

Dear All,

They say you can't have too much of a good thing. The 'they' in this context is clearly Ofsted the 'good thing' ESW schools as this week East Allington received a visit from two HMIs to consider how Covid has impacted upon schools. This time, as we are in the middle of lockdown (well, one week in) all was carried out remotely. Thinking back to when remote meetings first became the chief form of communication all the way back in March, and users fumbled with microphones, sharing of screens and other controls, it was heartening to see Microsoft Teams being used to its fullest extent by Messrs Pether and Girardot. The obligatory "you're muted" phrase made limited appearance as the HMIs were wowed by the provision we have put in place for children. There was also a greater opportunity to vent about the issues schools have been facing, and vent we did, about often late and misguided guidance, poor provision of devices for children, lack of support with funding for schools to meet extra costs and of course, the fiasco of free school meals.

On this latter note, the government has now agreed to fund FSMs for children during Christmas. When they eventually agreed to do this at Easter, after schools had already funded this themselves for about two weeks, the company appointed to run this was 'Edenred'. The result, as I am sure you have read, was a farce initially, with the system unable to cope with demand; families missing out on vouchers and local authorities and schools not receiving their allocation quickly enough. ESW, like the vast majority of trusts and schools, did not wait for vouchers to arrive but continued to feed children out of trust funds; the right thing to do. What a delight it is therefore to see that this has been recognised by the awarding to 'Edenred' of an award for "best Covid response Initiative at the GCVA Connect Special Awards for delivering the free school meals scheme". The mind boggles!

Another week gone by where lessons have been taught, children have been cared for, colleagues have been supported and, dare I say it, some have even begun to think about Christmas. Thank you for all you continue to do.

Have a great weekend, when and whenever it comes,

Matthew

