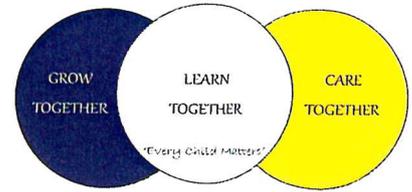




'Every Child Matters'

St Mary's High School Downpatrick

Principal: Ms R McLaughlin B.Ed MSc PQH(NI)



Celebrating 65 Years of Education
1957 - 2022

Dear Parent/Guardian

21st November 2023

Half day of strike action by teachers and school leaders on Wednesday 29th November 2023

I am writing to you about the forthcoming strike action by the five teaching unions in Northern Ireland. You may have seen coverage of this in the news, and I wanted to inform you about the impact that this is likely to have at our school.

Why?

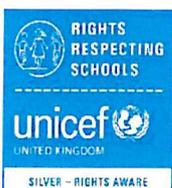
- Education in Northern Ireland has been systematically defunded in recent years, resulting in decimating reductions in support, resource and capacity.
- The teaching profession has filled in the growing gaps, holding the fragmenting system together and protecting children from the impact of the cuts.
- Pay paralysis, when set alongside the working conditions of the teaching profession in Northern Ireland, is having a devastating impact on the profession, with clear evidence that we will not be able to recruit or retain teachers and school leaders in the future if these issues are not resolved. Education is in crisis.
- Other public sector workers in Northern Ireland have also received pay increases during this time.
- Teachers across the UK and Ireland have received their normal pay increases, several times over the last three years. Teachers in Northern Ireland have received nothing.
- All five teaching unions have been in dispute for over a year, during which time no offer has been made.
- During this year of dispute, action has been gradually escalated, in the hope that an offer of resolution would be forthcoming.
- Taking strike action is the last resort. This could have been avoided and, indeed, can still be avoided.
- The responsibility to resolve this dispute lies squarely with the employing authorities and the Department of Education.

When a strike takes place, those taking strike action stop work and withdraw their labour.

Everyone involved in the action will, therefore, not teach class(es) or undertake any other duties before 12.00 noon on the strike day.

How will strike action affect St Mary's High School?

A detailed risk assessment has been conducted which considers the impact that the action will have on the health and safety of pupils, staff and visitors, and whether the school can run a full or amended curriculum, to determine whether it is possible to operate the school safely during the strike.



*Spirit of Catholic Education
Award 2022*



As the Principal, I and the Board of Governors have determined the school will be:

- Open for students from 12.10pm.
- On arrival Year 8 students will leave their school bags in the normal place and go to the canteen for lunch.
- Years 9 -14 students will go to the class that they are timetabled for (period 6) where registers will be marked, and normal classes will resume.
- Year 8 students will have their registers marked period 7.
- School meals will be served at the normal times.

Clearly this is a difficult situation, which will cause some disruption. I would ask you, however, to be understanding. This is a very unusual circumstance and is the direct result of the failure to take into account the very real concerns expressed by teachers and school leaders. Taking strike action is not something that anyone would undertake lightly. Those on strike will have thought long and hard about their decision and will also lose pay for the period that they are on strike.

The responsibility to resolve this dispute lies squarely with the Department of Education and our local government. To make your feelings known about that damage that is being done to the our schools, the teaching profession and, of course, our children, you can write directly the following people, in addition to your own local political representatives:

Sara Long, CEO: Education Authority, 40 Academy Street, Belfast, BT1
sara.long@eani.org.uk

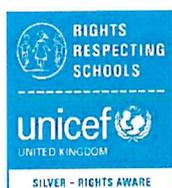
Eve Bremner, CEO: CCMS, Linen Hill House, 23 Linenhall Street, Lisburn, BT28 1FJ
eve.bremner@ccmsschools.com

Mark Bailie, Director of Workforce: DENI, Rathgael House, Balloo Road, Bangor, Co Down, BT19
mark.bailey@education-ni.gov.uk

Mark Browne, Permanent Secretary: DENI, Rathgael House, Balloo Road, Bangor, Co Down, BT19
mark.browne@education-ni.gov.uk

Yours sincerely


Ms McLaughlin
Principal



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