



Dear colleagues,

I want to start by marking the return to education, who would have imagined we would have returned to a new school year given the events that have unfolded over the last few months. It is thanks to you for your tremendous efforts, all the exceptional work in supporting our children and young people back into school and college.

Where has the time gone, it feels like many months have passed since I last spoke to you to express my sincere thanks for the many ways in which you negated the COVID pandemic, and with a message of encouragement as you sprung into this new Term. Since then we have seen the start of a busy term and further unfolding of COVID cases across the city. I can only imagine the difficulties this caused you in your role as educational leaders. The constant change of plans on a daily basis, responding off the cuff to new challenges and striving to provide support for staff and parents as you deliver these changes will have likely had a significant impact on your own emotional strength and I am sure the response will still be 'I'm just doing my job' when it has been so clear to me that it is so much more than that.

I am so proud of everyone in this city who continues to go above and beyond, there are so many acts of kindness that I see every day from teachers, support staff, transport staff, caretaker staff and domestic staff all keeping our schools clean and safe. So, while are keeping everyone safe we also need to work hard at keeping our staff emotionally well and that includes the need to look after the wellbeing and mental health of all of our staff.

Leading our FTB mental health services I know that burnout is a real and present risk for us all as the pressure piles up high, so I want to encourage you to focus on your own self-care and well-being as much as possible over these coming weeks and months . Please take some space each day to reflect, refuel and restore. I am reminded often by my peers that we cannot pour from an empty cup it won't help you and it won't help those around you, the very best way you can support your fellow colleagues is to care for yourself and be visible in doing so. As your "cup" is emptied with every daily challenge, it is of utmost importance that when you can, you fill up. Please do pick up the phone to each other, give our friends at BEP a call and speak openly and honestly about what your needs are. We are here for the long haul this is not a sprint, it's a steeple chase with many hurdles to jump it's a marathon. It's imperative that you pace yourself and stop at the drinking stations and top up your cup.

Erin Doherty and our STICK team have been working to look at what else we can be doing to support our educational colleagues. I wanted to share attached, we are going to be offering weekly staff support sessions that you can promote to all colleagues and staff. A space where they can drop in (virtually) every week to be greeted with a smile and to be listened to by our STICK clinicians.

These sessions are crucial to create a space that is safe to discuss the weight of the need we are seeing on a daily basis as well as building a peer support network across our city. I truly hope we see you and colleagues there. That you will be able to encourage them to fill their cup and in turn you fill yours.

My final reflection is thisyes, we all need to keep going, but please don't sacrifice or overlook your own wellbeing and mental health needs. You are the people who really matter and will inevitably be here to make life returning to school just a little bit more bearable, you are the people who will bring hope and courage for our children and young people though the next school year and beyond, **please share and make use of our resources..... #STICK together.... we are here for you too.....**

Kind regards, Elaine

Find out more about what we do at forwardthinkingbirmingham.org.uk

If I am sending emails out of 'normal' working hours, I am working flexibly. Please be assured that I do not expect a response outside of your own working hours

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