

WOODLANDS PRIMARY SCHOOL: HEADTEACHER'S BLOG – 11/12/20

I would like to start this letter by sharing my disappointment in the reporting of the UK press in all forms - written, radio and TV – all year. The levels of misreporting, clickbait headlines and twisting of stories to paint a picture is downright scandalous. As a profession, I believe teachers have been unfairly treated for years by the press, and this has intensified over the course of this pandemic.

We are classed as lazy, work shy, cowardly, lefties... the list could go on. This has not been helped by the constant undermining and drip feeding of information from the Department for Education, who seem to vilify us at every turn. The Unions have not helped in this either - they either take too firm a line (NEU) and say things to the press which are then reported as fact and something **all** teachers want, even if it has not been consulted on with their members, or they do not take a strong enough line (NAHT) and leave us vulnerable.

The way the INSET Day debacle has been handled is nothing short of a disgrace. The Daily Mail's Headline of "**Schools are allowed to have December 18 off so 'stressed' teachers get a 'proper break - after unions called for last two days of term to be 'work from home' so staff can spend Christmas with Granny without worrying about Covid**" is at best inaccurate and at worst defamatory.

If I could advise the journalists, as they clearly have not done any research prior to writing these reports or headlines, then I would remind them of the following:

1. **Schools, and school leaders did not ask for this.** This is possibly one of the worst solutions to address the problem that was brought to the attention of the government. It does not do anything to mitigate against us, of the children, either taking the disease home, or potentially isolating for 2 weeks which will ruin both Christmas and/or New Year for everyone's families. I will still need to run Track and Trace for school for 7 days post breaking up and not many schools have the flexibility to change INSET days with such short notice. It is a Department for Education decision, so it should be reported that way.
2. **The first schools and their leaders heard of this was when Nick Gibb made his announcement.** This was not something that we were even aware of as a potential action. The last we heard is that schools must stay open to the end. In addition, any announcement should have been in line with neighbouring countries in our Nation that would then have protected Christmas for you all, as well as staff, in readiness for any member of our school community testing positive **from today** and potentially closing a bubble for 2 weeks.
3. **This is not to give teachers a break.** It is an INSET day, and as such, school staff would be expected to work. We like to give our parents notice (where possible) of any kind of closure, as we respect our families and respect those who need extra consideration for child care, especially at the moment when older family members may not be able to help out as they are shielding. We use any available staff time to actually train our staff, as we value them immensely as the individuals who have a significant impact on our young people; good quality training takes months to plan, organise and schedule and ours has been done for the year in relation to pastoral and curriculum drivers linked to performance management and pupil attainment. INSET day is an entitlement for staff and uses public money, of which I am the custodian, and I am expected to demonstrate that it has been used effectively, rather than to give me a day off on Christmas Eve, I value my staff immensely and work them hard, so I want to give them the necessary tools to do the best possible job they can and that involves training.
4. **This is to reduce Track and Trace times.** Schools have been doing Track and Trace's job for months now, despite the £12 billion that has been spent (clearly this money has not been spent on a working, 'world class' Track and Trace system as the public are being led to believe). Is it really a school's job to be doing that work, with no extra money, up to Christmas Eve? Our funding has already been dramatically cut and the only people suffering from that are our children.

I read the following paragraph about this very issue: the story reported by the press should be:

“Schools, who have been conducting Test and Trace for months, with no recognition or additional funding, have been asked to continue this work over the Christmas period. The Department for Education, without consultation of any school staff, made an unworkable proposal for schools to change their INSET days so that Friday 18th December is a day children do not need to attend, although school staff will still be working. This decision was made by the DfE so that schools can stop the Test and Trace process on December 23rd, instead of 24th. However, most schools will not be able to do this, as their INSET days have already been set in advance and they do not want to cause stress to parents and families by asking them to find child care at the last moment.

A DfE spokesperson mentioned some nonsense about record levels of funding and caring about the school staff. When we called them out on this, they just regurgitated the same rubbish. When then challenged them on why schools are having to do test and trace, when we have a 'World-Beating system' and the spokesperson mentioned something about the £12billion was being put to good use as unnamed companies needed some money to increase their profits, which can only be good for the UK.”

In other, much happier news, the Christmas Jumper Day (with all funds going to the Countess of Chester 'Blue Skies Balcony Appeal'). Well done all and how wonderful that we have managed to do some good in our community.

The Toy Appeal was amazing and the toys were collected yesterday by Stanlaw Abbey who were overwhelmed and actually quite emotional about the number of items donated. They will make all the difference for some families this Christmas. Thank you everyone!

The PTA have been in and spent literally HOURS filming our children in Covid-safe ways and editing and compiling the Woodlands Christmas Video! Please see their newsletter for how to order them.

Co-Jos has continued to be a roaring success, and the children have been loving this 😊

We have continued to do lots of singing, crafting, and supporting, in addition to a wheelchair rugby session for the Y5's and a Question and Answer session with Rev Jackie, Forrest Schools in Y3, Meet the Characters in Y2 and lots of other fab stuff that I am sure you will have seen on the class Twitter pages 😊

Let's all re-double our efforts in the next week and stay super safe because the last thing I want for anyone is me closing a bubble in the last week and being the Grinch who ruins Christmas by making you all isolate for 2 weeks