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STRIKE ACTION BY THE VARIOUS TEACHING UNIONS Strike Day Wed 18th Jan 2017 - INTO

Dear Parents

As you may be aware the various teaching unions are and have been in an industrial dispute with

- the Minister of Education
- the Department of Education
- the Educational Employing Authorities

The origins of this dispute is over the continued failure of the Northern Ireland Executive to properly invest in our educational infrastructure and over their failure to properly fund education and the payment of teachers.

You will have seen from the newspapers, before Christmas that no school had their budget approved in 2015/16 as nearly every one of them indicated that they would be in deficit (running in the red) within 2 years. This is unprecedented. Currently schools are only allowed to spend the finances they have had made available to them....when this money runs out no one is sure what will happen. Before Christmas the NI Executive was to approve a budget. This has not happened. Traditionally schools would have had their school budget by the end of January allowing them to plan their spending in the new financial year (April to March). The failure of Government to set a budget means as a school we do not know how much money we will have to spend in April. With the current chaos at Stormont this problem is likely to be exasperated.

From the additional money that the Minister of Education announced at the DUP party conference in Oct, our school benefitted by £0.09/per child/day. Consider this in the context of the price rise for the cost of a school meal per day which is due to rise by £0.40/per pupil/day by Sept 2017.

Over the last number of years the amount of money made available to run schools by the NI Executive via the Department of Education has declined in real terms. Primary Schools have always been the 'Cinderella' of the school system as their funding levels per pupil, are the lowest in comparison with both pre and post primary sector, even though year on year they produce some of the best educational results. This can be seen in the recent international study where the teaching of Maths in Northern Ireland was ranked 6th in the world. We have a highly motivated, trained and skilled workforce where your child is at the heart of the job that we do.

Since the NI Executive initiated the austerity agenda the morale of the educational service and teachers in particular has been diminished and now stands at an all-time low. There is less money in the system and there is no money for staff training to ensure teachers remain skilled and proficient, especially in the digital economy in which we live. As a school we have seen the resources and funding made available to us reduced year on year. This year the cuts have been in the region of £30k, next year these are likely to be in the region of £40k. This is a significant amount of money. As a system we are being asked to do more and more but with fewer resources to do it. School budgets are now lower in real terms than they were in 2010, bearing in mind that over £400million will have to be found for the Renewable Heat Initiative, which was approved by our Government.

In the past where teachers in Primary Schools have taken industrial action they have always ensured that it did not directly impact on your child's education.

Last term, however, industrial relations between teachers and their employers reached an all-time low, with the employers refusing to implement the 1% pay rise for 2015/16, money which was made available by the U.K. Treasury via the block grant and which all other public sector workers were given. Teachers were the only sector of the public service not to have received this automatic increase. It is interesting to note that MLAs in the same year received a pay increase of 1%. For many years teachers' pay has been linked to the pay of teachers in the rest of the U.K. Many see the failure to implement this pay rise and the break in pay parity as the introduction of regionalised pay, with teachers being the first of the public sector to suffer. Why should teachers in Northern Ireland, where it is widely agreed that the standard of Education is the highest in these islands, be paid less than their counterparts in the rest of the U.K.? Teachers' salaries are now worth less than in 2010 and they now have to work to the state retirement age which is currently 68 and could be increased even more.

With this in mind, and with teachers seeing that your children are suffering because of the lack of resources, they have taken the unprecedented move to strike. This began last term in Belfast with members of the NASUWT striking.

Just before Christmas members of INTO voted
1 Not to co-operate with the Education and Training Inspectorate (this action is also being supported by NASUWT and UTU)
2 To take strike action

On **Wed 18th Jan 2017** teachers who are members of the INTO union will be withdrawing their labour from 1am until 12.30pm, that is they will be on strike for half a day. Like many other schools all over Northern Ireland, this action will have an impact on our school as the majority teachers will be unavailable to teach your children.

The arrangements for the day (Wed 18th Jan) are as follows:

- 1 No child is to be in school at 8.30am as there will be no staff to supervise and teach them
- 2 School will commence at 12.30pm with lunch at 12.45pm for P3-P7, no child should arrive to school before 12.30pm
- 3 There will be no school for P1 and P2 children.

Striking is something that teachers do not do lightly. Teachers understand the impact that this has on your children and schools, but they also know if they don't the standard of Education will decline.

This strike is about more than teacher salaries, it is about a fair day's wage for a fair day's work, no matter where you work in the UK, stopping the introduction of regionalised pay which at some point could be introduced across the public sector. It is also to highlight to you the parents the inadequacies in school funding and that if something is not done now it will have a devastating impact on your child's educational experience and a decline in educational standards right across the system.

Please show you support for your children, your school and your teachers by writing to

- 1 your MLA
- 2 the Minister for Education
- 3 the First and Deputy First Minister

Demand fair funding for Education, especially Primary Education, and support your teachers when they strike, even though this may inconvenience you. As teachers we are doing this for your children and their future.

I apologise for the inconvenience this will cause to you and your children. I would ask for your patience, understanding and support.

Yours truly

(K. Donaghy)
Principal