



17 February 2023

Dear Parents & Carers,

Industrial Action Update

I wrote to all parents and carers in January to explain that industrial action had been planned by the National Education Union (NEU) in February and March 2023. The first day of industrial action has already taken place and the second day is scheduled for Tuesday 28 February 2023 in the Northeast of England. There are two additional dates that could potentially impact on all schools, and I wanted to share those again so that families can plan ahead. Those dates are:

1. **Wednesday 15 March 2023:** England and Wales.
2. **Thursday 16 March 2023:** England and Wales.

The information that I shared in January is still accurate and we will follow an identical approach on Tuesday 28th February. 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 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.

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

The NEU is the only trade union to have met the threshold for industrial action. The other large teaching trade union, the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT), did not meet the threshold for action. In addition, neither of the two trade unions that represent Headteachers and School Leaders



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(ASCL and NAHT) are taking industrial action. 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 four days identified above and it is important to note that civil servants working for the Department for Education and Ofsted also have industrial action planned for that day. Industrial action has not affected schools until this point, but, as you will be aware, similar action has been very frequent in other sectors and services.

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.**

How will the NEU's industrial action impact upon Durham Johnston on Tuesday 28th February?

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. Therefore, we have the following contingency plans in place:

- **Years 11, 12 and 13** – These year groups **will attend school on Tuesday 28 February**. School transport will be available as normal and students will have a mixture of lessons and support with revision, study skills and exam technique where necessary. **We have been advised to prioritise these year groups as they have public examinations in May and June 2023. Year 13 mock exams will continue as planned on this day.**
- Years 7, 8, 9 and 10 – These year groups **will not, unfortunately, attend school on Tuesday 28th February**. 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 27th February so that they fully understand the arrangements that are in place, have the opportunity to ask questions and, for years 7-10, know what work they need to complete at home on Tuesday 28th February 2023.

- We will offer an additional update on Monday 27th February for all parents and carers to confirm these arrangements or to share any changes to our planning.

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 significant 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 as in relation to Tuesday 28th February?

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 have already provided vouchers for all families with children who will be working from home and are entitled to a free school meal. The vouchers are to cover all 4 potential dates, even if the industrial action is called off.
- 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.
- There will be no after school clubs taking 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.

I hope that this update has offered a clear overview of our contingency plans in relation to industrial action. I am still hopeful that some form of resolution may be reached prior to next week and certainly before the next proposed date in late February. 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