

THE CONVERSATION

Friday Supper Supplement



The Conversation
Talking about Education

Simeon Royle: How do you solve a problem like no other?

Running a School during a Pandemic

Hard isn't it?

The permanent feeling of being on a state of high alert - waiting for an email from the dreaded covid@mountsbay.org address and yet fortunately none so far. Yet another revision of the break duty rota. Yet another explanation to the young people why they have to eat quickly so that they don't miss their outside time. Why they have to rush their toilet visit because the rest of the year group are disappearing rapidly down the stairs, and if they get separated from that group they could come into contact with the year group who are timetabled to use that entrance in 2 mins time. The inability to have a purposeful interaction at the end of a lesson to tie up any causes for celebration or any further conversations that were needed before that group is seen again - not possible as staff have to be in a another zone relieving another colleague - 2 minutes ago. Yet another set of advice from Westminster - 50 or so pages, but then in reading them seems much the same as last time, but we need to read it all just in case of any crucial changes - Surely there is a job somewhere for a DfE employee to simply go through and highlight the differences from the last guidance?

All of this adds to the potential for staff to be stressed, on edge and not on top of their game.

And yet they are. Mounts Bay Academy is seeing extremely high levels of student attendance - over 95% last week. To put this into context, the national average for secondary school is around 94.6% - but that is without Covid. Secondary school attendance the moment is averaging between 78% and 84% in England. We are way above that. Similarly, our record of staff attendance is excellent and a real testament to the passion, commitment, fitness and sheer doggedness of the Mounts Bay team. We hear of schools up the line having to shut off certain bubbles or move to remote learning not because of Covid or those waiting for tests, but just because teachers are understandably exhausted and cannot get to work, resulting in levels of staff absence being so high that some groups of students have to work from home.

We know that we live in an exciting and unique community catering for the full range of socio economic backgrounds, albeit from a limited range of faiths and cultures. However, we know that we have many who are extremely active on social media looking at such a wide range of views - from the anti-vaccination team right across to those families who have not left their houses for 6 months due to fear of catching Covid. I think that is the beauty of West Cornwall and our tolerance and celebration of diversity - prime British values after all - should come to the forefront as we cope with the pandemic in different ways.



Praise Song for my Mother by Grace Nichols

You were
water to me
deep and bold and fathoming

You were
moon's eye to me
pull and grained and mantling

You were
sunrise to me
rise and warm and streaming

You were
the fishes red gill to me
the flame tree's spread to me
the crab's leg/the fried plantain
smell replenishing replenishing

Go to your wide futures, you said



And yet the #BeKind movement is now more important than ever as our patience is tested in these 'unprecedented' times - yes - that is the word to use in that sentence at that point - because this is unprecedented!

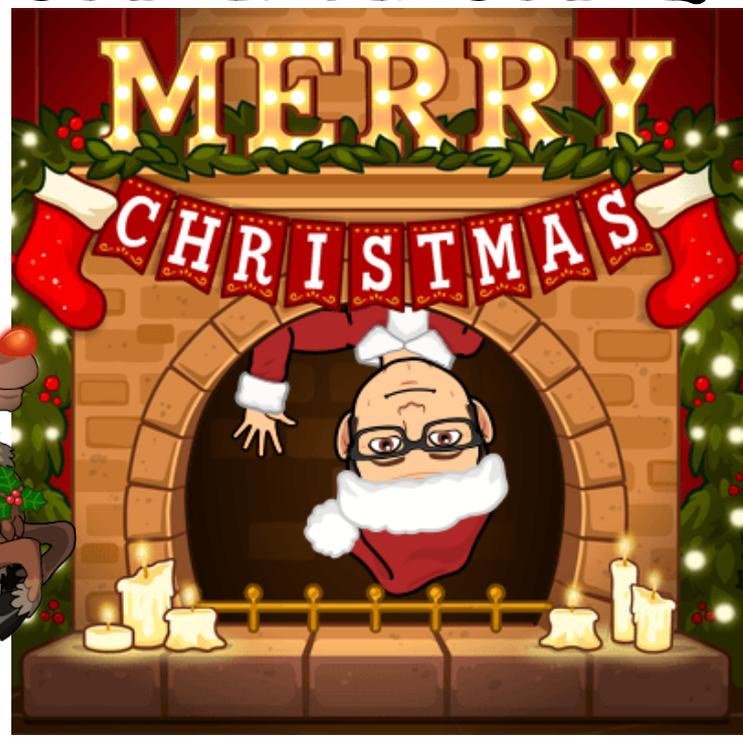
As school leaders, we need to be responsive, and yet keep all views in balance and this can prove a challenge. The safety of all members of the Academy has to be the priority, and so steering a safe middle ground in the midst of the hype is our target. But then this can alienate those outliers who are often the most vociferous in their 'advice' to the Academy, often sharing their advice widely and in public forums. Should we answer them publicly or do we maintain our dignity and not respond to antagonistic posts on FB, Instagram or Twitter? Should we answer them individually? Should we ignore them since the majority of comments/complaints/advice that we receive are not mainstream views.

We do answer them personally, but not in a public forum. Anyone asking a question deserves the courtesy of a response. We answer them calmly and professionally and objectively and we accept that one size certainly does not fit all, and we urge those asking the questions to understand this as well.

Given that we are ten months into our new normal, there is certainly an element of Covid fatigue and so it is tempting to mix bubbles, albeit briefly or just for ten minutes, or just whilst two groups cross routes outside. However, safety remains paramount and we are proud of our Covid free site and the sacrifices that we have made in terms of rigid protocols must have gone some way to achieving this.

Lunchtime is a military operation which seems to stretch on for most of the day, with the first groups eating at 11:45 and the final group getting back to afternoon lessons at 1:30. Groups have some eating time inside in their bubbles - eating is of course important. We did look at opening the canteen so that eating could be more communal and social and yet still safe within bubbles, but our planned launch day for this new routine coincided with the Prime Minister announcing the second lockdown in November. Fresh air and movement are important and essential for all of us and so we were insistent that students get some outside time, although again this needs to be staggered. Five groups requiring a supervised inside eating session followed by an outside session makes for a complex rota of staff supervision but allows each student 15 minutes inside and 15 minutes outside.

Naturally, this is not long enough to enjoy a civilised bit of lunch and a conversation with friends and so eating does tend to be a little rushed. Students then have a short walk to the playground to stretch their legs and their outside time has to be limited to 15 mins as there is another year group in the playground before them and another waiting for them to vacate at the end of their slot. Again - not ideal and it all feels rushed. We have received comments from families who are struggling with the hurried eating time and pleading for more time at the expense of going outside. Likewise a small number of families are very vociferous about the lack of outside time and concerned that the young people are not getting enough time outside. So should we lengthen the lunchtime to appease both parties? Perhaps put some more time on the school day? This was shortened at the beginning of the academic year so as to ensure that the students spent less time in large numbers on the school site as was the advice from the DfE.



Distancing and cleaning rules mean that we cannot share the canteen without a deep clean in between bubbles and a staggered lunchtime is needed if we only have one eating area and five different bubbles.

We dream of times when our primary concerns were learning, teaching, social development, lifestyle and pedagogy rather than logistics, break duties and safe walking routes around the school.

It is a testament to the quality of the school and its staff that these conversations are still happening. Staff training is still important, and we work towards ensuring high performance learning for all, using our new friends Zoom, Teams and even the telephone to ensure that we are up to date and on the same page.

I finish with the usual #BeKind signoff. There is nothing more important than looking after each other. We can sometimes see and feel each others' tensions, and sometimes we cannot, although we know they are there. This is a time to be strong, to be considerate, to think of others, to bite your tongue and develop that inside voice, and perhaps most importantly, to #BeKind.

Can I propose a new daily regime? A break from the break duty rota, a break from the blue zone playground walk, a break from that constant worry that something huge and outside of your control is about to happen, a break from the constant feeling that you are not good enough, and simply join us in following the kindness calendar for December?

Best wishes to all of you. Stay safe and keep well and enjoy your Christmas break, Don't feel bad about teacher holidays because this year, perhaps more so than any other year, you have earned it!

Simeon Royle

KINDNESS CALENDAR: DECEMBER 2020

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
 7 Leave a positive message for someone else to find	1 Share the Kindness Calendar with others and spread kindness	2 Contact someone you can't be with to see how they are	3 Offer to help someone who is facing difficulties at the moment	4 Give kind comments to as many people as possible today	5 Make a gift for someone who is homeless or feeling lonely	6 Support a charity, cause or campaign you really care about
14 Share a happy memory or inspiring thought with a loved one	8 Do something helpful for a friend or family member	9 Notice when you're hard on yourself or others and be kind instead	10 Listen wholeheartedly to others without judging them	11 Be generous. Feed someone with food, love or kindness today	12 Buy an extra item and donate it to a local food bank	13 See how many different people you can smile at today
21 Appreciate kindness and thank people who do things for you	15 Contact an elderly neighbour and brighten up their day	16 Look for something positive to say to everyone you speak to	17 Practice gratitude. List the kind things others have done for you	18 Give away something that you have been holding on to	19 Buy locally and support independent shops near you	20 Contact someone who may be alone or feeling isolated
28 Be kind to the planet. Eat less meat and use less energy	22 Congratulate someone for an achievement that may go unnoticed	23 Choose to give or receive the gift of forgiveness	24 Bring joy to others. Share something which made you laugh	25 Treat everyone with kindness today, including yourself!	26 Get outside. Pick up litter or do something kind for nature	27 Call a relative who is far away to say hello and have a chat
31 Plan some new acts of kindness to do in 2021	29 Turn off digital devices and really listen to people	30 Let someone know how much you appreciate them and why	Let's look beyond our differences and help each other. Every act of kindness matters			

www.actionforhappiness.org | #DoGoodDecember | Stay Wise · Be Kind



Cryptic Crossword COTW:

Communist beginning to get a bird (8)

First correct answer pinged or emailed to JR will receive a prize

The Conversation

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