



Friday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2020

Dear Signatories,

**RE: An open letter to decolonise The Emmbrook School curriculum**

I would like to thank all of the signatories of the open letter for sending such a clear and compelling message; a message that I am happy to say has my full support. The global protests in support of the Black Lives Matter have been a powerful symbol of the racism that persists throughout society. I have had the opportunity to read some of the personal experiences of former students that were shared on social media and I do not underestimate the bravery needed to do so. I know that I cannot undo what has happened in the past but reading those words has strengthened my resolve to work with our current students and the wider community to ensure that we continue to do better.

While it is pleasing that your letter acknowledges the positive actions we have taken to support BAME individuals, I want to stress that we are not complacent and understand that we must all share in the cause of promoting justice and equality. Schools are so well placed to contribute as they are places of education and we have a duty to inform our students of the past, open their eyes to varied viewpoints, celebrate diversity and promote fundamental values. The curriculum is a powerful tool in this cause. So too is the way that we respond to and resolve incidents of racism and discrimination.

In my letter I will draw on examples of actions that we have taken or plan to take. These are by no means exhaustive but, I hope, illustrative of reforms already being implemented. This is very much a journey and these measures alone will not get us to our destination, but my view is that we have acted and will continue to do so – warm words of support are simply not good enough. In short, things are changing, much has been achieved and, crucially, more change is required.

We are currently implementing a school-wide review of the curriculum as we move back to a traditional three-year KS3 and our Curriculum Leaders (Heads of Department) are currently leading this change ready for September. They have been directed to use this time as a chance to broaden the diversity of our curriculum experience. Lucy Fyfe (Assistant Headteacher) will be leading this over the coming year.

Given the focus on history in your open letter, I feel it would be useful to give a sense of the work currently being undertaken by our teachers. A good example of this is within our Year 7 curriculum, with a unit on immigration through time – so that students grasp the important role different groups have played in shaping the UK and how these groups have been treated. We began with understanding why immigration is important for us to look at. We then looked at immigration before 1066 and the contribution these groups made to shaping Britain.



During the lockdown, our live lessons have been very well attended and we have looked at linking examples from History with events in the current media. Year 7 have been impressive with the mature attitude that they have demonstrated and their thoughtful responses. We looked at a case study of Jewish immigration through time and the treatment of the Jewish community. We ended this by looking at all the different areas that Jewish people have influenced – business, entertainment, poetry and literature. Our next case study was Black immigration – we looked at the Windrush generation – how they were treated, their contribution, the Windrush Scandal and other modern events. This was followed by the 1960s and 1970s and how immigrants were treated at that time, specifically looking at events in Smethwick and the visit of Malcolm X. We are finishing the term by looking at immigrants on television through the years and symbols of Britishness and how many of those symbols we owe to immigration. Over the summer we will be planning lessons on the contribution of Southern Asian immigrants too.

This work will continue, not just in History, but across the School.

We have taken action to broaden the diversity of voices that we expose our students to. For example, we looked again at the summer reading lists for our A-level students. Our Business & Economics Department identified that every book we had previously recommended was written by a white male. Teachers took the opportunity to revise their recommendations to include a diversity of backgrounds and I am confident that this will be of great benefit to our students. We must ensure that we maintain this momentum and continue to seek out further opportunities to re-think; we would be keen to work with members of the community to support this.

While we have the ability to shape the curriculum experience of our students, being a community school we are required to deliver the National Curriculum. Having received your letter, I feel a strong sense of empowerment to write to the Secretary of State for Education on behalf of the broader Emmbrook community in support of deeper curriculum reform. I will therefore be writing to Gavin Williamson to call for a broadening of the curriculum in general and History, English and the arts in particular. I would also urge other signatories of the open letter to write directly to Mr Williamson to express their views regarding curriculum reform.

In the days that followed the death of George Floyd, I wrote to all students asking for their support fighting racism and discrimination. I was delighted by the strength of the response that I received and this has resulted in the formation of a staff and student Inclusion Working Party. The group has already met several times with Taj Bhambra (Deputy Headteacher) and me. This forum elicited student concerns and possible ideas for moving forwards. Our year leaders and other staff have also become involved and we are starting with a blank canvas, to think about a new approach to tackling discrimination in all of its forms. The group has decided to create bespoke material to tackle this agenda in a way that would involve all of the form tutors; we felt that we wanted and needed everyone in school involved. Therefore, every single tutor, year leader, other colleagues and students from the Working Party will have each produced something for us to share and use in September. This may be a presentation, a poster, some poetry and even song lyrics! We have a long way to go, but feel that we are heading in the right direction. Once COVID-19 allows us to safely, we are also planning on inviting guests to the School to support our work.



The physical environment will be utilised to support equality and promote anti-racism. In September, our Art & Design Department will be launching a year-long project to paint empowering, challenging and inspiring quotes around the school buildings. We want the students to suggest quotes that have meaning for them and we will ensure that they represent diversity, promote equality and challenge discrimination.

Our Governing Body are also supportive of our work. We have a governor leading on and working with school leaders regarding the issues of equality, racism and discrimination. Governors are now working to establish an Emmbrook schools group, incorporating representatives from the infant, junior and senior schools, to work collaboratively in search of solutions to promote equality and fight discrimination. Governors have also engaged with our School Council to strengthen the voice of students and, as a result, one such initiative in place for September is a letterbox where students can anonymously report any concerns that they have, so that we can act swiftly. This will sit as an addition to the reforms we have made to our Behaviour and Anti-Bullying Policy updates as another way that students can reach out for support.

In your letter you raise the idea of external workshops and awareness training. Interestingly, these were ideas that our students in the Working Party also suggested. I have already begun talking with a local headteacher to jointly procure such training so that we can pool our resources to secure high quality provision. This is another project that we will make a long term commitment to.

I recognise that there is still much to be achieved and I can confidently affirm that The Emmbrook School is anti-racist and committed to the cause of fighting discrimination in all forms. We want to reach out to the wider community to ensure a plurality of voices and experiences can contribute to and shape our plans for further action. I understand from an email exchange with one of the signatories, Katie Hodgetts, that there are individuals who are willing to engage with us and I would very much welcome further contact with them so that we can stand together in common cause.

With very best wishes,

**Nick McSweeney**  
Headteacher