



Mon, 8 Jun, 15:10

Dear Alice and Melanie,

Thank you for your letter to the school. The Headteacher, Jo Butler, has asked me to respond to you on her behalf. We are glad that the letter we sent out on the 5th June has been well-received. Due to the length of the letter already, I was unable to go into more detail about the work that we're already doing in decolonising the curriculum at Cotham School but I can outline it for you here.

We registered at the end of last academic year to become one of the pilot schools to develop the One Bristol Curriculum of which you may have heard:

<https://cognitivepaths.co.uk/onebristol/>. We are one of only 3 secondary schools in the city to do so.

Our commitment to developing this curriculum is such that, this academic year, our staff have been working on completely overhauling our KS3 (Years 7, 8 and 9) curriculum. I created a set of principles for our curriculum redesign and include one of the core principles below:

- Develops **cultural capital**, recognises **diverse and Bristol's local history and achievement**, provides enriching experiences to level up the social playing field, links learning to the world, current affairs and social issues, and engages students in **thinking about 'big ideas'** outside of their limited life experiences achieving **breadth**. Encourages disadvantaged students to diversify their interests e.g. taking up Arts-based subjects, widening their extracurricular.

Every subject has, therefore, been working passionately and with clarity, starting with Year 7, to create a curriculum that celebrates BAME history and achievement. I have emphasised the importance of not just rooting the curriculum in BAME struggles but also in achievement. We have spent a significant amount of time preparing staff to create this curriculum, delivering sessions on unconscious bias, discussing why it is important to challenge the colonial narrative and how it can be done, inviting in key speakers such as Dr Shawn Sobers at UWE to inspire staff, and working closely with Cognitive Paths (commissioned to deliver the One Bristol Curriculum) to ensure that we're on the right path. These four points you mention in your email are precisely what our KS3 curriculum review is focusing on:

- include a variety of historical teachings, that touch not only on the UK's "highlights", but the realities of colonialism and slavery at the hands of our ancestors
- include geopolitical history and perspectives from other countries, encompassing each continent
- ensure English curriculum readings include texts from equitably balanced white and Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour authors, and ensure this balance is reflected in the literature available in the school library
- ensure music/art/textile lessons appreciate the cultural influence Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour artists have had throughout history, and how they have used their medium to amplify their voices, and that it does so without appropriation

I met with each Head of Subject last month to scrutinise their progress so far and offer critical feedback - I was impressed with how committed our staff are to developing a curriculum that is inclusive and inspiring to all of our diverse student body. You may wonder why we have only started with Year 7; however, I truly believe that we need to get this right so that it is not a tokenistic nod towards diversity but a deep uprooting of the way in which we teach history, literature, the arts, sport and everything else, so I have focused on getting the whole staff body to come on board and move collectively in the right direction, and I feel that we have really managed to achieve that this year. Despite the focus on the Year 7



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curriculum, subjects have been motivated to begin revamping the Year 8 curriculum already and to reconsider what they are teaching higher up the school as well. Teachers are really excited to begin teaching the new curriculum to Year 7 and I am looking forward to sharing what we have done with the One Bristol Curriculum - our resources, credited to Cotham, will go into a centralised bank of curriculum resources that every secondary school in Bristol will be able to draw upon.

I would also like to address another point you raise about reflecting the diversity called for in the curriculum in our teaching hierarchy and enabling support for BAME staff to succeed and lead. When I moved to Bristol 12 years ago to become an Assistant Headteacher in a school within the Cabot Learning Federation (CLF), I was the only secondary school senior leader in Bristol, and most possibly in the South-West, from a BAME background. I made it my mission then to work on supporting other BAME colleagues to positions of leadership within the education sector. As part of the BAMEEd and WomenED networks this work continues. Cotham School is the primary host for the Aspiring BAME Leaders programme (run by the teaching school, CLF Institute). One of the biggest challenges facing all Bristol schools is the recruitment of BAME colleagues into the profession in the first place. I am really pleased to be able to say that year-on-year at Cotham we have seen increasing diversity in our staff, most specifically in the teachers who are role models to our students, not just in the support staff. We continue to be committed to increasing the diversity of our workforce and recognise that there is still work to do - I am keen to work more closely with the local universities and other teacher training providers to encourage the recruitment of BAME persons into teacher training programmes but also to ensure that Cotham School is high on the list of schools for BAME trainee teachers to be offered a placement.

Finally, as someone who has personally experienced much overt and institutional discrimination and racism in my lifetime I (along with key colleagues, both BAME and non-BAME) am passionate about addressing these issues directly with students, having really honest conversations with them about race and sharing my personal stories and learning from them, something I have been doing for the last 4 years since I started at Cotham. This article in the national magazine for secondary schools explains one way in which we have been doing this: <https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/best-practice/racist-language-an-effective-response/>. We also work closely with organisations like SARI, the Black Police Association, TALO and the Bristol Somali Forum among others to ensure that we educate all of our students and staff regularly about hate crime and developing wider cultural awareness of our BAME communities.

Please be rest assured that, as alumni of Cotham School, you can be proud of the lead that we are taking in the city to decolonise the curriculum, increase our diverse curriculum and tackle racism and injustice.

Kind regards

Domini

8 Jun 2020, 20:59

Dear Domini,

Thank you for such a well informed and timely response. As students who had little to no guidance or teaching on these issues we feel very reassured from this response.

We would like to share this, or a version of this, with the other signatories. Would you be ok with this? Is there anything else you would like to say to those that have signed this document?



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It is brilliant to hear that not only are you are doing the work, but also are planning to share this and influence other schools.

Thank you again, we look forward to seeing the changes take place.

Best wishes,

Alice and Mel

Tue, 9 Jun, 11:34

Dear Alice and Mel

I am more than happy for you to share my response with the other signatories. I would like to add that we established a BAME Working Group at the end of the last academic year and we have a strategic plan for affecting systemic change in the school. We have 5 objectives behind which sit some clear short-term and longer-term actions:

1. Create an inclusive curriculum for all
2. Increase parental engagement (with a focus on Black Caribbean and Somali parents)
3. Create an inclusive environment around the school site
4. Develop BAME student empowerment
5. Increase BAME staff recruitment and retention

In relation to objective 4, it would be really great if we have passionate alumni who are BAME, or allies of BAME issues, to draw upon on occasion, perhaps to come in to talk to a few students (when we are back up and running properly) or be available for a video call. I don't yet know what this could look like but, if we have a pool of such alumni, the BAME working group can put some good thought into it.

Kind regards

Domini