground staff and other ‘hidden’ staff.
- Make time for kitchen and lunch staff to join the children and talk about the food they eat and why it matters.
- Hold a quiz for children about what school support staff do.
- Get children to help support staff for a day – keeping the playground clean, helping to set the lunch tables, older children helping younger ones with reading, painting, or writing.
- Hold a ‘circle time’ session highlighting the difference support staff make to the school.
- Hold a special assembly featuring interviews with different members of support staff, carried out by the pupils.

“Without the support staff, our special needs children could not come to school as they need personal care and one-to-one support in the classroom. We give them the opportunity to access an education they are entitled to”.

Teaching assistant, UNISON member

Make a big fuss of school support staff

- Feature support staff in your school newsletter, eg 'a day in the life of...'
- Ask pupils to nominate the best member of the support staff and have an awards ceremony or special assembly to announce the winners.
- Ask classroom staff to run a competition along the theme "How do our support staff make our school better?". This could be art, poetry, dance, singing or anything else you can think of.
- Ask children to write a story or poem about the different support staff.
- Ask children to make a card, poster or small piece of writing about why they appreciate their support staff.
- Ask parents to come into school for a special ceremony or assembly where support staff are honoured. Parents could bake a celebratory cake.
- Hold a breakfast, coffee morning, lunch or afternoon tea for all support staff.
- Make support staff VIPs for the day.
- Ask teachers to cover playground duties for support staff for the day.
- Collect pupils' comments about support staff and include them in a thank you card, or in a 'word cloud' certificate.

Make sure everyone knows how important school support staff are

- Take a photo of all the support staff and put it on a noticeboard that all children and parents can see.
- Put a message on the school TV about how wonderful the support staff are.
- Contact your Parent Teacher Association and ask them to get involved. Invite them to the school's celebration.
- Contact your governors and ask them to get involved. Invite them to the school's celebration.

- Write to your local newspaper to let them know you're celebrating support staff.
- Invite your MP and local councillor to your special event so they can see how important school support staff are.
- Have heads and teachers shadow support staff for a day, or even invite your MP and councillors to shadow them.
- Use your Twitter and Facebook accounts to promote the day.

"I've been teaching for 25 years and without a variety of support staff I wouldn't have been able to do my job. They are the ears and eyes of the teacher monitoring and intervening in the learning of children to stop things escalating; they support vulnerable children to reach their potential - not only in the core subjects, but more importantly with personal and social issues."

Head of two nursery schools, Manchester

Just for fun

- Hold a face painting competition
- Ask pupils and staff to dress up as superheroes for the day
- Hold a 'Stars in your eyes' competition

Your celebration day stories

“We started with a Red Carpet Assembly where all support staff received a certificate, a walk on our red carpet and a round of applause. Children also made cards and gave presents to the support staff. Next our Parent Teacher Association made everyone ‘brunch’ in the form of a bacon sandwich, which was delivered to their classrooms by Year 4 waiters. In addition we paid for two beauty therapists to perform a 30-minute massage/manicure/facial on everyone who wanted it. I think this was the favourite bit! Feedback was positive from ‘The massage was lush - thank you.’ and ‘Feeling valued at work’.”

“We held an assembly for the whole school in which each member of support staff, such as teaching assistants, nursery nurses and office mangers received certificates written by the children, containing quotes about how they had helped them. Each member of staff was also given a box of chocolates as a thank you.”

“To celebrate Stars in Our Schools we decided we would like to hold a cake sale and donate the money raised to the school for the benefit of the children. The School Council were asked what they would like us to purchase and they requested the money go towards a drinking fountain. The cake sale was a great success. We planned to sell them during morning and lunchtime, but by the end of break there were not many left! We raised enough money to buy the fountain and dedicated it to the memory of an amazing teaching assistant from our school who had recently died.”

“I enjoy creating brilliant science demonstrations and practicals to help learning and inspire future scientists”.

Science technician, UNISON member

“The local press came to take photos of the certificates of achievement being awarded to kitchen, admin, site and classroom staff team members. Children had also designed “thank you” cards for the work support staff had done.”

“School support staff are a vital part of the education workforce and their work is invaluable in the classroom and throughout the whole school. They help children learn, keep them safe and healthy and make sure schools run smoothly. The contribution they make in helping teachers deliver high-quality education is crucial and needs to be recognised and celebrated.”

Patrick Roach, NASUWT general secretary

“We held a very successful Stars in Our Schools day. Our support staff dressed up as superheroes, our TV screen showed all our support staff on a PowerPoint presentation all day and our librarian held a competition. Pupils and teaching staff were reminded about our special day over the tannoy system in the morning and we sat with pupils at lunchtime chatting with them and had a good response from pupils thanking us. It did also highlight that some of the pupils didn’t know us all, so even if we educated a few children the day achieved its intention.”

“The children performed a specially rehearsed song and staff were given handmade gold badges!”

“We had a fab day. We were all presented with certificates by the children at a special assembly and then given an extra long break with cakes provided by school. UNISON provided mugs for us all and arranged for the local councillor to meet us. In the afternoon we were all given a bottle of wine and a bar of chocolate from the headmaster.”

“UNISON arranged a visit from our mayor, who joined support staff in the school café. The mayor and support staff were served tea, coffee and cakes by staff and the students who had made the cakes themselves. The events were enjoyed by all participants and the mayor left the school impressed by the work of all who were involved.”

Frequently asked questions

What are the campaign messages?

- School support staff add huge value to our schools and our children's education.
- Schools today cannot function without support staff.
- They keep children safe and healthy.
- They help children learn.
- They keep our schools running smoothly.
- School support staff deserve to be better rewarded for the work they do, with proper career structures and better pay, terms and conditions.

How do we advertise our campaigning activity?

- Let UNISON know what events you are planning by emailing education@unison.co.uk.
- Go to the UNISON in Schools Facebook page and tell us what you are planning.
- Tweet us [@UNISONinSchools](https://twitter.com/UNISONinSchools) and use the hashtag #StarsInOurSchools.
- Email photos of the event to action@unison.co.uk or tweet them to [@UNISONinSchools](https://twitter.com/UNISONinSchools) (where you have consent if from a school).
- Inform local media of what activities you are planning.

What I love best about the job is knowing that we're doing the children good. We don't know their background, or what they eat at home, so if we're providing a child with one good hot meal a day, we've done our job well.

School cook, Essex

How can I use social media to promote Stars in our schools?

- If you use Twitter, help us get #StarsInOurSchools trending by writing about why school support staff matter. You could quote positive statements from parents, teachers, head teachers and children. Include @UNISONinSchools in your tweet.
- Spread awareness of the Stars in Our Schools event on your Facebook page and 'like' www.facebook.com/UNISONinSchools

I'm busy on the day itself. Is this a problem?

No! Any activities or events in the same month will help create a buzz. Just let us know what you are planning so we can feature it on the Stars in Our Schools website. UNISON values school support staff every day. If you can't take part that week, every day is a good day to celebrate the team!

For more information please see the dedicated website www.StarsInOurSchools.uk

"Children look up to me as their safety net, as home can be so difficult. I did not realise the impact until I meet them away from school and even some as adults later. They still remember my name and all the help I gave them. Great feeling and reward for me."

Welfare officer, UNISON member

If there weren't committed cleaning staff, the school would suffer as the children and staff wouldn't have a clean and comfortable environment in which to work and thrive. We all have a place in the working day of the school.

Cleaner, special school, West Midlands

I can't take part in any organised activity. Is there something else I can do?

- Read about school support staff on the Stars in Our Schools website.
- Send your examples of the difference school support staff make to education@unison.co.uk
- Make some noise online using the #StarsInOurSchools hashtag.
- Use other social media, email and face-to-face communication to tell others about the event.
- Encourage members to become workplace representatives to make sure their schools are involved.
- Write to your local head teacher about why you value support staff and ask them to take part in the day.
- Ask colleagues to join UNISON by calling 0800 171 2193 or by visiting www.joinunison.org

What materials are available?

A whole range of materials can be downloaded free from www.StarsInOurSchools.uk and from the 'Stars in Our Schools' section on the [UNISON online shop](#) if you are a UNISON branch. Resources include posters, graphics, template letters to schools and MPs, certificates and loads more!

Branded items

UNISON branches can also order branded items like the ones below.

To order these items please contact TC Branding direct by emailing: unison@tc-group.co.uk or call 01844 275 700.

Prices vary according to quantities ordered and minimum order requirements apply. Delivery takes several weeks so make sure you order in plenty of time!





"I am a secondary science teacher with 31 years experience and my life would be considerably harder without the back up of this invaluable group of people. They rarely stick to their timetabled hours and deserve a higher rate of pay and recognition."

Teacher

"I want to send my message of support for the amazing Learning Support Assistants at my school. They do an incredible job and make the school the excellent, inviting and positive place it is!"

Teacher, Pembrokeshire