



Wednesday 28th June 2023

Dear Parents and Carers,

Industrial Action Update

I wrote to all parents and carers in the spring term to explain that industrial action had been planned by the National Education Union (NEU) on numerous occasions between February and May 2023. I am offering this update as two additional days are scheduled for **Wednesday 5th and Friday 7th July 2023**. Those additional two days are based upon NEU members concerns about a lack of negotiations with the Department for Education since April, the Education Secretary's proposal that any pay rise has to be funded directly from current school budgets and concerns over the Government failing to meet recruitment targets for 2023-24, in a year when a record number of teachers will leave the profession in 2022-23. An announcement on pay is scheduled for late July 2023, making it very difficult for schools to budget or plan with any accuracy. Three other trade unions for teachers have raised similar concerns and are balloting their members on industrial action, including ASCL who are balloting members for the first time in their history. I am sharing this additional information to offer context and to highlight how disappointing it is that since April 2023 the Government has not met actively with unions to resolve these issues.

The detail that I have previously shared is still largely accurate and we will try to follow a very similar approach to that taken on previous days of industrial action, if at all possible. I am keen to share as much information as currently possible so that you have the best possible understanding of the situation, the contingency plans that we have made and how our students may be affected. I also wanted to give parents and carers advanced notice, to allow sufficient time to plan any necessary childcare arrangements. I hope that the following information is helpful.

Why are the NEU taking industrial action?

All teachers have a legal right to take part in the planned industrial action, although **it is important to emphasise that the action is not specific to or directed at our school**. It is based upon ongoing national issues and will, potentially, impact on all schools in England and Wales to a lesser or greater extent. The industrial action is in relation to the NEU's dispute with the Government over nationally agreed pay awards, the increased cost of living, issues with the recruitment of specialist teachers and a belief that schools have been underfunded for a significant period of time. As it is based upon action by one trade union, it will impact on schools in very different ways, as patterns of trade union membership differ from school to school.



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Please note that there has been an increase in membership of the NEU both locally and nationally since February 2023. Therefore, many schools may encounter greater logistical difficulties because of that when planning provision for key year groups.

Are other trade unions linked to education taking part in the industrial action?

The NEU is the only trade union to have currently met the threshold for industrial action and identified dates. In addition, neither of the two trade unions that represent Headteachers and School Leaders (ASCL and NAHT) are currently taking industrial action. However, it is important to note that those other teaching trade unions are currently balloting their members. No action is planned by GMB or Unison, the professional bodies that represent support staff in most schools. All of those additional trade unions have informed their members to attend work as normal on the two days identified above at the time of writing. Similar action has been frequent in other sectors and services since September 2022 and is, unfortunately, ongoing. Like all schools, we are keen for the Education Secretary to arrange talks and to meet with all teaching trade unions so that a resolution can be reached.

What advice have schools been given in relation to the industrial action?

All Headteachers have been informed that they need to do everything in their power to keep schools open, given the resources that they have available and their unique context. Please be assured that we have planned, on the basis of meeting that requirement, and ensuring that our contingency plans meet our statutory responsibilities in relation to safeguarding and effective health and safety. Our planning has been based upon our best understanding of how many staff members have indicated their support for the industrial action and also ensuring that we have enough staff in school to comply with our legal obligations and duty of care to pupils to those who will be asked to attend. **It is important to note that those taking part in the action cannot be compelled to share their plans with the school and that NEU membership has grown locally and nationally.**

How will the NEU's industrial action impact upon Durham Johnston on Wednesday 5th and Friday 7th July 2023?

A very large number of staff at Durham Johnston are members of the NEU and have indicated that they intend to support the industrial action. This means that it is difficult for the school to run at anywhere near full capacity and we may not be able to open for as many year groups as in the periods February to May 2023. Therefore, we have the following contingency plans in place:

Wednesday 5th July 2023

- **Year 12** – This year group **will attend school on Wednesday 5th July 2023**. School transport will be available as normal, and students will have a mixture of lessons and private study. **We have been advised to prioritise this year group.**

- **Year 10 – Unfortunately, we do not have the capacity for all Year 10 students to be in school.** We have identified a number of students that we feel would benefit from support and are in the process of sharing that information with their families.
- **Years 7, 8 and 9 –** These year groups **will not, unfortunately, attend school on Wednesday 5th July 2023.** We will provide a combination of work on Teams in relation to personal development, and online learning with school staff or via direction to curriculum supporting web-based learning where possible. Students will recognise these packages as Hegarty Maths and Seneca for Science. **Please encourage your child to seek a password reset if they cannot currently access either resource.**

Friday 7th July 2023

- **Year 6 Transition Day –** The second of the two strike days coincides with the school's induction day for Year 6 students. Year 6 students will be joining us from 37 different primary schools, and we feel that going ahead with the day is important for young students to make a successful transition in September. Therefore, we intend to go ahead with the induction day and that will impact upon other groups that we can invite into school.
- **Year 7 -** This year group **will attend school on Friday 7th July 2023.** Year 7 play a vital part in transition days having recently experienced that step up. School transport will be available as normal, and students will have a mixture of lessons and activities and will support Year 6 through their induction. We will also prioritise activities to help with their personal development.
- **Year 12 –** This year group **will attend school on Friday 7th July 2023.** School transport will be available as normal, and students will have a mixture of lessons and private study. **They will also provide support for Year 6 students, as they do during each induction day.**
- **Years 8, 9 and 10 -** These year groups **will not, unfortunately, attend school on Friday 7th July 2023.** We will provide a combination of work on Teams in relation to personal development, and online learning with school staff or via direction to curriculum supporting web-based learning where possible. Students will recognise these packages as Hegarty Maths and Seneca for Science. **Please encourage your child to seek a password reset if they cannot currently access either resource.**
- We will share additional information with students on **Monday 3rd July** so that they fully understand the arrangements that are in place have the opportunity to ask questions, and discuss what work they need to complete at home.

Are arrangements for industrial action the same as the Covid-19 pandemic?

Our contingency plans **are not the same** and it is important to explain why. During the pandemic, a large number of staff volunteered to support students in school and, from January 2021 (the second lockdown for all schools), we taught all year groups online from the first day of term. This partial closure is based upon industrial

action that a considerable number of staff will be taking part in. Therefore, we will not have the same number of staff available. In addition, other trade unions have been specifically advised not to cover classes or to volunteer to do so. During the Covid-19 pandemic there was clear statutory guidance on which groups needed to be in school during that lengthy, national lockdown. Our response on this occasion is based upon four individual days across a 6-week period and very different staffing and resource availability. **This means that we cannot, unfortunately, support the same range of groups.**

In addition to the Year Groups mentioned above, which other students will be supported in school?

We will contact the parents and carers of all those students that we feel would benefit most from being in school. **The Department for Education often references those students as having a specific or general vulnerability.** Whilst we are prioritising those students, please be aware that we will not be able to offer a normal teaching day and will focus upon wider study skills and personal development opportunities in line with all other students in Years 7-10 who are working at home. School staff will be in touch to share arrangements for this large group of students in the coming days.

Is there anything else that I need to be aware of in relation to Wednesday 5th and Friday 7th July 2023?

There are a number of other important things to consider:

- All school buses will pick up and collect students at normal stops and at usual times on that day.
- We will provide vouchers for all families with children who will be working from home and are entitled to a free school meal next week by post. The vouchers are to cover both dates. **Please let us know if you have had any issues or need any additional support.**
- We have been advised by the Department for Education to enter an additional attendance code for those affected by the industrial action so that overall attendance isn't affected for your child. **However, if your child is unwell on any of those dates, please share that information via the normal school recording system.**
- All students who are attending school on that day need to have their usual equipment for the day and to be in school uniform.
- After school clubs will not take place on that day.
- Any external meetings due to take place on that day will be reviewed and rearranged, if necessary, for a new date.
- We will have a number of first aid trained staff available on site to ensure we meet our statutory health and safety responsibilities.
- Any trips or visits scheduled for that day will go ahead as normal. That guidance relates specifically to the Year 9 Maths Inspiration, which students have paid for in advance and is still taking place in Newcastle. Those students participating should come into school as normal.

I hope that this update has offered a clear overview of our contingency plans in relation to the upcoming days of industrial action. . **We have looked very carefully at the possibility of bringing different year groups into school but, unfortunately, we do not have the staff numbers available for that to work effectively.** If our plans have to change in any significant way, I will ensure that all students, parents, and carers are made aware as quickly as possible.

Yours faithfully

A J O'Sullivan
Headteacher