ESHA Statement on the Manchester Bombings

The age profile of the Manchester victims, the senseless deaths of so many young people, the brutality and warped mindset of the perpetrator means that is difficult to find hope in the aftermath of such an atrocity. As school leaders we trust that colleagues don’t find themselves in a situation of trying to explain at school assemblies why a valued and loved member of our school community is no longer with us due to the warped opinions and actions of an individual who was so recently a member of another school community himself. What did we do wrong in educational terms to enable such actions?

ESHA believes that every school should be a beacon of hope and opportunity every day throughout every community across Europe. We want to create a climate in our schools that eliminates tension and division that is caused by race or religion. We want to create a culture where children are encouraged to be curious, where through the various curricula taught in our schools our children are encouraged to develop an ability to make reasoned and informed decisions, respecting difference and promoting the common values which our communities share.

Education can’t only be about academic success – we must encourage character, spirit, resilience, wellbeing, involvement and pride in our community. That’s what I saw in the reaction of the people of Manchester to this brutal atrocity, their offers of help, their willingness to do everything possible to comfort the victims and the bereaved.

At the heart of the European School Heads Association is the knowledge of the difference that schools can make to promote a vision for a just society and the values necessary to bring this about if our schools are seen as beacons of hope. Education isn’t a cost to society. Education is an investment in society. As school leaders must reject the mindset that knows the cost of everything but the value of nothing. That is the mindset which encourages a divided society, a society where hatred can flourish. All right minded people will condemn this latest atrocity. Remember, love will always conquer hate. Hope is the answer and in our role as leaders within our communities no matter where we live our schools must be beacons of hope. The people of Manchester are in our thoughts.

Clive Byrne, ESHA President,

European School Heads Association