

5 May 2022

Dear parent/carer,

RE: Information for parents/carers about industrial action

We wanted to take the opportunity to write to parents/carers to provide an update on Unite the Union industrial action.

Whilst the majority of school, and other Education Authority (EA) services are operating as normal or with minimal disruption due to contingency plans in place, some EA services unfortunately continue to face disruption as a result of the industrial action, impacting particularly on school transport and on some Special Schools.

Whilst the EA fully respects the right of staff to take industrial action, we also very much recognise the significant impact any reduction or change to learning patterns can have on children and young people, particularly those with special educational needs and the challenges this causes to you as parents/carers.

Why is Unite taking industrial action?

The ongoing industrial action by Unite relates to the 2021/22 National Joint Council (NJC) pay award which applies to Local Government Organisations across England, Wales and Northern Ireland including the EA.

NJC pay is negotiated and agreed nationally under agreed collective bargaining arrangements that includes 3 Trade Unions, including Unite.

Under these arrangements if the majority of organisations sign up to the pay offer (in this case two out of the three Unions agreed the pay offer - Unite did not) Local Government organisations, including EA, then implement the pay award that is agreed. EA staff have now received this pay award.

Why do EA not have the power to or authority to renegotiate this?

The 2021/22 NJC pay award of 1.75% has been agreed in line with these collective arrangements. EA is therefore unable to renegotiate the pay award for 2021/22.

However, national negotiations for the 2022/23 pay award are about to begin and this presents an opportunity to influence the future pay award and make a real difference. We would therefore encourage Unite to actively engage in these negotiations in a constructive and meaningful way.

EA very much values all of our staff and are committed to advocating for a fair pay offer in the 2022/23 national NJC negotiations to reflect the rising prices and pressures workers and families are facing during these challenging times.

Additionally, we are firmly committed to continuing to engage collectively with all of our Trade Unions on local issues, unrelated to the national pay award 2021/22, which impact on pay and conditions.

“To inspire, support and challenge all our Children and Young People to be the best that they can be.”

Education Authority

40 Academy Street, Belfast, BT1 2NQ

T: +44 (0)28 9056 4000 F: +44 (0)28 9033 1714 W: www.eani.org.uk

What are EA doing to minimise disruption?

We have implemented a range of contingency measures to minimise disruption as much as possible during the industrial action. To date the measures put in place have enabled us to ensure that the vast majority of transport and school meal services continued to operate.

However, we completely understand that for a number of our children and young people, particularly those attending some of our Special Schools, the industrial action has caused significant disruption to their routine and education.

We have a dedicated team who are in regular contact with Special School Principals to identify emerging issues and to explore every possibility to ensure the safe return of as many pupils as possible where they are learning remotely.

We have also made repeated requests to Unite for exemptions for staff supporting Special School services which to date have not been facilitated. We continue to engage with Unite to reconsider these requests which are valid, reasonable and would help protect our most vulnerable children.

Will there be further periods of industrial action?

The current period of Unite industrial action is due to continue until Sunday 8 May 2022.

Yesterday afternoon, the EA received notification from Unite about a further period of industrial action that will take place from 11 May to 1 June.

We will continue to work hard to ensure plans are in place during any such periods to minimise disruption to schools and our children and young people in particular.

How can parents stay up to date about any planned service disruption?

Further detail on specific areas of disruption during periods of industrial action will be published on our website, www.eani.org.uk/industrialactionupdates, and our social media channels each day.

Our Transport Helpline will also be available to support parents Monday – Friday from 9.30am – 12.30pm and 1:30pm – 4.30pm. Please call 028 9598 5959.

Thank you in advance for your understanding and support.

Yours Sincerely,

Robbie McGreevy

EA Assistant Director, Corporate HR and Business Partnering, Human Resources

“To inspire, support and challenge all our Children and Young People to be the best that they can be.”

Education Authority

40 Academy Street, Belfast, BT1 2NQ

T: +44 (0)28 9056 4000 F: +44 (0)28 9033 1714 W: www.eani.org.uk