

**Belonging and well-being forum summary: 12.07.23**

We had a really enjoyable and informative discussion about both belonging and how this, in fact, links quite inextricably to well-being. The purpose of the meeting was to look at protected characteristics and how we can help everybody in our school community to feel a sense of belonging, and to help everybody in our school community see how they can help other people feel like they belong.

We began by discussing how a lot of work has been done on ‘hidden’ disability, but not necessarily a great deal in helping our children to understand or, rather, know how to approach or discuss more physical disability. A parent suggested this could be done via more textbooks and figures within the curriculum, as well as exposing the children to role models and inspirational figures who have disabilities, and who can explain a bit more about how they would like people to talk about their disability. It was discussed how in society people often don’t know how to respond to those with physical disabilities and so quite often will skirt around any issue and try to ignore it completely. A parent of a child with a physical disability commented that it’s perfectly okay to ask questions and in fact really important to do so and enhance the visibility of disability – far more often than not, someone with a physical disability, or those with relatives who have a physical disability, will be open and willing to talk about it, often in a very matter-of-fact way. It is just that as things stand, a lot of people are scared to say the wrong thing and so end up saying nothing at all or, even worse in some cases, showing pity. There is some work that we can do as a school to try and normalise and celebrate our differences and here it was suggested that perhaps links with local schools could be an option. This is something we will be looking at.

We touched on neurodiversity and shared an email from a parent, who commented on the importance of our children understanding each other’s differences, and how a child with neuro diversity might act ‘differently’ in some circumstances. Staff present in the meeting said that children are tremendously understanding of different peoples’ needs, but in some cases it can be parents who perhaps may be unaware of context or of the challenges that some children face, whether that may be because of neurodiversity or because of circumstance. It was suggested that perhaps a workshop could be had for those of us within the school community who would like to have more knowledge about neurodiversity and how it affects different individuals in different ways. This is also something that we will be looking at as a school, and we hope that there will be engagement, particularly from ‘neurotypical’ families.

We then discussed gender for a short time and the importance of making sure that whilst we do rightly place focus on protected characteristics, we must be mindful to ensure that we don’t forget about the majority and consider the dynamic between boys and girls and how they might both feel they are treated. This is something that we will need to continue to bear in mind.

The conversation turned to well-being. It was noted that we still need to note that the pandemic has had a considerable impact on our children’s mental health and their underlying capacity to feel safe and accepted. It was discussed how this very much manifests itself in where and how children get their validation and here the perils of online safety were discussed as was the impact of social media influences.

We talked about the importance of supporting our children to take responsibility for their actions (and helping them to develop their independence in managing conflict and disagreement) and this links in with resilience and how children need to understand and accept the things that they are not in control of and work on the things they are. It was rightly pointed out that in order for resilience to be nurtured, work needs to be done to draw it from within rather than trying to impose it upon the children. This is a big piece of work and responsibility and resilience is going to play a big role in our school development in the next academic year. We will perhaps be looking at developing a working party on how this can be done as a school community – it is extremely important that it is done properly and with everyone on board, with a common approach and common language to support our children in being more resilient, but understanding what that truly means - and often it means needing to lean on others and being aware of that and okay with it. This links in with the importance of allowing our children to understand that it’s okay to feel angry or upset, and we shouldn’t reject those emotions…it is just how we support them in managing how they respond to these emotions.

The benefit of ‘feelings clubs’ was discussed and here it was mentioned that Mrs Ball in her role as ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant) could have a prominent part to play.

We will be looking at sharing and developing further a framework for resilience, a word which is often misinterpreted for just striving and cracking on regardless. It is so much more than that.

We said that we would share a video that we shared with the junior children a couple of weeks ago, which we feel summarises resilience quite well. Here is the link: <https://youtu.be/zeu9X88g8DE>

We hope to have another meeting in the autumn term and thank parents for attending this time. The relationship between our school and parents remains integral to the success and ongoing improvement of Urmston Primary.