



Connaught
School for Girls

Dyers Hall Road
Leytonstone
London E11 4AE

Headteacher — Alexander Silk, MA

seize the day

Friday 13th December 2024

Dear Parents/Carers,

I am writing to you as we come to the end of the first week of strikes with more dates intended to be taken next week. There has been much talk and communication, from various arenas and forums, and in amongst all of the conversation and rhetoric, I wanted to address as best as I can, some of the miscommunications that have been shared.

I know that you will all appreciate that as the head of this school, there are many things I can and cannot say; my position is always one of protection for the students so that they, and the staff who are appointed and hold positions of responsibility for them, can come into school and we can be in a space together to provide the students the education they are entitled to receive.

We are really proud of the children who attended school this week and those who still kept up with the work set for them at home. We have never been able to open to the school as much as we have for this round of strikes; this is the most we have been able to offer our pupils in the ten years of action that some staff have deemed necessary to have undertaken. Ten years of disrupted education for the children and this school community. Ten years of long negotiations and stipulations that the school has been asked to meet again and again, all whilst trying to deliver a good standard of care and education.

We know you have raised alarm and concern that I am the 4th Headteacher in five years and being able to operate a school is a key requirement of a Headteacher and the leadership team. I am glad the miscommunication that strikes at Connaught, over all the years of strikes, has now been cleared up regarding staff being paid and that no loss of earnings has been incurred. I am aware that many of you have raised the number of days of strike action teachers at Connaught undertake compared to all other boroughs and what is driving this is also being discussed.

I do not want this message to be overly long, but I did want to address some specifics in as broad a scope as we can share with the aim still to have an environment where we can all work together.

Our public data is there for all to view. You have raised with me time and time again, the downward trajectory we have had especially in some areas of study and how the school will tackle this. We agree. Educational standards must be high. All staff must teach to a standard that is, at the very least, good and be supported to do so. All children should make good progress. We agree it is the responsibility of all leaders and all staff to ensure this happens. We need to have a culture whereby everyone serving in the school holds themselves to account for their own performance and that of others (if they are in any position of leadership). I would like to be proud to lead a school where the culture of delivery for the students was always consistently high and all staff held high standards for themselves and what our students can achieve. We will continue to prioritise outcomes for the students at Connaught as best we can.

In order for this to happen several things must happen; staff need to attend school and teach well. I can confirm that the school follows the Waltham Forest absence policy, with an additional amendment to support disability leave, which is in agreement with trade unions. We hope everybody is aware of why this is key and important.

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In order for schools to be supported, trusts and governing bodies are set up with professionals from all sectors to come together to lend their support and expertise. The role of the governor is to be a critical friend to the school. This is both to support and challenge. Governing bodies have a statutory duty to ensure that floor standards are met and that children are safe and happy in school. As you are probably aware, all governors are volunteers who give up their time and knowledge to support schools and the communities they are in. Governors are volunteers who give up time and their own work to support our children. There has been much miscommunication regarding this role. For clarity, I can confirm that at most, governors who meet with staff will always ask about some basic elements as part of their role:

- What leaders and teachers are doing to teach well and how department leads meet their responsibilities in ensuring this happens
- How staff who are facing difficulties are supported and what they do to ensure that staff are held to account for what they are paid to do
- How they intend to improve standards for the children in their care
- They are outward looking and ensure that best practice is brought into the school, invest in their own areas of responsibility and whether the impact of this is visible and translates into outcomes for students.

Again, from our data, you will be able to identify where we have been, where we are and where we need to be. I am saddened by the reputation we have now and the data which reflects this. I do not think it serves any of us, for me and for you, not to openly acknowledge this. Again, I thank the parents who have asked for this to be addressed and have recognised what our main issues at Connaught have been.

I will also confirm that we take safeguarding seriously. In our recent external safeguarding audit the school received a very positive review. We have also recently reminded all staff who remained unaware that personal devices could not be used in the classroom without explicit instructions guidance and supervision from either the Designated Safeguarding Lead or a senior member of staff as one-off exceptional circumstances.

I will end this letter by saying what we ask of staff is that we work alongside everybody who chooses to work at Connaught. It is very difficult to be told what the school can and cannot do for the students, all whilst miscommunication is shared. Our objective has been and remains the same: For all of us, who choose to work at Connaught School and have chosen to remain and work here for years, to deliver on what our students deserve.

Lastly, I wanted to thank the children who have taken the time to speak to me and the staff who have been in school to allow them to be here too. I will finish by leaving you with some words of a student in the school, a reminder of who we all say we come to serve.

“Hello Sir, I wanted to email you about the strikes.

As a year 11 student, I feel that the strikes are greatly affecting my learning, especially at such a crucial time where we only have months left till our GCSEs. However, I am very grateful for the effort that you are putting into the short hours that we are in school so that we can make the most of our time. I really appreciate how willing you are to help us (as well as the other teachers coming to school) and how organised you have kept this all. I understand this is probably a very busy time for you right now but you have made it a lot less harder than it needs to be. You have really embodied the traits of a hardworking headteacher who cares for their students.

No matter the outcome of whether the strikes get cancelled or not, I can assure you that many of us are making the most of our time at home and are ensuring that we do not miss out on much. In a sense, this is also allowing us to be more independent and responsible with our learning.

I, as well as the students around me, greatly appreciate your effort and support for us”

Yours faithfully,



**Mr Silk,
Headteacher**