**To           :              Headteachers; Chairs of Governors; Foundation Governors; Ex-officio clergy**

**From     :               Jeff Williams**

**Date      :               4th November 2020**

**Re           :              Fortnightly email and resources from the Diocesan Education Team**

Dear colleagues

**Niksen** : a Dutch verb, noun, adjective and exhortation that I learned last week, and have since discovered there was even a book published on it last month!

I recently enjoyed a really long walk with friends, during which we commented on the massive number of grouse jumping out of bushes and running alongside us, but also the cleverly-designed feeding stations all over the place.  Slight irritation turned into moans that the numerous known routes and paths we normally take had ‘closed’ signs on the gates and route-markers. This turned into a discussion about how Covid could possibly be used as an excuse for closing paths and routes – only to be told ‘the obvious’ by a passer-by that the areas were not closed for Covid but for ‘sport’ taking place the following few days. Hmm for some, but not all,  grouse shooting is sport.

While grouse-commenting and paths-closed-moaning we had been completely unaware of a pair of red kites, majestically flying above us.  Without suggestion or invitation, totally unplanned or debated, we instantly sat, then lay on our backs – not a word between us for about fifteen minutes. Watching these beautiful birds with just under a two metre wing span, gracefully swoop, hover, catch the wind and almost hang motionless in the air was truly spectacular and in the real sense of the word, an ‘awesome’ experience.  If you want to permit yourself four minutes of relaxation right now, here’s a clip of Red Kites flying in slow motion <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZO5lV0gh5i4>

I’ve since discovered that the Dutch refer to such times as Niksen – the art or practice of doing absolutely nothing. The reason for ‘Niksening’ is to intentionally impact on our well-being. Niksen can happen spontaneously, or can be planned (we intend going back to repeat the Red Kite Niksen, for example). Either way, it’s conscious, and an intentional acknowledgment that we are so busy filling our time, and need to *properly* relax; even when relaxing watching the TV or listening to music, we often end up multi-tasking to make the most of the time – this is not relaxing, leave alone Niksen. And what about being attached to our phones during downtime……….. I won’t go there!

Like swans, who appear to be effortlessly gliding along the water, they are in fact working hard below the surface; and the Red Kites, while appearing to hover and hang motionless, are busy adjusting their feathers and moving their muscles to take advantage of the updrifts and air currents. Since that significant day that we all faced back in March, I know I’ve tried to give the impression of being ok, but have been completely fatigued and worked beyond capacity. School leaders and staff exude an air of Swan-like or Red Kite-like calmness, to bring confidence and trust in children, colleagues and parents – while actually working flat out and relentlessly, putting our own well being in second place, at often, great personal cost.

The second national Lockdown from tomorrow is already impacting on levels of anxiety, that will invariably materialise and be expressed in the relative safety of classrooms and with trusted adults. As we face the darker, wetter and colder months ahead, with the increasing concerns of more Covid infections and deaths, it’s really important that we intentionally carve out time, however brief, to boost our own well-being and replenish our energy levels. This might be Cloud Spotting, sitting on a beach, in a park, wood or alongside a stream, just being, rather than doing. This isn’t like the Seven Dwarves ‘busy doing nothing’ but *actually* doing nothing, without feeling guilty; stopping; not multi-tasking . It’s an art that might need time to cultivate and develop for some of us, especially if influenced by the Protestant work ethic, but the benefits can be tangible.

I wish you well for this new half term, and you might like to gift yourself some reading time (though, it’s actually a contradiction to count reading as Niksen!)   *Niksen  : Embracing the Dutch Art of Doing Nothing.*

Thank you, especially this week for who you are, above what you do.

Best wishes

**Jeff**

**Ethical Leadership** – in case you haven’t come across this useful resource for leaders at all levels - <https://www.nga.org.uk/ethicalleadership.aspx>

**The Riding Lights Theatre Company - Storytelling Theatre on Film** – presents an adaptation of Oscar Wild’s Selfish Giant for Primary Schools this Christmas. Please see the attached flyer.

**Diocesan Education Project** : we had planned on launching our 2021 project : **‘Ten Ten’** this half term. However, given the ongoing pressures and priorities of schools, coupled with wider restrictions on many of the intended activities and ideas in the project book, we will hold this over until the New Year.

**Southampton City Mission** have a number of worship and RE resources that you may like to preview and potentially use <https://www.youtube.com/c/SCMSchools/videos>

**Agents of Hope Book Pack – 20% discount available** A selection of 14 picture books for Key Stages 1 & 2 which explore emotional health; feelings of worry/anxiety; ways in which to support each other; how to thrive together as a school community. Suited to prompting discussions about the impact of coronavirus as well as, ultimately, promoting messages of cooperation and hope. <https://www.letterboxlibrary.com/acatalog/Agents-of-Hope-Book-Pack-.html#aAOH01>

**Remembrance Day 2020** – a 15 minute video and ideas for reflection is attached to the Worship Resources that are sent in the separate email for forwarding to teachers and others.

Jeff Williams

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