



# SAINT MARY'S PRIMARY SCHOOL & NURSERY UNIT

Principal: Mr P Gilchrist

E mail: [pgilchrist570@c2kni.net](mailto:pgilchrist570@c2kni.net)

Telephone: 028427 28278

53, Windmill Hill  
Portaferry  
Co. Down  
BT 22 1RH

23<sup>rd</sup> November 2023

Dear Parents,

## **Half day of strike action by teachers and school leaders on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2023**

I am writing to you about 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 this is likely to have at our school.

### **Why take this action?**

- 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 Primary School and Nursery Unit**

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.

**As the Principal, I have determined the school;**

- **Will be closed for all pupils from 9.00am until 12.00noon on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> November 2023 and that our school will open its doors at 12.10pm for pupils to come into school.**
- **A full school dinner service will be available on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> November 2023 from 12.10pm, but we ask that you let the school know on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> November if you wish for your child to receive a school dinner on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> November 2023. There will be no opportunity to book a school dinner on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> November 2023.**
- **Normal afternoon lessons will continue with our P1/2/3 pupils finishing school at 2.00pm and our P4/5/6/7 pupils finishing at 3.00pm.**
- **After School provision will be available on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> November and again we ask that if you wish for your child to attend After Schools that you notify the school on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2023.**

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](mailto:sara.long@eani.org.uk)

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

Maria Thomasson, Acting CEO, CnaG, Áras na bhFál, 200-202 Falls Road, Belfast, BT12 6AH  
[mariathomasson@comhairle.org](mailto:mariathomasson@comhairle.org)

Roisin Marshall, CEO: NICIE, 25 College Gardens, Belfast, BT9 6BS [rmarshall@nicie.org.uk](mailto:rmarshall@nicie.org.uk)

Nuala O'Neill, Director: Governing Bodies Association, Fountain Centre, Belfast, BT1 6ET  
[nuala@gbani.org](mailto:nuala@gbani.org)

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

Yours sincerely



Mr Gilchrist  
Principal