Dear Colleague,

We hope you are keeping safe and well. As we head towards the last few weeks of term for most of us, we thought it would be good to give you an idea of how secondary school linking will look next year.

**During 2020-21 the programme will provide students with the opportunity to:**

* Engage in dialogue about issues that really matter to students
* Explore their values and bring these to life through participating in a social action
* Appreciate the importance of identity, empathy and diversity
* Understand how we form beliefs and views about other people and how we can change our minds
* Develop critical thinking skills and share these with other students

**Virtual Linking**

Secondary linking 2020-21 will be virtual rather than face to face.

One of our key aims has always been to give pupils an opportunity to engage with pupils that they would not normally get a chance to meet in a meaningful way and explore how we can all live well together. We believe our programme offers new ways of connecting students and broadening experiences. We have also promoted greater opportunities for self-reflection, empathy and critical thinking.

**Step by Step Guidance**

We understand that this next academic year will be challenging. Hence, it is our intention to make linking as easy as possible for everyone involved. Our team will be producing resources and guidance to make the process simple but effective.

**Flexibility**

Built into this programme is plenty of flexibility to allow pairs of teachers to tailor linking around their subject, pastoral programme, or a shared wider school focus. The start date and length of the programme is also going to be flexible. For example, the programme can start in November or January and it might run over just one term.

**Social Action**

A key focus of linking this year will be to incorporate **social action** into our programme. The idea is to get students to understand how they can be agents of change - a social action could be a simple act within school or could be students participating in a national campaign. Having a sense of empowerment and hope is crucial; especially at a time like this. Hopefully the social action will be shared within their own schools and even the wider community. Issues that students might choose as a focus for social action could be: how to be an anti-racist, how to combat hate crime, how to support school to review the curriculum, how to combat fake news and participate in anti- rumour work, how to develop critical thinking skills, how to understand and share with others the dangers of stereotyping. The Linking Network can facilitate the connection between the pairs of classes and local or national organisations which can support the students.

**Shuttle Dialogue**

The key element of the programme will be the exchange of ideas between the groups. Each group will take part in dialogue using the same stimulus and capture their ideas and the two teachers will facilitate the exchange of information between schools via email exchange - ‘shuttle dialogue’. Further guidance on how to exchange ideas from group discussions and dialogue activities will be given.

**So how will it work?**

You decide whether you want a subject based link or a tutor time link. We will offer a range of 'shuttle dialogue' activities and of course teachers can incorporate activities and guidance into your own curriculum-based link. Dialogue sessions would be classroom based and last for no more than a normal lesson time. There would need to be at least four sessions in order to develop skills and explore the ideas of both groups. Input from TLN and expert visitors would probably be by video-call or recorded video. There is no requirement for the two classes to participate in simultaneous video-calls.

**If you follow our programme directly, then fully resourced sessions will be designed to get pupils to reflect and explore the following questions:**

What matters to us and what are our values?

What positive changes can we make as groups or individuals within our own lives, schools, and the wider community?

What are human rights and how we can be the best of our ideals?

What are some of the barriers and misunderstanding that we encounter?

Finally, linked students' exploration of ‘*what matters to us all and the values we share’* will lead to a social action campaign within their own schools and through the group they have worked with to the wider community.

**Training and Support**

We will provide virtual training and support and bespoke resources to help each school get the best out of linking. We will connect you to guest speakers and organisations who can help bring your project to life. If you haven't linked before we will work with you to see if we can find a link partner school.

**Cost**

There is no cost involved to be part of our programme.

**What should you do next?**

**Express an interest in joining our programme by filling out the Secondary School Linking Renewal Form and returning to** **secondary@thelinkingnetwork.org.uk**

Very best wishes and we look forward to working with you in the autumn term through linking.

Azam, Liz and Meg