



## Statement regarding the reasons for strike action at St Catherine's Catholic School

10 November 2019

In June 2019 our union representative was unfairly suspended based on a fake allegation that should never have been accepted as serious. This allegation was absurd, and should never have resulted in anyone being suspended. The member of staff concerned was suspended for four and a half weeks and reinstated with no case to answer. After the HR company investigating the allegation found that there was no case to answer, the school changed HR company. This is why staff cannot trust the fairness of the current suspensions. At present any member of staff can be suspended at any moment, on a fake allegation that can be called serious by the leadership team. Suspension is a potentially career-damaging action and the Union believe it has been used by the school to bully staff into silence. The suspended member of staff was escorted from the site just two days before a meeting where she was due to raise staff concerns regarding the culture of fear that exists at St Catherine's with governors.

It is true that striking staff will be supported with loss of earnings by the NEU. However, the Union would not commit to supporting so many staff, over so many strike days, if they were not absolutely certain that this misuse of power and bullying could not go on. By standing up for what is right, even if they are supported financially, staff risk serious consequences. Staff are prepared to take this risk because they care about St Catherine's and, most importantly, its students.

Staff would love the opportunity to communicate with parents. They are grateful to those members of the public who have shown their support, even bringing hot tea and biscuits. They would love to answer any questions from parents. Anyone who would like to have a conversation with staff to better understand why they have been pushed to strike is more than welcome to come to the picket line on strike days from 7.30 to 9.30 a.m. The Headteacher has actively sought to prevent the Union from communicating with parents by attempting to stop Union staff, after school, from lawfully and peacefully offering leaflets, explaining the situation, to students to take home to their parents. Meanwhile, the Headteacher and Chair of Governors have written to parents on a total of five occasions. In the Chair of Governors' most recent letter he stated that the Headteacher had been subjected to 'unchristian abuse and harassment over recent months'. It is not unchristian to challenge bullying. In fact, the staff are sure that the reason parents send their children to this Catholic school is so that they learn to be decent people who stand up to injustice wherever they encounter it. The Union finds the attacks on school staff in letters to parents to be indicative of the bullying behaviour of the leadership of the school.

The NEU members at St Catherine's deeply regret having to take strike action. They would not need to do this if the school cared for and protected its staff. Staff who are on strike want ultimately to be in the classroom with the students, not resigning and leaving the school, as some already have felt obliged to do. St Catherine's is currently the top performing school in Bexley. This is due to the hard work, day after day, of the teachers and support staff who are standing up to show the students in their care that bullying is always wrong.

Striking staff work in classrooms, on the playground, in the dining hall and around the school, building relationships with students based on integrity. They cannot teach young people that bullying is wrong if they are not prepared to live that message themselves.