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Dear Parents/Carers

I am writing to update you on recent communications you may have received from the GMB trade union regarding concerns made by some of their members. The GMB Union has formally raised a dispute with the school and the council (as the employer) in relation to proposed changes to working hours, job titles, workload, and health and safety matters. I understand that some families may have been contacted directly by the union, and I want to ensure you also have clear information from the school.

Some of the issues highlighted by the GMB relate to class sizes, staffing levels, and current vacancies. As with many schools nationally, recruitment remains a significant challenge, and vacancies can arise due to notice periods and standard recruitment processes. However, I want to reassure you that we are actively addressing this. We recently completed a successful round of recruitment, with new staff due to join us after the Easter break. A further set of interviews took place this week and I am pleased to inform you that we have filled all of our classroom support staff vacancies and are looking forward to those staff starting at The Orchard School as soon as the standard recruitment processes have been completed.

To maintain consistency and support learning during periods of staff absence or vacancy, we use qualified supply staff from trusted agencies. Several of these supply colleagues work with us regularly, and we do everything possible to ensure continuity for pupils. All supply staff meet the same professional standards as permanent staff, and, where possible, we select individuals with experience in specialist settings.

I continue to meet regularly with the GMB and other trade unions. I will be meeting with Unions in the coming days to discuss the issues in detail and provide reassurances.

Above all, I want to reassure you that **the safety and wellbeing of your children remain our absolute priority**. Staffing is carefully planned and monitored to ensure safe and appropriate levels at all times, and we are confident that pupils are well supported throughout the school day.

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you would like to discuss further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you, as always, for your continued support.

Yours sincerely,



Elizabeth Hopewell
Headteacher