



Dear Parents,

Industrial action at More House School

I have received formal notification from two trade-unions of intended strike action in which some of our teaching staff intend to participate. This is an exceptional situation, of the like I have not known in my twenty years' involvement with our school. The issue relates to the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS).

Context

Before September 2019, the school's employer-contribution towards each teacher's pension was 16.48% of the teacher's salary. However, the TPS is an unfunded public service pension scheme and subject to increasingly greater spend than income. A revaluation for 2019 resulted in all employers, nationally, having to increase their contribution to each teacher's pension to 23.68% of each teacher's annual salary. This has increased our charity's costs significantly.

But the national scheme has again been revalued and it is advised that employers' contributions for teachers' pensions will rise again to more than 30% of salary, taking effect in September 2024. The TPS is a Defined Benefits Scheme and as such, with each rise in the employer's contribution there is no improvement in the package received by teachers; the hikes in employers' contributions are purely to keep the national scheme solvent.

Meanwhile, our school governors are concerned about the impact on pupils and the charity of what is expected to be, by September 2024, an increase in annual costs to the school of half a million pounds. They have therefore asked our teachers to engage in a period of consultation with school governors to determine whether More House School should withdraw from the Teachers' Pension Scheme, and instead provide to teaching staff an alternative pension scheme with controllable costs for both parties.

This is, understandably, a very important issue for affected teachers and, even though this consultation is currently in progress, two trade-unions, the NEU and the NASUWT, have served notice to the governors that they are instructing their members in the school to strike on the following dates:

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Thursday, 15th June NEU & NASUWT members

Tuesday 27th June NEU & NASUWT members

Wednesday 28th June NASUWT members only

Thursday 29th June NEU members only

Tuesday 4th July NEU & NASUWT members

Wednesday 5th July NEU & NASUWT members

Thursday 6th July NEU & NASUWT members

Saturday 8th July (Founder's Day) NASUWT members only.

The governors are seeking to engage with the teachers' representatives, and the wider teaching staff, to avert the strike action, whilst ensuring that negotiations protect the school's short and long-term security. However, at this point I must assume that industrial action by some teachers in the school will proceed, and I am keen to provide parents and pupils with as much warning and information as possible.

Arrangements for strike days

Workers intending to participate in a union-organised strike are not obliged to tell their employer in advance of the first day of strike action. This makes planning difficult, but such action by unions is intended to be disruptive. Nevertheless, in seeking to ensure the safety and least disruptive experience for our pupils, I have asked teachers to let me know whether or not, should strikes go ahead, they expect to participate. I am very grateful to those colleagues who have told me of their individual intentions, helping me and senior colleagues to devise plans for those days. There are, though, some staff who have chosen not to disclose their intentions.

A good number of teachers have informed me that, regardless of the call to action from the trade-unions, they wish to attend work as normal. From this, I have determined there will be sufficient staffing for us to operate on named strike days as follows:

Pupils in years Four to Ten

All pupils in years Four to Ten inclusive should attend school as normal on named strike days. These days may feel more like a flexi-Friday, with a special timetable of academic lessons, LDC therapeutic intervention and pastoral/social development activities. All lessons will be delivered by More House School staff, but pupils are

likely to find that in some or all of their lessons, they have a different teacher to their normal one. Break-time and lunch-time arrangements will operate normally. Morning and afternoon registrations and form-times may be in larger groups than usual. The school's safeguarding management and medical surgery arrangements will operate normally.

There will be a very reduced after-school activities provision. Paid-activities will operate as usual, but wherever possible, all other pupils except boarders are urged to be collected from school at 4.20pm.

Pupils in Year Eleven or Upper Sixth

Pupils in Year Eleven and the Upper Sixth have completed their courses. I ask, please, that students in those year groups do not attend school on strike days unless there is exceptional reason. Students who are boarders and wish to remain in school may do so.

For any Year Eleven or Upper Sixth student expected to be in school on a strike day, it would be extremely helpful if their parent would confirm this in advance. For such Year Eleven pupils, please email Miss Adkins directly. For such Upper Sixth students, please email Mr Rashleigh.

Where public examinations are scheduled for strike days, candidates should come to school for their examinations, which will be protected as a priority from the disruption.

Pupils in Lower Sixth

It will be impossible to provide a rigorous academic provision for Lower Sixth pupils relevant to their chosen courses on strike days. This is because a majority of their courses are provided by a single specialist within the teaching staff, and I must work on the assumption that many of those specialist teachers will choose not to attend work. Also, we expect to have insufficient staffing capacity to enable the usual, much smaller, Sixth Form class sizes to operate.

Therefore, I regret that it is most sensible for Lower Sixth students to study from home on strike days. Some teachers will be keen to provide activities for their classes on MS Teams. However, many classes will not have such provision, since teachers who are on strike do not have to prepare or set work for their pupils.

Where it is necessary for any Lower Sixth student to remain in school across a strike day, it would be extremely helpful if their parent would confirm this in advance. For such Lower Sixth students, please email Mr Rashleigh. Students who are boarders and wish to remain in school may do so. Students in school may be invited to support younger pupils in their learning activities, and will be provided with space to complete any academic activities set remotely by their teachers.

After-school clubs and Activities

There will be a very reduced after-school activities provision. Paid-activities will operate as usual but, wherever possible, all other pupils except boarders are urged to be collected from school at 4.20pm. There will be only one supervision activity available from 4.30-5.30pm on strike days.

Transport

The coach transport to and from the railway station, for those with reserved places, will operate as normal.

Public examinations

Where public examinations are scheduled for strike days, candidates should come as usual to school for their examinations, which will be protected as a priority from disruption.

Individual instrumental music lessons

We expect instrumental music lessons to continue as usual on strike days.

Year Eight Immunisations – Tuesday, 27th June

We expect the Year Eight HPV immunisations to proceed as planned.

Music Summer Concert

The summer concert is expected to take place as planned.

Junior Years' tea-party – Wednesday, 5th July

We expect the junior tea parties to go ahead as planned.

Founder's Day – Saturday, 8th July

I expect Founder's Day to be delivered in customary style, and look forward to welcoming all pupils and their parents to our annual celebration of our boys' achievements and aspirations.

Picketing

I have written to our teachers asking them to be considerate of our pupils when planning strike-day picketing activities. I have asked that our pupils are not subject to having to cross picket-lines at the school's entrances.

I am very sorry that I must write in such a way to you. It is the hope of all involved, I am certain, that the situation is resolved as quickly as possible. In the meantime, I undertake to provide any updates as quickly as I can to all parents, and I thank you for your understanding and support.

Yours sincerely,
Jonathan Hetherington
Headmaster