

Letter to Schools Leaders, Teachers and all School Staff – 3rd April 2020

I write this having just stepped in from my front garden from the Thursday 8pm celebration that is becoming a regular event to celebrate the NHS by clapping, banging on pots and pans and singing in praise of what those dedicated public servants are contributing in these unprecedented times. The part of this which, this week, pleased me considerably was that this recognition has been extended to cover all of those who should be applauded including social workers, care staff, supermarket employees, van drivers and of course all of you school leaders teachers, and others who work in schools.

I leave the mention of all of you until last in that list above not, to imply some hierarchy of importance in this but to emphasise the fact that everyone will be part of the resolution to this crisis and that all are equally important.

The difficulty that this Covid-19 crisis has shown is that despite the adversity, the lack of guidance and information, the manner and speed with which schools and the teaching profession have responded is exemplary. Schools have never been closed in this manner and the teaching profession have never needed to react to such a constantly changing situation. I salute you all for the way you have reacted. I would also thank Clare Kershaw and her team who have worked tirelessly throughout the last weeks to ensure that you are kept abreast of information, support and guidance through a constantly evolving situation.

Mahatma Gandhi said: “The greatness of humanity is not in being human, but in being humane”. I think that our population and you as a profession have shown that in excess.

However, as we move forward the challenges remain, staying open for the children of critical workers and the vulnerable is a key issue particularly when that extends through what would otherwise be the Easter Holidays. The safeguarding of children by remote control when we know that the family pressures will grow within those constrained households over the coming months, those children who require support because of the economic impact of breadwinners losing their jobs will grow and on top of all this you need to continue to provide education to our children in an arm’s length manner the extent of which has never been seen before.

I can confirm that with regards to safeguarding Clare and I are working with the police, youth services and the social care team to ensure that as this goes on and as tensions within families grow we can ensure that we can assist in managing the wellbeing of young people. Hot summer nights are, in normal terms, a great time for young people but not if they are all socially isolated! Your help in that with the detailed knowledge you have of your children will be essential in ensuring that we keep them all safe.

So, most of all I want to say a big "THANK YOU" for everything you are doing and next week for the Thursday Clap I will be bequeathing three of every four claps for schools and teachers!

Stay safe and well!

Ray Gooding
Cabinet Member for Education and Skills