

Teachers and school support staff will be hailed as ‘unsung heroes’ for their work to help children and families during the pandemic, in the Church of England’s weekly online service marking the start of the academic year.

The Dean of Birmingham, Matt Thompson, said school staff and governors had worked ‘sacrificially’ to ensure that the most vulnerable children and their families were cared for over the months since lockdown.

This included keeping schools open for children of key workers and vulnerable children, setting up online learning platforms, distributing computer equipment and delivering food parcels and vouchers to families.

“We have so many unsung heroes in our classrooms and in our school offices, not just in Birmingham, but throughout the land,” he said in a sermon for the weekly online service for the Church of England.

He added: “Our service today is a small way in which we can say a big ‘thankyou to God’ for you and for all that you have done to show God’s love in action throughout these long months.

“We give thanks to you and we salute you for all that you have done, a truly outstanding act of service to God and to our nation. We bless you for the new year to come, with all its opportunities and challenges.”

The service, with the theme of Love in Action, to be broadcast from 9am on Sunday on the Church of England’s **website, Facebook page** and **YouTube channel**, marks the start of the new school year. Prayers will be said for children and staff returning to school at the start of the academic year.

The service will be led by Revd Tim Bateman, Assistant Vicar at St Luke’s, Gas Street, in Birmingham, with contributions from staff and pupils at St Thomas Church of England Academy, part of the All Saints Multi Academy Trust, Birmingham.

Sarah Smith, Director of Education for the Church of England in Birmingham, will contribute a reflection recorded from the building site of Christ Church Church of England secondary academy, a new free school in Yardley Wood, Birmingham, due to open in September 2021.

“We want to develop schools that are about human flourishing – yes to academic success but also learning how to use that with wisdom - how we use our skills, how we treat others with dignity, how we can hope for the future and the whole idea of being part of what a community looks like,” she said.

The service ends with **‘Looking to the Rainbow’** a song originally composed by Becky Drake for the school where she is chaplain, Blue Coat Church of England School in Birmingham and used in the Church of England’s Faith at Home resources.

The Church of England’s Chief Education Officer, Revd Nigel Genders, said: “The Church of England is proud to provide 4,700 Church schools across the country and our commitment to education for the common good includes working with and supporting all other schools in our local communities.

“Ensuring all children have the opportunity to grow in wisdom and to flourish in their daily lives is at the heart of our aspiration and we are hugely thankful for the countless staff, governors and church leaders who make that possible.”

Notes to editors

Faith at Home works with schools, churches and families to support the faith development and pastoral care of children and young people. This has involved creating resources and films for children, schools, parents and churches to help explore aspects of the Christian faith. These have featured contributions from students and senior leaders from across the country, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, whose first national assembly in partnership with Oak National Academy, was watched by over 60,000 people.

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