

**Diocese of Carlisle Board of Education**

**Heads Huddle Notes**

**Tuesday 13th October: Closing the gap post COVID**



**Reflection:**

*“If Jesus embraced human vulnerability for the purpose of associating with those who were exposed to the pains of life, how much more are we called to sacrificial living that causes us to renounce our comfort and to identify with the most vulnerable of our world?”*

Jesus healing the bleeding woman

**Feedback from Headteachers: themes of the week**

**Exhaustion:** the tiredness and extent to which Headteachers and all school staff are run down, becoming ill (with things other than COVID) and lacking energy was a recurrent theme. Staff absence (including staff who are **never** normally off) is creating staffing shortages and extra strain. Headteachers described their job as feeling like “surviving” and “just getting to the end of the day every day”. Headteachers reported how draining they are finding keeping up the show of “normality” for the children so that they still have a positive school experience (one Headteacher compared it to constantly putting on a mask). Lots of schools are missing the staffroom banter, chance to unwind with colleagues and to pick one another up.

**So many firsts:** first symptoms in schools; first test; first positive result in the area are stressful and draining.

**Technology:** is still causing some problems as staff (and more particularly governors) are struggling with access. However good technology is, it isn’t the same as being in a room together (whether to meet parents, for a staff meeting, governors meeting or anything else).

**Remember to look after yourselves:** one Headteacher shared a great example of some self-care for herself and her colleagues including asking a PPA teacher to cover her class so she could catch up which has made her feel better; and advertising for an MSA/cleaner to relieve pressure from the team. Do pause at half term and think about any small tweaks you could make to make life easier for yourself and your colleagues.

**Feedback from Headteachers: closing the gap**

**Never enough:** Headteachers reported that however much they do, it doesn’t feel like enough. Some of the issues pupils need support with are beyond the remit of school staff’s expertise and getting external support is harder than ever. Families not being in school makes arranging meetings difficult and those who find meetings difficult and tend to avoid them are even more inclined to do so when they are online meetings.

**Delayed symptoms:** lots of schools have found that pupils who returned really well in September are just now revealing quite how difficult the school closure period was for them.

**Things to celebrate:** Early Years pupils have settled well into school life and notwithstanding a long period (representing a large proportion of their lives) out of any kind of setting, have settled well into school life and lift the spirits of school staff (although it was noted that emotional and relationships development was understandably not where it would normally be).

**Just one pupil:** one Headteacher shared an example of a real school closure success – one pupil who had been struggling with maths has worked 1-1 with his mum throughout the school closure period, has boosted his understanding and confidence and returned to school a new person, enjoying challenges independently without any need for 1-1 support. Remember to hang onto the success stories as well as focusing on all the things that aren’t where you want them to be!

**Hope:** one school has planned in Christmas jumper day, Christmas parties and a Christmas dinner. This has given all pupils something to really look forward to and has been warmly welcomed by parents. For the most vulnerable pupils the routine, feeling of “normality” and the “treats” are especially important.

**Information sharing from the Diocese:**

**Governors:** we discussed the fact that governors too are finding school leadership difficult at present as their role has also had to change. Some of them are feeling despondent and are unsure how they can feel “useful”. We discussed some of the ways in which governors can do different but equally useful work to support the school remotely (including for example website review, policy audit, policy reviews). We also discussed the need for governors to be checking in on Headteachers, ensuring they are as well supported as possible. This links back to the discussion about Headteachers’ performance appraisal – it is important that the “worth” of our Headteachers is acknowledged, celebrated and that they are thanked and given any help available.

**If you have a particularly difficult relationship with your governing body and need support, please get in touch – we are here to help including attending meetings or being part of performance appraisal if needed.**

**Information for Governors:** the Diocesan team will put together a checklist for Governors to help them understand ways in which they can continue to support the school even without being able to visit and expectations around supporting Headteachers. (**Action: VO’D, CT, MA)**

**Changes to website requirements:**

**Academies:** must include whistle blowing procedures (from September 2020)

**All maintained schools:** must contain link to financial benchmarking website (from January 2021)

**Future huddle theme suggestions:**

Whilst specific guidance, information etc had been well received, Headteachers present preferred to have open forum huddles to pick up on themes emerging from week to week. They did not feel a themed focus was necessary.

However, if there is a topic which you would like raised in a huddle, please do let us and know and we can ensure that colleagues are aware and can bring their thoughts and experiences along to the discussion.

**Next week:**

**8am or 3.45pm:** teaching RSE in a Church School. An opportunity to share your experiences, ask questions and make sure you are ready to comply with the new guidance which is compulsory from Easter 2021.