

4 October 2004

GROSS MISMANAGEMENT OF PUPIL'S FALSE ALLEGATION PROMPTS ALL OUT STRIKE

Announcing the commencement of continuous strike action on 7 October 2004 by NASUWT members at Laurelhill Community College in Lisburn, near Belfast, Northern Ireland, **Chris Keates, Acting General Secretary of NASUWT**, the largest union representing teachers throughout the UK, said:

“For many years NASUWT has been highlighting the vulnerability of teachers to false, malicious and exaggerated allegations by pupils and calling for the introduction of measures to protect them.

“The case at Laurelhill Community College is a text book illustration of the issues about which we have been campaigning. It is for this reason NASUWT has decided to initiate publicity for the case and call the first all out strike of our members on this issue.

“A male teacher at the school, an NASUWT member, was accused of sexual assault, suspended for over two years, investigated, exonerated by the court and is now too ill to attend work due to the stress and trauma he has suffered.

“Contrast this situation with the pupil who made the false allegation, induced another pupil into supporting her story, made further false allegations against two other teachers and yet remains in school apparently with the full support of the Education and Library Board and has had no sanctions taken against her.

“In my view, based on the facts of the case, by anyone's standards this is an unacceptable state of affairs.

“By failing to address this situation decisively and vigorously, I believe that the Education and Library Board has failed to exercise its legal duty of care for employees and is sending a clear message to the pupils at the College and indeed throughout the whole UK education service that they can perpetrate such behaviour with impunity.

“NASUWT believes this to be one of the worst cases of gross mismanagement of a false allegation the union has encountered.

“Local education authorities throughout the UK should take note of the NASUWT action at Laurelhill Community College. NASUWT will address all such cases with vigour.

“Until this matter is resolved satisfactorily, NASUWT's 55 members at the College will engage in continuous strike action.

“NASUWT will be drawing this situation to the attention of the Northern Ireland Education Minister, Barry Gardiner.

“In addition, we will use this case in the productive discussions in which NASUWT is currently engaged with the Westminster Government to identify strategies to protect teachers from false allegations.”