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# Strike threat to shut school for eight days

Parents have declared their unwavering support for the headteacher of Essex's only Jewish secondary school, King Solomon High in Ilford, after 38 staff voted to strike for eight days from next week, writes Michelle Rosenberg.

Officials say the proposed action by members of the NEU (National Education Union) is likely to force the entire school, led by Michele Phillips, to close.

According to the school, the NEU is demanding the head and school governors guarantee that staff being monitored to improve their teaching will not progress to more formal procedures.

The NEU is also demanding lesson observations of teachers are capped to three times a year. These demands are in addition to 15 others sent to the school which have been agreed.

In all, 50 staff at the school are NEU members, so although not all voted to strike, others may refuse to cross the picket line.

King Solomon High School was given a 'requires improvement' assessment in November 2021.

Headteacher Phillips, plus



Staff at King Solomon High School in Ilford voted to strike

governors and a new senior team, have put in place an improvement plan to secure the school's future.

One parent said: "Our children have already had to endure numerous lesson cancellations due to illness and shortages of teachers. This strike is totally unacceptable in such a crucial stage of their education."

Another said: "Our children deserve the best. If there are teachers not teaching to a high enough standard, and cannot develop their skills to reach the needed standard ... why would we want them to remain teaching our children?"

In a statement seen by *Jewish News*, the school said the NEU was demanding the headteacher "ignore established Redbridge policy".

The statement added that "the school needs to improve, and this means that teaching needs to improve" and "we need to improve in order to maintain a Jewish school in Redbridge, for current and future generations.

"Leaders holding staff to account is a standard part of running any successful organisation.

"There are no words to really describe how damaging, detrimental and

upsetting this will be for students and families, especially those taking GCSEs and A-levels later this year.

"The senior leadership team and governors still hope to avoid this action, but we fear that despite planned talks with independent mediators, strike action will likely take place."

The proposed strike days are 20, 21, 26, 27 and 28 March and 4, 9 and 10 April.

This will be the fourth strike by the NEU in Redbridge since 2019.

A further meeting between the school and the NEU mediated by Acas (the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) was scheduled for yesterday in a final attempt to prevent the action going ahead.

*Jewish News* has approached the NEU for comment.

## LUBNER GIFTS £4.5M TO LABOUR PARTY

The Labour Party has enjoyed its best year for individual donations, new figures confirm, including £4.5m from communal businessman Gary Lubner, writes Lee Harpin.

Electoral Commission records show Labour received a total of £13.7m from individuals and companies last year.

Former Autoglass boss Lubner, a long-time supporter of the Israel charity UJIA, is revealed to have given the party £4,527,500 over the past year in donations.

The 65-year-old, who stepped down as CEO of Autoglass owner Belron last March, has praised Starmer for tackling antisemitism in Labour while criticising Tory policy on Brexit and immigration.

Lubner has said he wishes to give away "the vast majority" of his wealth to

charitable and progressive causes.

Labour Party chair Annelise Dodds confirmed the party had achieved its "best fundraising year ever".

The previous best was in 2005, the year Tony Blair won a third term, when £10.8m was raised.

Labour's overall fundraising total for 2023 was £31m, including £5.9m in union donations.

Supermarket tycoon Lord Sainsbury of Turville donated £3,070,000, and daughter Francesca Perrin became Labour's highest-donating woman, giving £1,060,000.

The Conservatives' fundraising outpaced Labour's by about £17m, with a total of £48m.

The Liberal Democrats amassed £8.4m and Reform UK £255,000 from a total of six donations.



Gary Lubner

## Hendon rabbinic couple selected to lead Kinloss

Leaders of Finchley United Synagogue (Kinloss) have chosen Rabbi Dr Yoni Birnbaum and Rebbetzen Elisheva Birnbaum from Toras Chaim in Hendon to lead their community, writes Michelle Rosenberg.

Rabbi Birnbaum replaces Rabbi Jeremy Lawrence, who unexpectedly left his nine-year role in May 2023 while on sabbatical.

A graduate of the Gateshead and Ponovezh Yeshivot, Birnbaum grew up in Kingsbury and received his semicha from the Chief Rabbinate of Israel.

He completed advanced rabbinical training with the Ner L'Elef Institute in Jerusalem before joining the Hadley Wood Synagogue and community in April 2010.

A graduate of the Susi Bradfield Leadership Programme, Rebbetzen Elisheva Birnbaum grew up in Golders Green and combines communal duties with professional work as a paediatric occupational therapist in private practice.

The couple have six children and took up rabbinical positions leading 100 families at Toras Chaim, the former New Hendon Beis Hamedrash, in 2020.



Rabbi Dr Yoni Birnbaum and family

Rabbi Birnbaum is also a law graduate, and holds a masters and a PhD in Jewish Studies from University College London.

Community members are invited to meet the new couple over Shabbat 5 and 6 April, after which they will vote.

In line with United Synagogue by-laws, the Birnbaums need at least 75 percent of the votes to move the appointment forward.

If the vote is successful, the Birnbaums are due to take up their posts in September.

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