



Head Teacher in Coronavirus Lockdown 2020

by Victoria Cooper

“The days pass quickly, and yet one is so bored here,” my Self-Isolating friend complains. She practises Italian and paints.

My other friend, Head Teacher smiles but her eyes are full of tears. It’s Friday night and the week has spluttered to a close. We catch up over video call, the now usual. But this is not usual; Head Teacher explains.

She tells us of new group-distancing procedures for 4-year-olds. Emails sent to parents anxious for their children, then for their jobs. She comforts the despairing.

Head Teacher discovers a mother without food in her fridge. Three children and nothing for tea. Head Teacher helps. She brings food vouchers to the door. Her school takes in the children so the mother can work. “I like her,” she explains, “she’s doing her best.”

An already struggling single father begs for his child too, but needs proof of “critical worker status.” He calls again; his employers are printing leaflets for the NHS now; the child is in. 12-hour night shifts mean his 7-year-old is in the care of his teenage brother. The school cares while the father sleeps, or he home-schools after nights. Now furloughed he has very little, but assures Head Teacher, “money is not everything.”

She has tearful teachers reluctant to return too. The ever-changing policies, the risk assessments and the fear of risk. She buys more antibacterial spray.

A family seek refuge from an abusive father and they turn to the school for help. There is no one to go to. Where else is safe in lockdown?

She fears for vulnerable children, in houses where she can do nothing but wait for an arrest to make them safe.

Then a mother desperate, unable to make ends meet, confides. Head Teacher has no time to sit and stare, but listens. The woman cracks before her and inside this crack is a plea. I want to die, she tells her. Head Teacher listens and helps.

My friend, Head Teacher shrugs her shoulders, "you'd do it too," she says.

We are not expected to though, I argue. We haven't supported parents, safeguarded staff or reassured the distressed. All this while our government demands Head Teacher must get the economy moving and get children back to school.

We are not Head Teachers.

And this is more than a Head Teacher can do. And these are the stories not being told.