

Important Diocesan Education Team Update #16, Fri 22 May 2020

Dear colleagues,

If you are reading this, you have survived another of the most stressful weeks that you have probably ever experienced in education. For that alone, I commend and congratulate you! As we approach the end of this week, I do not want to add to your burden of things to read but I do want to just draw a couple of things to your attention.

- **Expansion of provision from Monday 1 June**

- We will all have our own views of the expectations, support, advice, guidance and demands that you are in the midst of navigating right now, but I want to emphasise and hopefully clarify a couple of points.
- The guidance from the DfE is non-statutory GUIDANCE. This is a double-edged sword. It provides for you making a decision that is bespoke to your context, informed by your risk assessment, and signed off by your governors. However, it also raises questions of liability. To this end, I strongly urge you to err on the side of caution in your risk assessment and subsequent decision-making and to only deviate from the guidance by offering less than is suggested rather than more. You can always expand provision further in the coming weeks if things go smoothly, but it will be difficult for you to withdraw once parents have taken up places. We have raised the matter of liability on governors of VA schools (liability for VC schools sits ultimately with the LA) and WCC is seeking legal advice on that specific matter. We will update you as soon as we know more.
- I am aware that several vicars have kindly been open to the possibility of schools making use of the church in order to accommodate a larger number of children in the coming weeks. Having consulted the national Church, at present we are unfortunately not able to agree to this possibility. Churches remain closed even for individual prayer and the guidance around their use is explicit and extensive; using the building to give schools extra space is not one of the permitted uses. When this changes, I will let you know and I have expressed my thanks to our clergy colleagues who are keen to help you as you face this latest challenge.

- **‘Never the Same’**

- We sent this [resource](#) on bereavement, loss and grief to you last week but it is so good, and as I don't want it to be lost in the sheer weight of what is being sent to you. Please do share it with colleagues in community schools and academies.

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• Admissions – academies and VA schools

- Rowan Ferguson from the CEEO has been in discussions with the DfE on the question of how attendance at worship should be interpreted in relation to the period in which churches have been closed. She writes, *“I have been advised by the OSA that it would be preferable for the relevant schools to apply for a variation to their admissions arrangements. The OSA are prepared to process such variations in bulk if Dioceses can assist by collating the applications. I am in the process of agreeing a suitable statement that works on the basis that attendance will only be measured during the period when churches are open. I will be seeking a similar approach (bulk applications for variation) from ESFA in respect of academies. We had hoped originally to deal with the situation by means of guidance to clergy, without any changes to the policies at school level but this would not have been watertight and could not have been backed by the OSA.”* If this applies to you, and if you wish to apply for a variation to your admissions arrangements, please let me know.

• Surgery

- Tim, Gemma and I joined with a number of headteachers earlier this week for our first online drop-in surgery. I hope that you found it useful if you were able to attend. The next one is scheduled for **11am on Friday 5 June**.

• Cluster / Briefing meetings

- As previously mentioned, Tim and I will be leading three sessions of diocesan updates and discussion for headteachers and three for Chairs of Governors. All sessions will be held on Zoom and numbers will be limited to 25 per session. Please let [Laura Farmer](#) know which session you would prefer to attend:

Headteacher Clusters / Briefings	
Monday 15 June	1.30pm - 2.30pm
Tuesday 16 June	10am - 11am
Wednesday 17 June	4pm - 5pm

• Thank you

- Every week I meet with the Bishop’s Senior Staff team in our diocese as well as with between 30 and 40 DDEs and CEEO officers. Without exception, these people are grateful to you for the work that you are doing in support of children, families and local communities and with a focus on keeping children safe and well. Bishop Martin has already written to express his gratitude to you and I have attached here a letter sent out jointly by a number of DDEs across England.

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- **Thank you \cont.**

- Every week, we pray together for you and, despite what we sometimes read and hear in the media, you are not forgotten. We know what you are doing and we know what it takes out of you. We value you and we thank you. More importantly than that, I believe that God knows where you are; He knows why you are there; and He knows what you are doing. Take heart and try to stay strong. We will keep walking this journey with you.

I know it easy for me to say, but please try to take some time off next week. Tim and I remain available all week if you need us for anything.

With best wishes,

Margaret James.

Margaret James
Diocesan Director of Education (DDE)