Reflection on the Leadership of Learning pre and post lockdown - Mr Tom Raw, Deputy Headteacher.

A slight digression at first, if I may: Summer 2003 I had just finished university and found myself flung into the job's market with a degree that was very niche, to put it mildly, in terms of job prospects (not many employers were after a 2:1 in Drama & Theatre Studies). The call to public service and teaching was still three years away and I suddenly had to find skills within me that I'd never given much thought to. Upon walking into a raft of recruitment companies, I was given several tests in order to gauge my skills in computer literacy. Oh dear. I suddenly felt very much like the proverbial fish out of water.

Fast forward seventeen years and the world entered a state of turmoil not seen since arguably the Second World War. All of a sudden, learning and leadership would need to be facilitated at a distance and the IT skills I had slowly (and at times reluctantly) acquired since 2003 needed to be brought to the fore. Many questions were raised: how will I teach remotely? Will face-to-face Google Hangout meetings be awkward? What books should I have in the background? How can I do this and be visible with a trusty clipboard or notebook?

The answer to all of the above was a resounding, 'I don't know.' Of course, the clipboard is now gathering dust in the office that I've since forgotten the door code for and some decisions regarding what books I should have in the background were easy (enter Shakespeare, Poe, Dante). However, I have found myself relishing in the challenge of remote leadership and it has allowed me the opportunity to work closely and coordinate initiatives with colleagues I had previously had little to do with in a professional capacity.

An example of this is with our Heads of House. Normally, pastoral and learning can exist separately but when it comes to monitoring student engagement on both an individual and subject level, their knowledge and expertise of the students has become invaluable. Similarly, this has resulted in greater delegation to tutors who are able to utilise their expert knowledge of students in order to bring them closer to their remote learning. As a result, subjects seem now to be able to work together as one body - one single engine - in order to bring the students closer to their collective learning, whereas in many schools (pre-Covid), they operated within their own little island states. I find, when talking to subject leaders, a running narrative that is united in how we get students on board. A continent, not a set of islands.

This all brings us up-to-date as to where we are now in terms of 'some face-to-face contact' or, as I put it, 'Remote Teaching: Phase 2.' We have worked together, as a single engine, to get the students on board and engaged and now we are looking at live online lessons. With the trust and common approach built up over 10 weeks of lockdown, it was relatively easy to move forward as one machine in order to bring in live lessons via Google Hangout. As soon as a timetable was released for staff to populate, there was no chasing up or clipboard pestering - teachers signed up as one with their offers and are now asking each other if they can drop in on the lesson as a silent observer in order to *learn*, not judge.

This is progress.

I, like everyone out there, am craving a return to some kind of (new) normality. I want to be at the chalk face again, in the classroom, and leading colleagues by having a conversation and discussion face-to-face rather than banging away on a keyboard. However, it would be disingenuous of me to say that leadership lockdown has not been good for me; I have picked up skills I didn't know were there and feel like, without having to run off to a series of pre-timetabled lessons, that I can coordinate and juggle a variety of tasks and initiatives in my own time - decided upon by myself - without the confines and restrictions of a set timetable that I now see as a hindrance.