

Friday 4 March 2022

Dear Everyone

We are thinking very carefully about how we talk to children, and among ourselves, about the war in Ukraine. Clearly it can't be ignored, and yet we also need to find a way to make the school a sanctuary from the unrest of the world, while being a safe space to express concerns and fears.

Years 5, 6, 7 & 8 joined me in assembly this morning for an open Q&A, first to reassure the children that they can talk about the war with their teachers, and at home. We touched on sanctions, and humanitarian actions, also, and the generosity of people across Europe in coming to the aid of refugees.

The conversation started with where they are getting their news. Among the media, most are getting their information from the BBC, with Sky News, the radio and print media also used by a few. The depth and detail the children want to know about is remarkable. They are thinking carefully and in a largely balanced way. It seems clear to me that the better informed they are, the more in control they feel.

The conversations included their shared concerns about the condition of the nuclear reactor reported on this morning's news, whether war would spread more widely and the effect of sanctions. Yet what dominated their talk is about the plight of people, from soldiers needing food, to people trapped in their country, to people with family connections across borders, to people fleeing.

The response from the children was overwhelming – they want to help directly.

One of the teachers made the point that the mood of empathy in the room for all people is very powerful, and another teacher made a clear point that, as a school, what we choose to do cannot be related to the war efforts, and that supporting refugees was the most appropriate thing to do as a community.

One parent, who is in Poland right now, writes to me to say that the situation is truly heart-breaking, and that 'normal people are getting involved beyond any expectations.' They have found this web site that may be useful.

<https://www.timeout.com/news/17-ways-you-can-help-the-people-of-ukraine-right-now-022822>

Many people have suggested that the BBC's *News Round* is very well put together, certainly for children for whom the concept of war is perhaps less clear, which is the case for younger children. As we heard this morning, older children want grown up news, although we know that this means seeing things that are difficult and upsetting. And this brings its challenges, too.

Many adults are of a generation not that far from war, either from their own countries in recent times, or whose parents lived through war. The further we get from direct experience, the easier it is for young people to see war as a glamorous and exciting adventure, and we must be careful about that, too. However, that fear of the allure of war for some, was allayed this morning. The children here want peace.

Your children may well talk at home about what we can do at school. We are going to come together again for Monday's assembly in Years 5-8 and hear those ideas. I have asked the Head of Charities, who represents the pupils, to work with Mr Walker and Mr Brown to come up with ideas we can all get behind.



*Picasso*

Poetry for our times

<https://poetryarchive.org/poem/wind/>

Best wishes

Simon