

27 November, 2020

Dear All,

School is a very different experience for children and staff in this time of Covid. Some staff have not been in schools since March as a result of Covid and for those based in schools the routines and processes they have to go through, as well as the lack of being able to do all they want to do for children, and would do in non-Covid times, makes schooling simply less 'fun'.

Children are corralled from lesson to lesson; lack of free time or freedom to go where we like when outside lessons; wearing masks; sanitising hands; staying two metres apart; being herded out and into school and onto buses; not being always able to deliver the curriculum we would like with as much creativity in subjects; lack of as many after school activities, weekend Ten Tors training and D of E and sporting fixtures and performance art opportunities. And as for the usual Christmas activities... When you look at the list like that it is not surprising that some children are not exhibiting huge signs of enjoyment at the moment! It is as a result of the dedication of teachers or support staff that any kind of school experience is happening at all.

This might seem incredibly patronising to some, but it is often the little, simple things that we forget about when we are ourselves feeling anxious or tired or over-worked (something to which all of us can relate at present I'm sure!). In *Improving Behaviour in Schools*, the Education Endowment Foundation stated that greeting students positively at the classroom door "can help teachers to positively and personally connect with each student...and deliver behaviour-specific praise". This also transfers into corridors; not always easy to smile with a mask on but saying hello to as many people as possible does help to set a positive tone. When in schools the value of a simple greeting and smile from staff and pupils certainly lifts my spirits but as the term drags on it is easy to let shoulders drop and forget the little things that make a positive difference to someone's day. If you are a child with anxious parents or a home life, which includes furloughed or recently made redundant adults, or even just adults who are anxious themselves, school might be the only place where you receive any semblance of positivity.

I want to quickly share something that some of the primary schools in ESW are doing for children and staff, simply because it made me smile. They have introduced something called Tomteets. These mythological creatures from Scandinavian folklore have been placed around the corridors and classrooms in some schools to keep an eye out for children doing the right thing: concentrating, being kind, being positive.

**Blackawton Primary School \* Christow Community Primary School \* Coombeshead Academy \* Dartmouth Academy  
East Allington Primary School \* Kingsbridge Community College \* Kingswear Primary School \* Rydon Primary School  
Stoke Fleming Primary School \* Teign School**

The old adage of catch them being good. As one Headteacher said, "the intention is to create a sense of calm and wonder but on day one their introduction led to good natured chaos as children excitedly looked everywhere for them!" Every day a Tomtee size envelope (the ESW Tomtees are about the size of your thumbs) is delivered to the Head with a child, or class or member of staff's name on it with a note praising them for their conduct and attitude and thanking them.

Thank you once again for all that all of you doing and have a great weekend when, and whenever, it comes.



Matthew