

Friday, 12 February 2021

Dear All,

### **Pausing and noticing**

The other day, as I walked with a friend through the fields around North Bedfordshire I stumbled upon a cluster of snowdrops that had, despite the snow, rain and severe freezing winds, nonetheless blossomed through the sodden earth to form the most beautiful bundle of nodding white heads, 'Now there's an example of resilience in action' I commented to my friend as we paused to enjoy the scene!



Pausing and noticing is something I have talked about previously in my letters to you and as half term approaches, I have found myself thinking again about the need for us to do just that. My reminder came in a conversation I had recently with my daughter who, at a medical appointment I attended with her the other day, discussed something that I hadn't realised was a concern for her. As we drove home afterwards, I asked her why she hadn't mentioned it to me before- "It's fine" she reassured me, "You've been so busy lately, I didn't want to bother you". As you can imagine, notwithstanding her reassurances, I felt myself almost immediately consumed in a tsunami of maternal guilt as I struggled to bite back my tears. Instead, of falling into a pit of despair, however, I took a few deep breaths, pulled the car over as soon as I was able and reached over to hold my daughter in a tight embrace, "I'm sorry", I said, "you're right, I have been busy lately, but never too busy for you" I whispered.



On returning home my daughter hurried upstairs to resume her on-line lessons, I made tea for us both and retreated to my office to reflect on our journey home. How often have I spoken about the benefits of 'pausing and noticing' and preached in school halls across the County as well as over Zoom about the need to 'see, hear and hold' our children. And yet, here I was, facing a significant reminder of my own inability to do just that; what I could do for a cluster of snowdrops on a winter's day walk I couldn't do for my own daughter! As I sat with my tea going cold, I found myself facing an emotional crossroads - I could go down the path of guilt, worry and self-chastisement or, I could accept the forgiveness so freely offered by my daughter, learn from the experience and move on. I'm pleased to say, I chose the latter and the lesson I learned (yet again) is this - I am only human!

### **Seeing and Hearing**

The power of being seen is tangible. Our situation may not be capable of change - we may still have work deadlines to meet, home schooling targets to try and achieve, elderly parents or relatives who need our care or whom we're missing terribly - all of this may still be true, but the overwhelming comfort that we experience when somebody takes the time (and it may only be a moment of time) to really see us, right where we're at, and pauses just long enough to really hear what we need to say, can be immense.

Seeing and hearing, pausing and noticing, is not a passive exercise, it involves actively engaging and exchanging with another person, even if that risks evoking difficult emotions or instigating uncomfortable conversations. We can see our children - resilient, tenacious and creative, but also struggling, lonely and under-confident. We can see our colleagues - tense, exhausted and stretched but still smiling, positive and encouraging. And we can also see ourselves - drowning, weary and 'failing' at every turn, but doing our best, being open to getting it wrong and taking the time to learn from our mistakes so that we might do it better next time.



This half term, with the school routine set aside for a time, can I encourage you to try to find some time to pause and notice the world around you – the nodding snowdrops and the green shoots of the daffodils as well as the laughter of children and the everyday joys of another day. As well as this, however, a year into this pandemic and with just a glimmer of hope that this situation might be easing, can I also encourage you to pause and notice your own reality - the worries and anxieties that you are carrying, the fears and concerns that hover during the day and haunt the depths of night. And as you take the time to pause and notice, please be aware that, like me, you may find yourself standing at an emotional crossroads. If you do, can I encourage you to choose wisely. In order to continue to support your own emotional wellbeing and give yourself the boost you need to carry on and support those you love and care for, think carefully about the path you choose – hope or despair, resilience or resignation. We may have



lost many liberties during this pandemic, but we still have some choices left – amongst them is the choice to see and hear, to pause and notice and in doing so to remind ourselves of all that we have achieved over the past 12 months – the battles we have fought, the loneliness we have struggled with, the worries we have overcome. We, you, have been remarkable – teacher, parent, mother, father, partner, carer, the list goes on. Each of you, in your own individual ways and wearing your separate and inter-connecting hats, has done the very best you could; like me, getting it wrong sometimes maybe, but always striving

to raise your game and do the very best you could. So as this half term approaches, can I encourage you to please take a moment to pause and notice just how amazing you are.

The snowdrops show us, year on year, that despite the best efforts of the harshest of winter weather, the seasons will, nevertheless, continue to come and go. And so, despite the difficulties that this half term has brought, I would like to take a moment to pause and notice one last thing - this pandemic too will end, despite the trials and tribulations that we have experienced, we can hold on to the knowledge that the sun *will* eventually shine, the trees *will* burst into leaf, and our lives *will* return to 'normal'.

In the meantime, may I wish you all a happy and healthy half term break.

With best wishes,

*Liz and the Making Me team.*