



The Abbey

The independent school for girls aged 3-18.

From the Chair of Governors : Mrs Elizabeth Harrison

12 June 2020

Dear Abbey Community,

I have been pleased and proud to read the current letter circulating on Facebook supporting the Black Lives Matter campaign that has been signed by over 600 former and current students and emailed to us today. It reinforces my belief that The Abbey School works hard to address all forms of inequality with all of our students from the Junior School to the Senior School and the Sixth Form. Your strength of feeling, your thoughtful analysis and your impatience to make society better are clear from your letter.

We, as a whole School community, are fully committed to continuing our regular debates and robust discussions around all forms of inequality and in particular, to make sure we create and continue an actively anti-racist environment at School.

We have many current examples of this commitment:

- The Senior School has been offering child refugees in Reading access to our Refugee Homework Club, providing additional support for their studies, for at least ten years.
- The Abbey regularly raises funds through its philanthropic activities year round for charities that tackle inequality in society. This year the Senior School chose to support Ufulu, a charity set up by one of our alumnae that aims to end period poverty for women in Likoma, Malawi
- In the Lower V, Peace and Reconciliation Day, we have had speakers from around the world who have spoken of their experiences of genocide, in, for instance, Rwanda and Serbia.
- Earlier this year, a Holocaust survivor and the grandfather of two of our students, came and spoke to the Upper IV about his experience of racial intolerance and injustice during World War II.
- In Philosophy and Theology, students explore the diversity of human identity and expression, responding to issues of prejudice and discrimination through dialogue, empathy, and shared responsibility.
- Our teachers have received INSET training from diversity and inclusion expert, Claire Harvey. This included conscious and unconscious bias.
- In a recent assembly we discussed the BLM campaign, during which students were invited to be part of the in-School Amnesty group looking at BLM. They have produced an amazing newsletter to be published soon.
- Lizzie, Kiran and Anika in Upper V (2020) have produced a very comprehensive list of resources on racism which is available here - https://docs.google.com/document/d/1YZdcJm4u0355OGxM4dDH_sndS63B_nZ-bm2tfBA9CDc/edit?ts=5ee08f48
- Mia has coordinated a group of LV pupils to produce a set of resources in powerpoint format available here -

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1IVcfffquJaeih_3xsqyVckmPUcUxqOjLok5OPzwA0em4/edit#slide=id.p

- The Junior School Humanities curriculum was updated last year to ensure that the contexts are relevant to all students and that 'histories' are multi-racial
- Thematic inquiry-based learning addressing themes such as migration and conflict facilitates this
- The Junior School values-led assembly programme provides opportunities to challenge stereotypes and unconscious bias
- Our History department seeks to create a diverse curriculum by investigating the Black experience from the great civilisations of African history, through the experience of Empire soldiers in the First World War to civil rights and its significance in society today. The Hidden Histories project is currently on display in the Senior School. This year, they hosted the Miranda Kaufmann lecture on Black Tudors.
- Tanisha (2016) produced artwork for her A-level examination on the BLM campaign to local acclaim. This has been highlighted on our website since 2016
- Flick (2020) has just produced an Artwork to fundraise for BLM via an online auction

We are delighted that so many of our Alumnae have offered to be involved in workshops on the topic of racism and inequality. For this we are very appreciative. Over the years the Abbey has become a more diverse and multicultural community reflecting changes in our local area. The list above is impressive but we are not in any way complacent. We know there will be much more we can and will do.

Our first task will be to conduct a BAME curriculum audit - to help us ensure that we are doing the best we can to include and acknowledge appropriately contributions made by people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds in arts, culture and science. You have made suggestions too for other actions and initiatives which will inform our thinking in the months ahead.

This is an important moment for society in general and for the Abbey School community. We are ready to respond. When we have become aware of issues and inequalities we have tried to bring these to the fore, and address them. We know that we may not always have got things right but we are keen to learn and to improve in all aspects of life and learning at the Abbey.

On behalf of my fellow Governors, the leadership teams and all the staff at The Abbey, I want to ensure you of our full support, not only for the current BLM movement, but for all movements that tackle racism and inequality in every form. We promise to continue our journey to create a culture of fairness for all and we delight in the difference and diversity of our own multicultural community.

Yours sincerely,



Mrs Elizabeth Harrison
Chair of Governors