



**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.

*"Most school secretaries and caretakers are paid through their school's ancillary grant, which means their pay is determined by individual school boards of management."*

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their pay is determined by individual school boards of management.

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 ■

# School secretary membership surge

SCHOOL SECRETARIES Maria Dunne, Kathleen O'Doherty and Marion Jackson addressed the launch event.

Fórsa's School Secretaries branch has seen a 10% surge in its membership since the January launch of the union's Support Our Secretaries campaign. And an online petition has secured over 6,500 signatures as the campaign continues to attract coverage in national and regional media.

Last week the Irish Independent published an extensive interview with school secretary Maeve Hurrell. "You can't put somebody at front-of-house for 28 years, then tell them they didn't make the grade," it read.

Meanwhile, the campaign was raised at the Oireachtas education committee last week as part of discussions on its 2019 work programme, which includes the status of non-teaching staff in schools following lobbying representations from Fórsa.

Fórsa lead organiser Joe O'Connor explained: "Education minister Joe McHugh attended the committee meeting, and was directly challenged by Green Party deputy leader Catherine Martin to resolve this matter.

"The committee has decided to write to all relevant stakeholders, including Fórsa, requesting written submissions on the issue. A

committee hearing will then be scheduled prior to Easter to consider these submissions," he said.

Joe said the recent surge in school secretary membership was very encouraging for the branch. "A crucial objective of this campaign is to boost our school secretary membership, which strengthens our hand in any future negotiations.

The response to our online petition, membership packs and the huge amount of traffic on the Fórsa website and social media platforms reflects the widespread interest and support for school secretaries nationwide," he said ■

## 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



**Fórsa school secretaries branch chair Maria Dunne.**

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.

"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.

*continued on page 3*

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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 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 ■

## School secretaries' campaign gaining momentum

**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.



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

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 ■

## PUBLIC MEETINGS

### Fórsa 'Support our Secretaries' campaign

**WATERFORD**  
MONDAY, MARCH 4th  
7pm, Teachers Centre,  
Newtown Road, Waterford

**CORK**  
MONDAY, MARCH 11th  
7pm, The Imperial Hotel,  
Cork City, T12 A2YT

**DUBLIN BAY NORTH**  
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13th  
8.30pm, Le Chéile Community  
Centre, Donnycarney, Dublin 9

**GALWAY**  
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27th  
8pm, The Harbour Hotel,  
New Dock St, Galway

**LIMERICK**  
THURSDAY, MARCH 28th  
7pm, Fórsa Midwest  
regional office,  
Roxborough Road,  
Limerick  
V94 YY31



## 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.

Thu 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

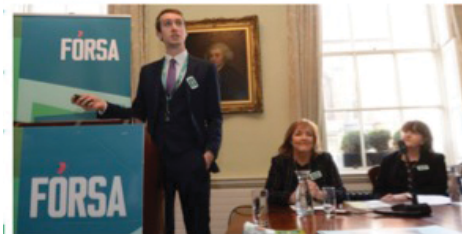


## School secretaries 'treated like second-class employees' – trade union

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, speaking 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, 2019  
#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.