

# ST MARK'S CE PRIMARY SCHOOL



Headteacher: Ms Laura Kelsey BA (Hons), PGCE, CEPQH

Tuesday, January 24, 2023

Dear Parents and Carers,

## RE: School closure for children due to Strike Action

As I wrote to you last week, the main teaching union will be joining many other public sector unions in calling for industrial action. Please understand that Teachers are striking against the national education policy and resourcing in schools and not against the children they work so hard for every day.

When making any decisions to close or partially close the school, please beware there are many factors I have to consider. This includes the health and safety aspects of a reduced staff capacity including adequate supervision, necessary first aid cover and the required safeguarding provision. I have carefully considered the non-statutory guidance we have been issued from the DfE as well as guidance from West Sussex County Council.

**At this current time, the school will not be open for children on strike days on 1<sup>st</sup> February, 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 15<sup>th</sup> March and 16<sup>th</sup> March.** This could change and I will keep you informed but, as it stands, we will not be able to care for / educate any children on those dates. We will also be unable to set any remote learning for children on that day as a strike means teachers withdrawing their labour (and losing pay for those days) which includes setting work.

Although the strike is detailed as being about pay (and its gradual erosion over time), the reasons many teachers will have decided to strike is about so much more than personal take home pay - however, the law only allows you to strike on certain issues with pay being one of them.

More often than not, a teacher's decision to strike is not based on their own personal circumstance, more the effect that these circumstances have on their pupils. Current funding levels in schools are woefully inadequate to meet the needs of society (despite the claims of real terms cash increases). For example, nationally and locally there are not enough resources or spaces to

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support children with the highest levels of SEND which means, throughout the land: many are not able to thrive in a suitable learning environment. Teachers and support staff across the country work incredibly hard to support children who have complex and long term needs but they can often be subject to multiple instances of assault including verbal or physical - hitting, biting, spitting kicking. These children are not naughty or badly behaved, their behaviour is communication / frustration as children with complex needs struggle to have their needs met despite our best efforts. Please note this is one of a number of national issues and not something I am identifying as a St. Mark's problem.

This has a knock on effect that resources are stretched even further when trying to support all pupils to fully reach their potential. I don't know of many schools who are able to say they are 'fully staffed' with no vacancies let alone are 'fully staffed' to meet the needs of all its learners.

Schools have national pay scales and we are confined by the income we are given. When a recession and cost of living crisis hits, private sectors can put up their prices and then offer to pay higher wages to compensate this - schools with a fixed income can't do this - therefore staff may leave or are forced to rely on handouts or foodbanks leading to further staffing challenges, pressure on those who remain in the profession, burn out and a recruitment crisis which is very real in the here and now.

Therefore when teachers, like nurses, are striking 'because of pay' it is not very often solely because of their own take home pay. It's the impact it has on the service they can provide, that they long to provide. Having entered caring professions, teachers and nurses never want to disadvantage their pupils or patients. They are not taking a day off (striking workers are not paid when they withdraw their labour) but they are left with no option to affect change. To tell those who can make the change enough is enough. We cannot do our jobs any more. We need more colleagues, we need to fix the recruitment and



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retention crisis, we need to look after and train our workforce to provide the world class service our children deserve.

Therefore when your child's attendance at school is restricted because of strike action, because a teacher has opted to lose a day's pay to be able to send a message that enough is enough then I hope you understand they are doing this to protect your child's future, to try and build a better society. I know it will be an inconvenience, I know it will impact people but this is very much short term pain for long term gain and I sincerely hope that you are appreciative of the efforts made to achieve this goal.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laura Kelsey', followed by a large, stylized flourish.

Laura Kelsey  
Headteacher



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