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School's out as teachers march

By Mario Cacciottolo
BBC News

So you're marching in London over teachers' pay, and you're carrying a large stereo. What song do you play? Pink Floyd's *Another Brick In The Wall*, of course.

As the strains of "Hey, Teacher" rose above the crowd of thousands, the striking teachers called, chanted and whistled their way through the capital as they demanded a wage increase.

This, just one of several demonstrations around the country, was organised by the National Union of Teachers, its members demanding a 4.1% pay rise instead of the 2.45% on offer.

Walking with the booming stereo was Christopher Lomax, 29, who was dressed in makeshift school uniform, along with nine of his fellow teachers from St Michael's School in Bermondsey.

"It's important that we're able to attract the best graduates in the future," said Mr Lomax, who is the head of art and design at his school.



Marissa Geldenhuys was shouting her slogans out on the march

“ I've seen reports that the average wage for teachers is £34,000 but I'm not on that, and neither are my colleagues ”

Theresa Auguste, a primary school teacher

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"I've seen teachers leave because of the financial difficulties they get into.

"Teaching can be quite well paid after three or four years, but it's the early stages that's the problem. A lot of subjects are falling short of teachers."

The march had the usual affair of banners and placards, often proclaiming the location of their union branch - Hungerford, Greenwich, Kentish Town among others.

As one would expect, the march was an orderly affair. At one point a woman approached her friend in the crowd.

"I knew I'd find you here, because the crowd's alphabetical," she proclaimed excitedly.

Similarly, the police presence was token, with barely an officer in sight. If a group of teachers cannot be trusted to behave themselves, then, well, who can?

At the start of the march, on a stage in Lincoln's Inn Fields, the singer Billy Bragg had sung about brothers and sisters uniting.

"Wave those banners!" Billy cried, and the placards bobbed up and down obligingly.

'Important role'

As the march began the singer stood watching, in between requests for photographs from several enthusiastic female fans.

"I believe that you can only really have a fair society if you do what you can to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential," he said.

"You can only do that by having an education.

"Teachers do a very, very important job. We have to trust our kids with them so we should pay them fairly.

"Teachers need to remind us of the important role that they play, and today is the day that they do it."

Most of the marchers were quietly



Billy Bragg sang at the start of the march to offer his support



talking among themselves, but some were more vocal, chanting and some banging small drums.

One lady was puffing her way gamely through an improvised trumpet riff, which went down well for those within earshot.

Unfair pay

Children of various ages, from babies in pushchairs to teenagers, had been brought along for the day too, and there was even a slightly nervous-looking dog sporting a tailor-made coat with an NUT motif.

Holding a home-made sign of her own was Theresa Auguste, 31, a primary school teacher at Gwyn Jones school in Leytonstone, east London.

She wisely checked it for spelling errors - there were none - before agreeing to have her photograph taken.

"I don't think that the pay teachers receive is fair," she said.

"If teachers are valued then they should have pay that enables them to do things like be able to buy their own houses.

"I've seen reports that the average wage for teachers is £34,000 but I'm not on that, and neither are my colleagues."

One of the more vocal and passionate marchers was 26-year-old Marissa Geldenhuys, whose cries of "fair play, fair pay," were taking their toll on her voice.

The maths teacher from Heathcote School in Chingford, Waltham Forest, said she wanted "an incentive for more teachers to come into the profession".

She warned: "If changes aren't made, then more teachers will leave.

"I know some parents are unhappy about us taking a day to strike, but if they want a better education for their children then they need to see that this issue is so important."



Theresa Auguste does not think teachers' pay is fair