

3<sup>rd</sup> March 2017

Dear Parents

We are writing to you to bring you up to date with regards the ongoing industrial dispute being taken by school support staff in Derby City.

### **Background to the Strikes**

To give you a little of the background, the Equality Act 2010 has meant that all Local Authorities have had to conduct Equal Pay Reviews of all their support staff including (but not restricted to) those in schools to ensure that all staff performing equal work should receive equal pay regardless of their gender. Derby City Council undertook a protracted process to review the pay and conditions of all support staff leading to the implementation of job changes in June 2016. As a result of implementing this equality legislation some staff were given improved pay/conditions whilst others were given worse pay/conditions. The Local Authority were not given additional money to ensure that all got improved (and equal) pay/conditions! School Teaching Assistants, unlike other support staff, have ended up with worse pay and conditions hence the dispute we find ourselves in.

### **Derby City Council and Portway Juniors response to strike action**

The Support staff's union, UNISON have been in dispute with the Local Authority (not with Portway Juniors) regarding the revised pay and conditions since last June leading to the strikes that we have experienced.

The Local Authority have told us that they have very limited additional money to resolve the dispute. An offer was made around Christmas time but was rejected by the Union. As the dispute affects so many staff, a limited pot of money doesn't go very far.

Portway Juniors has already done everything it can legally do to mitigate the effect of the revised pay and conditions on it's staff. We offered all staff negatively affected, increased working hours to ensure that their pay was not affected recognising the extra unpaid hours they were often working. However, our support staff have chosen to strike due to the change in their conditions and in support of those other staff in the city who have been negatively impacted, especially Teaching Assistants in the Special Schools.

### **Managing School during the strikes**

Portway Juniors has a majority of Teaching Assistants, all mid day supervisors and all office staff out on strike. This makes managing the school very difficult – all these staff are involved in tasks important to the safe running of the school and without them, a lot of extra pressures are being put on the remaining staff.

As Governors of Portway Junior School, along with the Senior Leadership team of the school, we have carefully considered what our options are for continuing to keep school open and operating as normally as possible. However, we are also conscious of our need to ensure that all children are safe throughout the day.

So far this term we have managed to keep the school open to pupils throughout the school day by adapting the way we work within school (having the office closed, for example) and by getting parent volunteers to come into school over lunchtimes. We are very grateful for their support. However, this is no longer sustainable and clear safeguarding issues are arising due to the lack of capacity we are now experiencing.

### **Plans for the coming weeks**

Unfortunately, due to the high number of our support staff striking and the continuous and persistent nature of the industrial action, the governors, senior leadership team and Head teacher have made the difficult decision to close the school next week. **The school will be closed all day from Monday 6<sup>th</sup> March to Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> March inclusively.** School will also be closed on Friday 10<sup>th</sup> March for a pre-arranged INSET day.

Regrettably, this decision has been made in light of the health and safety and safeguarding risk assessments carried out in school and in discussion with the Derby City Council legal team. The leadership team, governors and school staff continue to work tirelessly behind the scenes to come up with the most suitable arrangement to open the school safely again as soon as possible.

We recognise the impact that this will have on families. Please be assured that every staff member has done all they can do to keep the school open but our primary concern is the safeguarding of children whilst in school. Work will be sent home with every child today to be undertaken at home next week.

We will inform parents as soon as possible through email, text and the school website of any decisions made with regards to opening for the week commencing Monday 13<sup>th</sup> March based on further discussions with Derby City Council. Should the industrial action be called off we will let you know

We would urge you to be proactive and give your views and raise concerns via the following routes:

- Contact Derby City Council – They are the employers of all school support staff and have overseen the process regarding the new pay and conditions. This is who unions are in dispute with.  
Email: [parentcarer.query@derby.gov.uk](mailto:parentcarer.query@derby.gov.uk)  
Telephone: 01332 642575
- Contact Unison – This is the union who are in dispute with Derby City Council about the new pay and conditions and are coordinating the strikes on behalf of their members  
Email: [unison@derby.gov.uk](mailto:unison@derby.gov.uk)  
Telephone: 01332 643216

We deeply apologise for the inconvenience that this will cause, but unfortunately this matter is out of the school's control. I would like to thank you for your continued support and co-operation during this time.

Yours sincerely

Karen Puszczynska

Claire Brown

Phil Butcher

Head teacher

Chair of Governors

Vice-chair of Governors