



LIGHTHOUSE SCHOOLS PARTNERSHIP

21st April 2023

Dear parents and carers,

Re: ongoing strike action and the recent pay discussions between unions and the DfE

I know that you will be concerned that the dispute between the NEU and the DfE has not yet been settled. There were lengthy talks between the Secretary of State and all the education unions some weeks ago. In the end, the offer from the government (a pay increase of around 4.5% for teachers depending on grade and a one-off retrospective payment of £1000) was rejected by all the unions following ballots of their members. The NEU has now announced further strike days on April 27 and May 2 and NASUWT, NAHT and ASCL are balloting their members once again. As it seems clear that we are still some way from a resolution I felt that this would be a good time to contact you to update you on how our schools are managing this difficult time and alert you to a funding issue that this situation has raised.

So turning to the handling of strike days first. Our Trust and our schools are not direct parties to the dispute. We do not have the capacity to negotiate on teachers' pay as our funding is directly controlled by the government. We therefore do not have the ability to settle this matter for our own schools. We have been working to have our schools as open as possible subject to the need to have safe supervision ratios and also without asking staff who are not striking to act to undermine the lawful strike action taken by their colleagues. You will understand what a minefield this is. In primary schools we have in most cases been able to ascertain which staff are taking strike action ahead of the strike days and therefore provide certainty to parents on whether their children will be able to be in school or not. In secondaries we have in almost all cases been able to provide revision facilities and lessons for Year 11 and Year 13 pupils. We have been in discussions with the NEU on enhancing this provision as the exams approach and have seen a positive response from NEU members so far. Schools will be confirming these arrangements in the next couple of days.

The issue of school funding is completely entwined with staff pay. About 80% of our income goes on pay, so any increase in pay rates will necessitate reductions elsewhere unless our income from government is increased too. You may remember that the chancellor had to find an additional £2bn for schools last autumn as the pay rises last year were unfunded and schools across the country, ours included, faced deep cuts. So far this year the government has already offered a pay rise of between 3.88% and 9.42% to support staff that is unfunded and which our schools are already having to find within their existing budgets.

It appears that this situation is about to recur. The government's now withdrawn pay offer relied on schools finding almost all of the 4.5% increase from the 'headroom' in their budgets. Had the DfE's pay award been accepted by the unions I simply do not know how we would have found the money to pay it without making cuts to the service that we provide to pupils. This is not a situation unique to our Trust or region – every Trust and Local Authority in the country would face the same funding shortfall.

Chief Executive: Mr G J Lewis MA

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So what are we doing about this? Although Lighthouse Schools Partnership is not a participant in the negotiations, we do have a voice. Through our sector body, the Confederation of School Trusts, we are engaging with the DfE to demonstrate that school budgets are incredibly strained. I spoke to the DfE's Regional Director this afternoon to make the same case and am seeking meetings with the three MPs who represent our area. If additional funding is not forthcoming, and cuts do have to be made, we will keep outcomes for our pupils at the heart of our decision making. We will aim to be the most efficient we can be through, for example, the use of technology, and we will utilise the creativity of our staff and the strength of our partnership to mitigate the impact wherever possible. We are already looking at strategies to address this.

We are always incredibly grateful for the support and engagement of our families. I would especially like to say how much I appreciate the support that parents have given to our Heads in difficult times. We all have the same goal: an excellent education for the children and young people.

With very best wishes,



Gary Lewis

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