

11 June 2020

Dear Former RGSW pupils

We are aware that there is an open letter in circulation and which has been signed by many former pupils regarding decolonising the School Curriculum and we have also received a number of emails as part of the 'Black Lives Matter' campaign. We would like to thank our alumni for raising this issue with us in such a thoughtful and measured way. We appreciate your comments and understand your concerns.

We fully appreciate that the curriculum in all schools in Britain has not always reflected a world view and clearly alumni from RGSW Schools, including Dodderhill will have had very different experiences, representative of education at the time that alumni attended school. Former Dodderhill pupils will understand that, by joining the RGSW Schools, we have been able to move the School forward in many areas and adapting the curriculum is clearly an opportunity to ensure that the girls receive a thoroughly modern education. We do appreciate that, as in most schools, attitudes in the past may have been different, but we can reassure you that we are working to ensure that RGS Dodderhill embraces change and its recent advances with digital technology is evidence that we are moving forward at quite a pace and will continue to do so, including in areas such as curriculum provision.

It is important to note that education is dynamic and the curriculum continues to change over time, sometimes through government directive but also as academic leaders in our Schools make decisions about what is important to be taught to our pupils. As independent schools, we do have a little more control over the curriculum than state schools. For this reason, we already teach topics which are not directly covered in the National Curriculum but which we consider to be important. Specifically, you raise the query over atrocities committed by the British Empire and this is taught in the RGS Worcester History curriculum, with topics such as the causes of the Indian Mutiny, the Opium Wars and the Slave Trade delivered. Such topics are taught extremely sensitively to raise awareness in the pupils of this key issue of atrocities committed in the name of Empire. The abolition of the Slave Trade is taught at RGS Dodderhill. We appreciate that teaching about gender equality is also extremely important – while the Suffragettes is a useful point of reference, it is the development of the Women's rights movement last Century and continued concerns over gender bias into this Century that do need reference and it is in RS and in the PSHCE programme that these, together with other sensitive topics about sexual prejudice and bias are addressed in a careful and balanced way.

In Year Nine, the History curriculum does include immigration and Empire 'Windrush', which all pupils study. We are looking to introduce Islamic Civilisations into the Year Seven History curriculum which provides the opportunity for a global perspective on human development including in medicine and science. At the same time, we have recently introduced Civil Rights and Vietnam into the Year Ten GCSE curriculum (removing Weimar Germany) and A level Politics includes the key topic of Civil Rights. While we appreciate these topics focus on the

USA, they do encourage discussion about Civil Rights globally, and the reality is that these are the topics available to us from lists made available by the Examination Boards.

At RGS Dodderhill, the PSHCE syllabus includes topics such as hate crime, terror and persecution, stereotyping and discrimination, refugees, extremism and radicalisation and propaganda and censorship. In addition, inspirational leaders are studied including Millicent Fawcett, Martin Luther-King, Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, Tenzin Gyatso, Aung San Suu Kyi, Banazir Bhutto, Shirin Ebadi. Religious prejudice and lesser known world faiths are included (Jainism, Bahaism, Confucianism, Shintoism, Taoism, Paganism and Zoroastrianism).

In RS at RGS Worcester, the programme of study includes different types of prejudice and discrimination that all demographic strata of society can be subjected to; this includes gender, sexuality, religion, race, age, disability, class and appearance. Pupils are taught the many and varied ways in which these can manifest themselves and the subtle reasons why people may hold a prejudice or be discriminatory to a certain social group. The effects of discrimination are also explained to enable as clear an understanding about these important issues as possible.

In order for this approach to be effective, our pupils look at these issues through the context of human rights and the importance of a rights-based system of social justice. Historic events play an important part in developing our pupils' understanding of these issues and several case studies are examined. These include: France's decision to ban the wearing of the Burqa in public in 2010; the history of the Civil Rights movement in the USA; the formation of the BLM movement in 2013; global feminist movements; and the use and importance of protest and speaking out against social injustice in all its forms. Throughout the RS schemes of work, the value and importance of all human beings is celebrated and the need for further work to protect everyone is highlighted.

As well as these contextual studies of historical and current issues, a significant amount of time is taken to explain the fragile nature of human rights. The role of the individual, of protest, of public and private institutions, and that of charities in protecting human rights cannot be understated and time is dedicated to helping the pupils understand these complicated links and interdependencies. Through this programme, the pupils are given a grounding in the importance of their responsibility, both in words and actions, to contribute positively, as global citizens, in the ongoing battle to protect and improve equality for all.

The curriculum beyond Year Nine, including topics in PSHCE, is largely dictated to Schools by the government and we fully support your view that the government needs to review its curriculum for GCSE and A Level to make sure that it is reflective of the world rather than focus on a Eurocentric view. It is particularly important that compulsory subjects such as English reflect world culture, since this is a subject that all pupils study. At the same time, at RGSW we do take the opportunities available to study BAME writers and address the issues in class raised by their writings. The GCSE English Literature Poetry, for example, is a particular opportunity which we take for our pupils to study writers who address cultures from around the world.

We will do all we can through the channels we have to push for syllabi set by the government to be reflective of global culture rather than Euro-centric. It is the case that, the narrowing of

the curriculum in the last set of reforms by the government has not helped to develop the breadth of experience of such issues for the pupils. The challenge is not our will to include global topics and tackle difficult and sensitive issues from the past, but curriculum time available. It is very important that such topics are not taught in a superficial way but are given the time for the pupils to explore each topic and fully understand its importance.

We fully appreciate that this is not just about compartmentalising topics into specific subjects (such as History, Religious Studies and English Literature); it is about ensuring that all subjects engage with the debate and that none present from a particular view. This can be unwittingly done, and it is extremely important that all areas of the curriculum are constantly reviewed to ensure that there is no bias in content or delivery and that all cultures are represented.

We also understand that we have the privilege of educating children from a young age and so ensuring that all subjects at all levels are taught entirely appropriately with a proper world (rather than Euro-centric) view is extremely important. This clearly applies to our Prep Schools as well as our Senior Schools. We carry a very significant responsibility to educate our pupils to be global citizens and this means confronting the challenges of the past, however uncomfortable these may be for some, as well as looking forward. As your letter states, assemblies and talks can be successful in engaging the whole school community and we do already cover such topics, although we can always do more.

We are in the process of setting up a Working Group to consider the curriculum across the RGSW Schools and to conduct a full review. This will include charting a pupil's educational journey through our schools to ensure that key topics are covered at important stages and the points that you make are addressed. The Group will also be looking at the whole curriculum and delivery to ensure that attitudes and approaches are entirely as they should be, without bias or prejudice. With representatives from all four Schools, the intention is to demonstrate how our Schools deliver a full, inclusive and powerful curriculum that confronts and tackles these issues.

We will be looking to engage pupils, parents and former pupils in this work and, what is important, is this will not be a "one off" review but rather an ongoing process with regular reviews and reporting back so that we can adapt and change our curriculum and above all ensure that attitudes and approaches in the education delivered are as they must be.

We are also reviewing all aspects of our operation. We have always been fully aware that, as day schools, the RGSW Schools reflect our surrounding population and so we need to work hard to ensure that we do not have any in-built bias as an institution which exists without us being aware. We do have a number of measures already in place to address this but we will look at further checks to ensure that our Schools, as important institutions in the West Midlands, are fully inclusive at all times.

When the Headmaster at RGS Worcester joined the School community six years ago, he was determined to put Inclusion at the heart of the School's message. Having been educated and having taught in schools in London which have majority BAME students and have a real focus on providing opportunity for all, he sees it as his role to ensure that the RGSW Schools are focused on education for all with no bias and no prejudice. The Heads of RGS Springfield, RGS The Grange and now RGS Dodderhill, as well as the Director of Finance and

Operations who leads the Support team, are fully committed to this vision and we will do all we can to ensure that our pupils and our whole community understand.

If any former pupils would like to discuss his further with your School then please do contact the appropriate Head. We would be very willing to engage with alumni on this topic and have the opportunity to learn from your own perceptions of your education at our Schools. We would like to suggest that this is best done by open discussion so that you can share your views and ideas and so please do contact office@rgsw.org.uk and we can arrange to meet (remotely, if necessary, given current restrictions). We look forward to hearing from you.

Please do review our Summary about the approach across RGSW on our website which we hope demonstrates our commitment to ensuring that equality remains a core part of our curriculum and that our pupils do have a full understanding of events of the past and the tools and ability to challenge in the future. There is always more we can do and we hope that, through continual review, we can ensure that equality remains a key priority in curriculum planning and across all aspects of an RGSW education. By working together, we can make a difference and education is clearly a key part in this; we are sorry if this may not have been the case in the past, reflective of education and society as a whole at that time.

Thank you for your letter which has provided further drive to review all that we do as schools to ensure that excellence in education is delivered, which includes full awareness of the past, engagement with the present and working towards a brighter future when atrocities such as the recent incident in America, and racist incidents in this country, are eradicated forever.

Yours faithfully

John Pitt	Sarah Atkinson	Gareth Hughes	Laura Brown
Headmaster	Headmistress	Headmaster	Headmistress
RGS Worcester	RGS Dodderhill	RGS The Grange	RGS Springfield