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Headteacher: Mr A. Ratcliffe BEd (Hons)

## 'Educating For Life In All Its Fullness'

Dear Parent/Carer,

Further to Mr Ratcliffe's letter to you all with regards the forthcoming industrial action I feel it necessary to clarify some points to you all.

- The strike action is a result of a funding dispute between teaching unions and the Department for Education (DfE), and it is a matter for the unions and the Government to resolve.
- It is the NEU (National Education Union) that have declared this strike action on the following dates: Wednesday 1st February, Tuesday 28th February, Wednesday 15th March and Thursday 16th March.
- Any teacher who is a member of the NEU has the fundamental right to follow their unions' advice and if a teacher chooses to exercise this right it is taken independently with no influence from any school leader or Governor at the school.
- Striking members do not have to give notice of their intention to strike until the actual day of action, but at Harewood they have chosen to lessen disruption by giving notice, nor do they have to prepare any work in advance for the day of action.
- Other non NEU members of staff, will be in school on the day carrying out their contractual duties as normal. In many cases, their employment terms and conditions mean they cannot be instructed to cover any class where the teacher has decided to take industrial action.

The key aspect of the dispute between the unions and the DfE is about the current levels of funding for schools. Over many years, schools have increasingly had to pick up the costs for providing additional services for the children and families they work with. Schools regularly fill gaps created by cuts in other services and have a duty to implement ever-changing requirements passed on to schools by the DfE.

School spending at Harewood, has already had to be cut to a bare minimum over the last few years, with only essential purchases made, many subscriptions which support the curriculum cut and the building maintenance and improvements budgets cut to only essential maintenance and safety work. Even with this, the school budget has been in deficit at points in the last 3 years and it is projected to be so again next year. As schools are not allowed to set deficit budgets, more cuts will be required to balance funding and spending levels. What this means for the children is less being spent on providing resources for their learning, having a building which is not being properly maintained and ultimately, losing more staff. This is all before factoring in the increases to fuel costs and the current levels of inflation. This situation is common across schools.

Staffing costs are the vast majority of school spending. In recent years, including this one, pay rises for all staff have not been fully funded by the DfE meaning that the difference in costs has had to be taken from curriculum and premises budgets.

The unions also include other factors in their dispute, one of these being the recruitment and retention of staff.



Statistics show that an average teachers working hours are about 50 hours per week in schools + planning hours working from home. They are paid for 32.5 hours, the rest being unpaid overtime. At the same time, some figures indicate that the relative value of teacher pay has reduced over the last 10 years by up to 23%. Pay, working hours and pressure contribute to only 50% of teachers staying in the profession longer than 5 years. Recruiting and keeping staff is becoming increasingly difficult. The picture is even worse for Teaching Assistants where schools cannot compete with other roles on pay or flexibility of working.

Whilst teaching unions are calling for what they see as a fair pay increase, the main dispute is about funding any pay increases and supporting schools to do the work they need to do with appropriate finances. It is disappointing that the dispute has resulted in strike action and as a Governing Body we can only hope that a resolution is found quickly for the sake of everyone.

Industrial action is disruptive and I totally understand this is a cause of immense frustration and even anger towards it. However, I would like appeal to parents to consider and understand the above points carefully.

Whilst some of you may not agree with the action, I ask you to understand that we have no choice but to accept that it is going ahead. Mr Ratcliffe has done all he can, within the constraints of what information he has, to ensure you have sufficient notice of how your child's attendance will be affected.

We do sincerely apologise for the inconvenience this may mean to you and your child's education and we hope the dispute between the DfE and teaching unions will be resolved as soon as possible. In the meantime I ask that correspondence about the industrial action, including that on social media, is kept respectful and considerate of that fact that we are doing all we can under very difficult circumstances for all.

Yours sincerely

Mrs J. Jayne  
Chair of Governors

