



27<sup>th</sup> January 2023

Dear Parents/Carers,

You will no doubt be aware from media coverage and my recent correspondence that the NEU (National Education Union) will be on strike on four dates in the coming weeks, the first of which is Wednesday the 1<sup>st</sup> of February.

I wanted to write to you with the logistics of our plan for the strike action next Wednesday and in addition to this I have added some of the context and rationale for our decisions and importantly – an explanation as to why some of the staff at Malbank have chosen to strike.

For clarity, we have made the following decisions:

- All students in years 7-11 will be required to work at home on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> February.
- Students in year 12 are to come into school as normal. If lessons do not run as staff are on strike, they are to work independently in one of our study spaces.
- Year 13 students are to attend and complete their day of mock exams as planned. This is entirely unaffected by strike action.

To be very clear from the outset, staff choosing to strike at Malbank are not doing so in opposition to the school in any manner. At Malbank we all buy into the importance of “Making the 60 matter” and do all we can to live up to this expectation every single day. This commitment was demonstrated only one week ago when our staff battled into work through the snow and ice and is embodied through the routine desire staff show to deliver revision sessions for students in Year 11 after school every week.

I appreciate it seems very strange for our school to close for some pupils, particularly within the context of the recent pandemic and our clearly stated intent to improve attendance. However, the reasons for the strike days are not rooted at a local level or based on problems at Malbank School, but at an entirely national level.

The NEU are acting against the government based on “concerns about funding of schools, the erosion of educators’ pay and subsequent difficulties this causes for recruitment, especially in shortage subjects.” It is often easy, particularly given the ‘black and white’, right and wrong’ divisive narrative on social media and even national news to see strike action as “greedy” and to therefore make the assumption that it is simply about teachers, nurses, postmen, train drivers etc. asking for more. I am not naive enough to think that the concerns about the cost of living crisis are the sole preserve of teachers, but I find it hard to see young members of my profession invest years of their life and significant money to pay to train to have the chance to undertake what I fundamentally believe to be

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one of the most important jobs there is, only to find they are incapable of getting a mortgage and in some (albeit thankfully rare) cases occasionally having to access foodbanks.

As you may be aware, I have been teaching for nearly 20 years. In that time, I have not known a period of such intense challenge in terms of recruitment of high calibre staff at all levels. It is deeply concerning to see the education system losing talented colleagues to the private sector whilst the numbers of teachers being trained has fallen significantly. This week, statistics released showed that the government missed their own target for new teacher recruitment by 41%. When I first applied for an English teaching job, I was one of 60 that applied and joined a shortlist of 15 for the interview day. English is *still* seen as a subject with high staff numbers, yet our latest application cycle only saw 6 staff apply. Nationally, Maths teachers have become increasingly rare, and we have experienced numerous recruitment cycles where we have not received any applications. 45% of state schools have Maths lessons where students are routinely taught by teachers qualified in a different subject, yet the government direction of travel has shifted towards a plan that sees all students being made to study Maths until they are 18 years old.

We need a sustainable teaching profession to give our children and those who follow them the very best education and start in life. The current trajectory of funding and recruitment does not seem aligned with that aim. Malbank colleagues have made it very clear to me that their dispute is not with our school, and I know how passionately they care about the education of your child. However, many are willing to lose pay and strike to make their voice heard and do all they can to safeguard the education of the children and grandchildren of our current students.

As a leadership team, we have been scenario planning with a constantly changing and complex picture, with the clear aim being to keep as much of the school open as possible. I have been talking with local school leaders in Cheshire, consulting government guidance and working with local associations to fully understand the situation. Safety of students is paramount, and we cannot open the school to all pupils if we are concerned about the number of staff available to supervise, safeguard and teach them. In addition, many of the supply agencies who would normally give schools the capacity required to operate normally have instructed their teachers not to cross picket lines into schools and will not be making agency staff available to schools on that day.

I asked staff to indicate their intention to strike and they have worked incredibly openly with me to help me predict the likely impact on teaching and learning at Malbank. By the close of school on Thursday, I was aware that 90% of staff eligible to strike would likely do so. Following risk assessments and numerous options being considered, we therefore made the decision that we could not provide any realistic guarantee of consistency of provision or the effective safeguarding of students in years 7-11.



# Malbank School and Sixth Form College



*Rejoice in being the best that we can be*

The final page of this letter includes a helpful list of places to access learning next Wednesday. I have been very clear with staff that I expect live lessons via Microsoft Teams to be put in place wherever possible for students in years 7-11. Where staff are on strike, it is possible that there will be gaps in your child's timetable. What we have put together hopefully gives a rich variety of options for students to access so they have plenty of work to do at home.

To parents and students in year 11, I wanted to assure you that Mrs Edwards and I have worked tirelessly this week to try to piece together a way to keep Year 11 in school. We accepted early that years 7-10 would likely have to stay at home, but I am sure you can understand given all our hard work with year 11, that it was essential we did our best to try to keep that key year with us to maintain momentum. As the week has developed, we have had to concede that the quality of provision and guarantee of safety we would be able to offer was ultimately not feasible. I mention you as a separate group because despite my statements earlier in the letter about my sympathy regarding the rationale behind the strike, I truly hoped we would be able to keep our fantastic year 11 with us next week. I am very sorry that we have not been able to do this.

I fully appreciate that there will be a spectrum of opinions regarding the strikes. I hope, having read this letter that you understand why some of my staff have chosen to strike and how we as a school have had to make difficult and informed judgment calls with the children and families we serve at the centre of those decisions. In doing so I have tried to balance my need to provide education and support for the children here at Malbank today whilst supporting the staff who wish to protect the provision for students of the future.

I will write to you once again in the coming weeks about our response to the planned strike days on February the 28<sup>th</sup> and March the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>. As always, if any of the above is unclear, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours,

Mr Harrison

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## **Remote learning arrangements and links for Malbank School:**

The links below will take you directly to the learning resources we would recommend pupils use to support their Remote learning.

These can also be accessed through our website at:

<https://www.malbank.com/page/?title=Learning+Links&pid=66>

Pupils can access their virtual school desktop by clicking here [remote access](#) and this will take them to their own school folders and department specific resources.

Teams: [Office 365 link](#) – click this link to access your school Teams account and sign in with your school email and password. This will be the forum for all live lessons.

## **Generic resources: suitable for those in years 7-11**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize>

<https://classroom.thenational.academy/>

<https://www.myon.co.uk/login/>

<https://www.sparxmaths.uk/>

<https://ukhosted28.renlearn.co.uk/2233790/default.aspx>

## **Key stage 3:**

<https://bedrocklearning.org/>

<https://trockstars.com/>

## **Key stage 4:**

Malbank History app: [click here](#)

Malbank Geography app: [click here](#)

All GCSE subjects:

[senecalearning](#)

[GCSE POD](#) – learning activities for all GCSE subjects