

RECOGNITION

RECOGNITION of what's happened, and that our experiences during lockdown have all been different, life-changing for many and significant for us all. How do we encourage everyone to share their story of what's happened and their experiences of the pandemic so far?

What is recognition?

The word recognition has two meanings:

- To identify someone or something, often from a previous encounter, with a meaning more akin to *acknowledging* or *discovering*.
- To give value or validity to something, with a meaning more akin to *appreciation* and *affirmation*.

People can give recognition to themselves and their experiences, and give recognition to others, in both senses referred to above.

Why is recognition important now?

As people return to school there will be an urgent and important need to share personal experiences of lockdown – to talk and to feel heard. Experiences will have been very different:

- For some people it will have been a **very special time of deep connection** with their family and may have involved shared activities that deserve to be cherished and maintained. Recording these special times may help people to recognise for themselves what they want to keep hold of and build on. They may feel sad that this special time could be over and that the moments they cherished will be forgotten, the activities they enjoyed will become memories.
- For some people the lockdown **will have been challenging, even traumatic**. Tempers may have been frayed; conflicts with family members may have been a regular occurrence. They may have struggled to meet school expectations of on-line work through lack of adequate equipment (even basics like pens, pencils and paper, let alone access to a computer and to wi-fi).

- And for some people lockdown **will have been a terrible and frightening experience**, with some or all of the following – food shortages, hostility, violence or threats of violence, fear and pain. There may have been sickness, hospitalization of family members and even death in the close or extended family. Some people may have attended their first funeral. Any of these events could be **traumatising**.

Experience of **trauma** will impact on people's capacity to respond to the usual expectations of behaviour and output.

Recognition of this will be important for managing these expectations on self and others, and may involve adapting systems, policy and practice.

One final point about recognition – and this is the recognition that whatever we see and hear people do in school there is much more going on beneath the surface. The restorative way of thinking about behavioural challenges will become very important as children and young people return to school.

There is no doubt that behaviour will not be 'normal'. The old normal is gone and the new normal has yet to be established. Behaviour may well be abnormal, as people respond to an abnormal situation. Patience, tolerance and **empathy** are going to be required in large measure and the **recognition** that all behaviour is coming from a place of unmet need.

How can we give recognition to what has happened at this time?

See questions to stimulate thinking on the next page.



RECOGNITION *continued*



With the Senior Leadership Team and with the staff group:

- How will you make time for recognising the impact the experience has had on you?
- How will you ensure that all of your staff have access to a non-judgemental listening ear so that their needs can be addressed, and they can return to school ready to give their best?
- What is the best listening frame for this recognition? One-to-one with listening buddies/mentors, or in circles/groups?
- How will you encourage staff to recognise that they will need to start all over again establishing new norms for a new normality – working *with* their students to establish how things will be?
- How can you encourage staff to resist responding to abnormal or needy behaviours in punitive ways, and instead recognise that these behaviours are likely to be signs of distress as pupils grapple with what they have been through and are going through?

With children:

- How can every pupil be supported to recognise their own growth during the lockdown, no matter how positive or how challenging the time has been for them?
- How can they be supported to record this growth through a variety of mediums?
- How can their own listening skills be developed to offer recognition to each other?
- How can pupils be involved in creating the new normality?

With parents and carers:

- Can this group be encouraged to support each other?
- Are there ways to recognise what they have been through?
- Not all parents/carers will have managed to support their children in their academic learning as the school would have wished. However, many may have been even more creative. How can recognition be given to everyone – whatever has been achieved? How can all ways of teaching and all ways of learning be recognised in both senses of the word?
- What role could parent/carer circles/groups play in this recognition?