

John Roan teachers

Fighting job losses and course cuts

The John Roan NUT will be out on strike today and next week. Teachers don't take such action lightly so why have we felt compelled to do so? In this leaflet we do our best to answer some of the questions parents and our students have asked us recently.

Why are teachers on strike?



We are on strike because we are in dispute with the school over their decision to announce cuts of up to 20% of teaching and admin posts and to cut courses. On 29 February, the Headteacher, Nadine Powrie informed staff of her intention to make staff redundant and to delete courses including RE across the school, GCSE Psychology and Sociology, BTEC Sport, A Level Government and Politics and Film Studies and the downsizing of Drama. She also proposed changes to our pastoral system such as doing away with daily tutor time and changing the school day to 6 periods. In her proposals are plans to increase the teaching load for those teachers that remain.

The school has argued that the consultation is not yet over and that the unions should wait before taking any action

During any redundancy process it is expected that we have access to the school budget to see the rationale for cuts and that we seek ways to avoid job losses. Throughout the 7-week consultation process we have experienced delays in receiving these documents. Despite Freedom of Information (FOI) requests the school only released the accounts three days before the deadline for consultation. Throughout the meetings, Ms Powrie has shown no real engagement in working to avoid cuts to jobs and courses. It is our view and one that is shared by other staff unions, that the consultation process has not been meaningful and that the school management has avoided negotiating on key issues. This has forced the NUT to resort to strike action and other unions to consider balloting in order to impress on the Governing Body the seriousness of the situation.

Cuts are never a good thing, but Ms Powrie and Mr Cooper (Chair of Governors) have argued that the school is in deficit and therefore they must be prudent and make savings. Is this the case?

It is the case that on 11 December 2015, the School submitted a Deficit Recovery Plan and notified the Local Authority that they would need a loan to accommodate the deficit of £438,000. In several letters and on the website the School Management have asserted that the deficit is due to a falling roll in our sixth form, excessive staffing costs and essential expenditure that the previous Headteacher, Des Malone didn't plan for.

We are extremely frustrated and disappointed that despite providing clear evidence to challenge all this misinformation about the budget, Ms Powrie and Mr Cooper continue to peddle this view. It simply is not true. Firstly, the budget that balanced and was agreed by both Patrick Cooper and the Local Authority was based on funding in the sixth form of 244 pupils and we enrolled 242 in September 2015, so there has been no loss of funding.

Secondly, all schools spend the majority of their income on teaching and support staff – we are a school after all. Most schools spend approximately 80% (John Roan spends 78%) and this is average for schools similar to us. We are value for money!

We discovered through a closer scrutiny of the schools' budgets and accounts (when we finally received them in full on 11 April 2016) that in fact the deficit this year is caused by Nadine's spending in what is known as non-staffing costs. In fact, despite knowing that we only had a small surplus (£50,000), Nadine has committed the school to spending an extra £680,000 over what Des Malone had agreed to do. That's a lot of money to spend in what is meant to be 'hard times'.

What has Nadine Powrie spent the money on?

Initial observations suggest that money has been committed (and maybe spent, but this isn't clear from questions in our meetings) on CCTV (£77,000) ICT (£82,000) Service Contracts (£110,000) roof repairs on the DT building at Maze Hill (£250,000) and various other expenditure on consultancy, developmental projects and recruitment and marketing fees. We aren't suggesting that all of these items shouldn't be considered. What we are questioning is whether they are more important than teaching and support staff. Has Nadine and the Governing Body investigated other alternatives before they embark on cutting back on teaching and learning?

Is there an alternative?

Nadine Powrie and the Chair of Governors, Patrick Cooper, can take one of two routes: they can look to offset spending by making peoples jobs redundant or they can look for ways to save spending and seek to avoid job losses. Some tentative analysis of the projected budget for next year suggests a potential overspend however, it is lower than described and with a budget of £9.5 million the school can seek alternatives. The John Roan will benefit from the extra funding that will be available once spaces will be needed for the large number of pupils currently in the primary sector. Added to this we have the potential to grow our Sixth Form to 350. We would suggest that cutting A level courses, making experienced teachers redundant and teaching Y12 and Y13 students at the same time isn't going to make our sixth form an attractive choice.

The John Roan remains a great school, but if these attacks on jobs and curriculum go ahead we fear it will have a negative impact on the provision we provide for our students. There will be less staff for the same number of children and the curriculum will be narrowed reducing the choice for our students who may not be traditionally academic. Extra teaching and less time to plan will mean teachers get tired and stressed and move on. We pride ourselves on having a low staff turnover because we believe that positive relationships in schools and continuity help our students make progress.

We are asking for parents, students and the John Roan Community to join us in our determination to fight the cuts. Together we can make sure The Roan carries on serving our children of Greenwich with care and commitment for years to come.

