

**CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)**



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## Chairman's Message

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Colleagues,

When we started the school year in August 2019, we could not have predicted the challenges presented delivering education during a global pandemic. COVID-19 has presented personal and professional challenges for us all.

As a Chairman of the GBA and Chair of the Board of Governors at Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School, I have witnessed at first hand the ability of our schools to adapt and deliver in the most challenging of circumstances.

I would like to thank those school leaders who have provided a representational role on behalf of our sector over the past few months. Given your numerous other commitments, your time and insight are particularly appreciated.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to you and your school community for what you have achieved, particularly in the last few months. I hope that you manage to take some much-needed time off over the weeks ahead. The GBA will continue to support you in the weeks and months to come.

Terry McDaid  
GBA Chairman

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## **TNC Management Side**

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*By Ronnie Hassard,  
GBA representative on TNC Management Side*

About 11 years of industrial action in schools drew to a close at the end of April with the signing of the agreement reached with the five recognised Teacher Unions which make up Teachers' Side of TNC. Important as that agreement may be, much more significant has been the spread of COVID-19 and its baleful impacts, most of all in lives lost and griefs endured; other lives have been blighted by illness, loneliness, isolation or anxiety. The outworking of 'lockdown' with all that has entailed socially, economically, institutionally, organisationally and of course educationally, will only become clear with the passing of time.

As we approach the end of this extraordinary and much-disrupted school year we are in a transitional phase of the journey towards a 'new normality'. The precise nature of life post-lockdown cannot be known in every detail - although such details would certainly be welcomed. This is particularly true of schools as teachers, school leaders and governors seek to interpret and implement the lengthy and growing body of guidance materials from the Department of Education, the Education Authority and indeed from Management Side of TNC.

It might be helpful, with due respect to confidentiality, to give an overview of what TNC means in practice at this time. Work has continued, courtesy of *Zoom* meetings. Despite its title, the full TNC meets infrequently, as the body officially considering and signing off - not 'rubber stamping'- the product of detailed discussions and negotiations of smaller groups tasked with such responsibility. Management Side comprises representatives of the Department of Education, employment and sectoral bodies; from that perspective it considers the Terms and Conditions of Employment and Pay of all teachers and principals in grant aided schools. A Joint Working Party is the forum through which Management Side and Teachers' Side meet to discuss and seek to reach agreement on relevant matters. There has been a number of meetings of a smaller 'transition team' (5 members from each constituency) charged with implementing the agreement. GBA is actively represented at all levels of this structure and the constructive voice of the Voluntary Grammar Schools has been heard.

The focus at this time has been on implementation of the 'upfront asks' from Teachers' Side as part of the agreement; one of those asks is Directed Time Budgets; a communication on this matter has issued to schools. The agreed date is September 2020 and that remains the target. A training and support programme for Principals, provided through EA, is in development. Discussions are underway not just to determine the way ahead for TNC but also on how best to develop and improve relationships after an extended period of time when they could best be described as disagreeable.

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## Messages from Church Leaders

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The GBA has received 2 letters of correspondence, expressing thanks to the Voluntary Grammar School sector for their contribution to education during the crisis. These are from [Reverend Dr David Bruce](#), Moderator of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church in Ireland and [Reverend John McDowell](#), Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, and we would

very much like to share these with you. Please click on their names to read their respective letters.

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## Northern Ireland Assembly

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At the most recent Education committee meeting (24th June), the Education Minister and Permanent Secretary of the Department of Education updated members on COVID-19 developments.

Mr Weir explained that if there are particular additional costs around the reopening of schools, these will be absorbed centrally.

Bids totalling £57.6 million have been submitted by the Department in the June Monitoring Round for various other pressures. At time of press, decisions have not been made on these bids. Finance Minister, Conor Murphy, is announcing news today on the reallocation of funds. This will include money for free school meals over the summer period.

You can watch recorded meetings of the Education Committee using this [link](#). You can also watch live coverage of the Assembly via this [link](#).

We are in daily contact with various stakeholders, including the Education Committee, so please continue to feed any issues through to us. You can provide feedback via the following link: [contact us](#).

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## School Restart - Guidance Documents

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The consultative group have met on 3 occasions to date, covering the following areas:

- Guidance on reopening of schools - [view documents](#).
- Supporting staff returning to school - [view documents](#).
- Specific guidance for special schools - [view document](#).
- Risk assessment guidance – to be issued.

Transport and school meals will be discussed by the group at their meeting tomorrow (1st July). The group were advised that Voluntary Grammar schools can seek advice from the EA on HR matters arising from the reopening process, with the caveat that decisions ultimately lie with the Board of Governors for the school.

The consultative group will meet during July and August on an ad hoc basis to address any changes or further issues.

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## **GBA July Office Closure Dates**

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Due to staff holidays, please note that we will be unable to respond to queries immediately on the following dates:

10th-14th July, &  
17th July.

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## **Teaching & Non-Teaching Vacancies**

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GBA provides an advertising service for our Member Schools. The service is free of charge. Job vacancies are posted on our website and Twitter page. There is also a link to our job listings on the Education Authority website in the job opportunities section. This has helped to increase the audience for Voluntary Grammar sector vacancies.

If you would like us to host a vacancy for your school, please [contact us](#).



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## Email Subscription

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If any of your Governors would like to receive our newsletter, please send us their email address. We would also be grateful if you could circulate the monthly updates to your Governors.

If you wish to unsubscribe to these emails, please let us know via email (e) [Administrator@gbani.org](mailto:Administrator@gbani.org)

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