



The Wee Friday Note

Friday 24th November 2023



1. School Enrolment 2024

Although Open Night is now over for this year, parents of pre-schoolers are welcome to arrange a personal tour of our school by ringing the school office on 90 401246.

Remember - if we want Cregagh Primary School to remain a healthy, viable school that is here for the next generation of Cregagh folk, it is important that it is supported by its local community who in turn send their children to their local primary school!

2. Christmas Trips

Every December, our P1-3 children go to the cinema to enjoy a festive movie and the older children visit the pantomime. Because these trips are quite expensive (although we try our best to keep the costs down as much as we can), we like to give parents the facility to pay for the cost of these trips off in smaller instalments. This can be done online using the *ParentMoney* App for the P4-7 pantomime trip and the P1-3 cinema trip.

3. School Fund

School Fund remains at £20 *per family* per school year. This can be paid through our online payment system School Money in either one or several instalments. Speak to Miss Murphy our school secretary (90 401246) if you need help doing this.

***** IMPORTANT FUTURE DATES FOR YOUR DIARY / CALENDAR *****

Saturday 25th November

SEAG Paper 2 (some P7s only)

Wednesday 29th November

Cregagh PS closed in morning only.

School opens at 12 noon.

Lunches/dinners as usual.

Thursday 7th December

Christmas Jumper Sale

The PSA are organising a sale of pre-loved Christmas Jumpers, still in good condition but no longer needed. See details on note sent home.

Friday 8th December

P1-P3 Nativity

Mount Merrion Parish Church

Wednesday 13th December

P4-P7 Carol Service

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Monday 18th December

P1-P3 Christmas Cinema Trip

Tuesday 19th December

Pantomime trip for P4-P7

Waterfront Hall, Belfast

Class parties with Aldo the Magician & Disco

Wednesday 20th December

Last day of term – 12 noon finish

Thursday 4th January 2024

School restarts for Spring Term (Term 2)

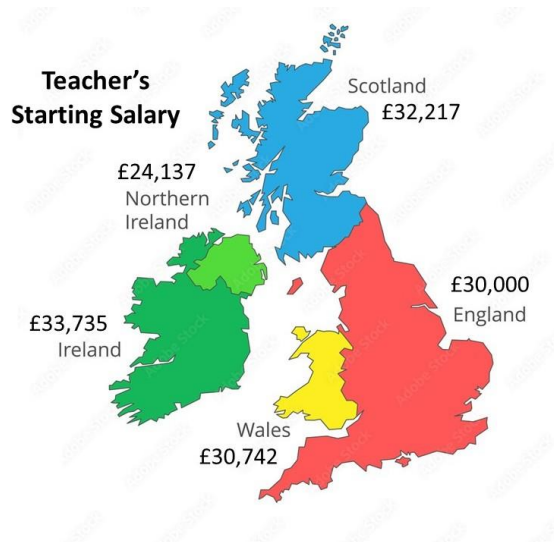
INDUSTRIAL ACTION IN NORTHERN IRELAND SCHOOLS

Dear parent,

As you will be aware, teaching and non-teaching staff in schools have been engaged in a lengthy industrial dispute with the Department of Education regarding pay and conditions, which shows no signs of abating. This action includes action short of strike action and direct strike action. This communication is designed to provide some context for the industrial action and some information pertaining to the current state of education in Northern Ireland that you may not be aware of.

Pay Disparity

Teachers in Northern Ireland are currently the lowest paid teachers in the whole of the UK, and by quite some distance. The map below shows the levels of pay currently received by newly graduated teachers in each of the four UK nations.



This situation is simply not fair – teachers in Northern Ireland deserve pay parity with the other regions of the United Kingdom and this legitimate demand is what is fuelling much of the current industrial action.

Funding Disparity

As with teachers' salaries, Northern Ireland finds itself playing catch up with the rest of the UK in relation to funding and spend per pupil. Once again, Scotland comes out top of the pile, with schools there receiving, on average, £1,300 more per pupil per year than schools in Northern Ireland. This is an astonishing disparity and one that must be addressed urgently. This underfunding and budgetary pressure means that with every year, more and more schools face a deficit in their budgets, meaning that less and less money is available to schools to deliver the fullest provision possible – approximately 48% of schools in Northern Ireland are in a deficit situation and many of those that aren't, will be very soon. The biggest losers in a situation like this are invariably our children.

The following link will provide some helpful further information:

<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/education/education-bodies-in-ni-call-for-urgent-action-over-unprecedented-budget-situation/884986893.html>

Increasing Demand/Diminishing Resources and Support

Society has changed, and is changing, at what seems to be breakneck speeds in the last number of years. Inevitably, those changes have found their way into schools and, as a result, the role of staff in schools has changed profoundly. This change has led to greater demands on teaching and non-teaching staff, with far greater levels of need now in mainstream schools, when compared to 10 or 15 years ago.

That being the case, it is not unreasonable to expect that an increasing level of need (and thus expectations on school staff) should be met with an appropriate level of increasing support. This is simply not happening. I detailed the decreasing financial support in the previous section, but added to that, the levels of practical and specialist support available to schools from external bodies, such as the Education Authority and the Department of Education, has steadily declined over the same time frame. It is an increasingly untenable situation that is leading to teacher disillusionment and burn out at rates never seen before.

We're Fighting for The Future Of Our Profession

A recent straw poll amongst current 4th Year students at Stranmillis University College (next year's new teachers), indicated that a significant number of them intend to move to Scotland, England or further afield to teach once they have graduated.

Given all the points I have already made in this communication, this is hardly surprising, but it raises a serious question about the future of the teaching profession and the impact of this 'brain drain' on our schools in the future. If we are losing our best young teachers to Scotland and England, with their better pay and conditions, it will inevitably impact the quality and availability of teachers here in Northern Ireland.

Similarly, it is not uncommon for schools to struggle to recruit new Principals, with vacant Principal posts now attracting small numbers of applicants, or, conceivably, not enough applicants to run a selection process. Re-advertisement of Principal positions is now not unusual. A role that was once attractive to many in the teaching profession, is quickly losing its appeal and that does not augur well for the future of school leadership. School principals pay in NI has fallen by 37% over the past 10 years, compared with school principals in England and Scotland. Teachers and principals in NI are asking: "Are we not worth the same?" and, "are our schools and pupils not equally valuable as those in GB?"

And What About Our Non-Teaching Staff?

The Non-Teaching members of our staff team are every bit as invaluable as our teaching members – our school simply could not function without them, from office staff to classroom assistants, to caretaking and cleaning staff, to catering staff. However, it is also becoming increasingly difficult to recruit people into the likes of classroom assistant roles because they are overstretched and underpaid. Consequently, schools struggle to recruit new CAs and often lose existing CAs because in a competitive jobs market, there are plenty of better paid jobs with much less expectation and demand.

Conclusion

Having read this communication, you would be forgiven for thinking that it's all doom and gloom in our schools. Whilst there is every reason for this to be the case, our schools continue to provide a high-quality education in positive and nurturing environments, and this is true of Cregagh Primary School. Day in, day out, all our staff work to the best of their ability to provide our children with as positive an experience as possible and that is testament to the professionalism and passion of the staff team at Cregagh Primary School in the face of many challenges.

School staff do not underestimate the inconvenience caused to families by industrial action. Many of our teachers, classroom assistants and other support staff are parents of school-aged children themselves. School staff engaging in strike action not only creates child-care issues for many of them; but it also costs them financially. It is regrettable that the Department of Education has allowed education in NI to fall into the depleted state it has.