HUNDREDS of teachers will be standing on picket lines today (TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 8) at school gates across Northern Ireland in protest of an 'insulting' pay offer from the Government after thirteen months of talks failed.

Teachers from 60 primary schools and secondary schools, including Bangor Grammar, which the Minister of Education Peter Weir attended, will be handing out leaflets to parents and the public urging them to ask their local MLA why Stormont does not put a value on education.

Thirteen months of talks between the Northern Ireland Teachers’ Council for Northern Ireland and the Education Authority ended last month with the five unions walking out over a one per cent pay rise offer for 2016-17 but no pay rise for last year.

Four main unions, INTO, ATL, UTU and NAHT, are fully supporting the teachers in a bid to shine light on this heightening crisis.

Gerry Murphy, the Northern Secretary of INTO (Irish National Teachers’ Organisation), said it's unfair that teachers in Northern Ireland are paid 16 per cent less than in other OECD countries and said the pay rise offer amounts to less than the price of a litre of milk per day.

Speaking ahead of today's pickets, Mr Murphy said: "The Government needs to take action in relation to teachers' pay because this is a crisis which is deepening. It's a postcode lottery for Northern Ireland teachers. To be paid 16 per cent less than their UK counterparts is more than disheartening.

"The one per cent offer came from the same people who were handed money from Westminster for our teachers but then they handed it back. There's no logic in this. There is no pride in our teachers and no hope for the young generations coming up through the schools.

"I challenge all parents, across Northern Ireland, regardless of religion or race, school or community, to stand up and support the education of our children. Our children's education matters. Our teachers matter. Our schools matter."

Avril Hall-Callaghan, Chairperson of UTU (Ulster Teachers' Union) said: "We are rightly proud of our educational standards in Northern Ireland. Teachers here deserve to be treated fairly in return. Teachers in Scotland did not have this kind of demoralising decision made by their political masters."
The Scottish Parliament awarded them a 2.5 per cent staged pay deal last year. We have asked that the Minister consider a staged deal as a way forward in this dispute.

Mark Langhammer, Director of ATL (Association of Teachers and Lecturers), said: "ATL, traditionally, is a moderate teaching association. That recent ATL indicative polls show over 51 per cent in favour of strike action and 89 per cent in favour of bolstered industrial action (short of strike) show the depth of feeling amongst ordinary teachers.

"The Government can find money to pay exorbitant fees and interest to Private Finance contractors; its rate-capping policies eschew much needed funds from those living in palatial mansions. It can even find money for numerous 'pet' projects. And, grotesquely, it can find money to 'pay off' paramilitaries.

"Set against these, the case for decent pay for teachers is an unimpeachable case. It is just a matter of priorities, not money."

The pickets will be staged today during lunchtimes at schools.

ENDS:

NOTES TO EDITOR:

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