**To           :               Headteachers; Chairs of Governors; Ex-Officio Clergy; Foundation Governors**

**From     :               Jeff Williams**

**Date      :               21 May 2020**

**Re           :               Weekly email and resources from The Diocesan Education Team**

**In this email :**

* **Mental Health and Well-being**
* **June and wider school provision**
* **Relationships and Sex Education Policy and provision**
* **Resources for schools**
* **The Diocesan Education Team’s work during furlough**

**Please feel free to circulate to your networks**

Dear colleagues

I wonder if your pre-Lockdown ‘normal’ routine might have involved singing in a community choir, taking walks on a beach or in the countryside? And if in the exceptional situation we inhabit, versions of such activities feature in your changed lifestyle? If they do, research from The University of Edinburgh (and frankly, many more organisations) reminds us that these are hugely impactful on both maintaining and indeed, improving one’s mental health.

This is **Mental Health Awareness** Week as we are thankfully, daily reminded on the radio, TV and Social Media. How timely as well – with our School Leaders grappling to come to terms with government guidance and expectations regarding the broader provision from our schools***, potentially*** at some point in June. The mental health and well-being of our school leaders is foremost in my mind currently, as they juggle pressure from parents, communities and government, while carrying the ethical and moral burden of weighing the impact of increasing broader school provision, and how this may impact positively and in other ways with children and our amazing teachers and support staff.

Would you please be kind to them? Would you please be kind to yourselves?

The recently-shared Mental Health Foundation survey presents what many of us know is stating the obvious : two-thirds of us acknowledge that when people are kind to us, it has a positive impact on our mental health. Being kind to others, is also good for oneself – another fact we probably know. Our immune system is positively impacted; kindness produces endorphins, the brain’s natural pain-killer; our stress levels are reduced; our energy levels are raised; our heart improves – figuratively and physically! Oxytocin, our ‘kindness hormone’ isn’t there by chance – it is there for personal and communal benefit. Equally, we have evidence that kindness is contagious – as is demonstrated by the contagious aspect of support that has risen while we are in Lockdown.

**Small Change : Big Difference** – whether that’s small coins that we all give to result in a major impact, or small changes to how we behave and relate to others, which causes enormous impact in our families and communities.

But what drives us in random and intentional acts of kindness isn’t primarily or even tangentially personal gain and benefit. Our values and belief basis is something that is our foundation stone and moral compass. Serving The Common Good, we forget to articulate so often, but it is a primary commitment and purpose of so much of what we do and who we are – Biblically grounded and driven.

A short video that I commend that you may find informative and affirmatory is found at :  <https://youtu.be/Qcyc68d6OAk>

**The potential broadening of school provision at some point in June**

Our schools, that I repeat are not re-opening, but broadening provision, have been asked by government to make provision for specific year groups, if risk-assessments permit, and if it is safe for children and staff to do so, potentially at *some point* in early June. The request has been for the physical return of Year R, Year 1, Year 6, Year 10 and Year 12 in the first instance– with an aspiration for all other primary year groups to be at school for a month leading up to the traditional summer break. Rotas, flexibility and physical space will determine each school’s response – which will equally ease and challenge families in terms of planning and returning to work : such is the reality of what we are being asked to do in England.

This is creating logistical and pragmatic challenges and concerns. I wanted to take the opportunity in this wider context to thank school leaders for the hours, days and sleepless nights that they have experienced and known, trying to be true to themselves, to honour their staff, and to acknowledge the spectrum of expectations from parents and carers. My team and I will support and stand alongside you in whatever decisions you take regarding broader provision, as each school must consider local context and factors.

As well as School Leaders, parents and carers are grappling with options. Anecdotally, figures ranging from 20% to 50% are being quoted regarding the number of children in the specified year groups who will physically return to school at whatever date in early June may be deemed as safe as possible by schools. The threat of fines for non-attendance has reassured many families – while weighing the opening up of the economy, personal earning and return to work, as well as psychological and learning for children drive their decisions. We equally stand by you in your decision.

Clearly VA Church Schools, who are employers of staff, have additional considerations and HR matters to review. We need to be certain that, having undertaken the risk assessments and taken all due care in welcoming children and staff back to our schools, that down the line any legal challenge is defensible, regarding the safety and welfare of staff and children. Practical considerations, like the choice of vulnerable staff, BAME staff and others not to return, are not compromised or prejudiced accordingly.

I have the privilege of meeting nationally with colleagues twice a week and feeding directly into DfE policy and practice. I meet with senior LA staff routinely. I listen to School Leaders and Governors daily. This week’s email is one day late so I might incorporate any feedback from the Regional Schools Commissioner whom I met this afternoon. Be reassured that on behalf of our 160 schools and academies, I work relentlessly and passionately for you, often behind the scenes, but equally as a loud, but considered voice in regional and national contexts.

As we approach a significant point in the relaxation of some of the elements of lockdown, as well as a new stage of furlough – do contact me with any issues, needs, requests for support and assistance.

**Relationships and Sex Education Policy Implementation**

Hundreds of governors and school leaders attended the consultation and information sessions I led earlier this year. Schools have subsequently been preparing consultation events and policy revisions. Thank you for investing time, energy and commitment to this aspect of provision that generates spectrum-wide interest and comment.

Yesterday I met with the Bishop of Winchester and the Bishop of Portsmouth to consider the guidance document we had formulated prior to Lockdown. I’ve also met with LA colleagues, regional and national colleagues on this matter. This afternoon the Regional Schools Commissioner was receptive to my request to approach the DfE policy team to reconsider the timing of the introduction of the policy implementation date of 1st Sept to January 2021 or preferably later. In current circumstances, the meaningful and relational consultation with parents and carers cannot happen : gatherings of adults in schools, or queues of individuals to discuss with the HT and me are not possible. Functional consultation by posting draft policies on school websites is not desirable or best-practice. Hence my advocacy for our schools and academies, governors and parents.

Meanwhile, please continue to reflect, and a revised version of the joint Diocese of Winchester and Diocese of Portsmouth document will be with you shortly. I remain available for discussions and phonecalls to assist; Zoom meetings with governors or anything that assists -  particularly where local circumstances and contexts are already raising specific or general questions.

**The Diocesan Education Team’s work during furlough**

I continue to manage one full time senior colleague (on rotation) and one part-time Buildings Officer while the remainder of the team are placed by the Diocese of Portsmouth on the government’s Furlough scheme. We remain accessible and present at Governor Board meetings, offering daily advice and support to Heads, Governors and ex-officios. Please continue to direct any requests for support and time to me in the first instance as individuals’ mail accounts are de-activated– and I will action. Do let me know of emerging different needs and challenges, as this will inform any recall from furlough and future priorities.

**Resources**

Attached are high quality resources, as we offer weekly. Please feel free to circulate to whomever you think might benefit. Thank you to those who are commenting on their value and how they have been helpful to other communities and groups.

**Story Time**

Thank you to the schools who are continuing to post stories read by Heads and Teachers to engage and support our families. This week I’m grateful to the Archdeacon of Bournemouth, **The Ven Dr Peter Rouch** who reads The Runnaway Bunny. You can enjoy Peter’s reading at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-EeND0xAk-A>

Bank Holidays now appear to be sun, rather than rain-filled occasions – I hope this weekend brings you moments of rest and joy.

Best wishes

***Jeff***

Jeff Williams

Director of Education

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