



Dear Parents,

I hope this finds everyone well. I think we have all adapted to this new way of living, and one positive to take from this is that our air is cleaner. This is due to a 60% drop in the use of vehicles and the fact that 80% of aeroplanes are currently grounded. In my assembly on Monday, I will focus on air pollution and the devastating effect it has on the environment. The UN Climate Change Conference COP26 which was set to take place in Glasgow in November, will now be rescheduled for 2021. COVID-19 is the most urgent threat facing humanity today but we cannot forget that in the long term, climate change is arguably the biggest threat facing humanity. Carbon dioxide remains in the atmosphere and oceans for centuries. There needs to be a global commitment to counter the devastating effects of climate change as a result of human activity. The current fall in emissions is undoubtedly due to Coronavirus and is only temporary. Researchers have discovered that air pollution has served to intensify the pandemic- could this be part of the reason that the death rate in the UK is the highest in Europe? The lockdown and related measures implemented by countries to stop the spread of COVID-19 have also led to a decrease in economic activities and a significant drop in road transport and air freight. This has temporarily "cleaned" the skies and decreased levels of certain air pollutants. For this to have any kind of beneficial effect in the long term, we need to seek ways to continue this trend as life returns to normal. Will humanity be prepared to make the necessary changes? Some countries have already begun this process with Paris constructing miles of bicycle paths to promote cycling in the city.

Another positive effect of the current lockdown is that people seem to have started talking to each other more. It appears that the more we are "socially distanced" from each other, the more likely we are to say hello to someone we do not know as we pass them in the street. When I go out for a run or cycle, people smile and acknowledge me which, living on the outskirts of London, was not something I experienced often before the pandemic. Some might argue that it is just a way of acknowledging the social awkwardness of having to navigate around each other at a safe 2m distance. However, perhaps it is an instinctive reaction; being told we cannot interact with others makes us want to do it all the more! Whatever the reason, it is certainly a positive. A survey conducted by Age UK identified that more than a million older people in this country say they always or often feel lonely. 17% of older people have only one conversation per week with family, friends or neighbours, and many can go much longer than that without actually talking to another human being. This is not something which has suddenly happened because of COVID-19. For some adults in our society, particularly the older generation, it is simply the norm. Many of us are now experiencing what it feels like to be isolated from our loved ones. This is an opportunity for us to reflect on this as we have a deeper and more personal understanding of the loneliness some people experience on a daily basis, with or without lockdown measures. If this is something that changes as lockdown measures are eased, it is certainly a positive step forward.

Many of us have been fortunate enough to be with close family over the past few weeks. When this is all over, I am sure that we will remember how strange it is to have our time with family and friends taken away. A positive outcome will be if we emerge as a friendlier and more caring society. I encourage pupils to consider contacting someone they have not spoken to in a while. It might be the only call that person receives, and will most certainly make their day.

The forecast for the bank holiday weekend looks good. Make sure you enjoy some time in the fresh air and remember to celebrate VE Day in remembrance of the European victory over Nazi Germany during World War 2.

Sincerely,
Leonard Blom

