

Dear Mrs Laybourn and School Governors,

We are writing to you as alumni of Burgess Hill Girls with regards to recent events surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement. As a private educational institution, you have one of the most influential platforms to educate the next generation. In this letter, we aim to illustrate the urgent need to decolonise the curriculum and suggest changes that can be made to ensure race-inclusive thinking.

Nationally, there has been an exclusion of certain histories from our education. Black British history, colonial history, LGBTQ+ history and migration history are predominant examples. This ignorance of our past has created the denial of our present, and it only allows the structural and interpersonal violence and oppression against our marginalised communities to continue. Our education system is undeniably responsible for enabling this environment to persist. As an educational and pastoral establishment, we hope you can acknowledge the previous neglect of these issues and champion our ethos by creating change.

Studies highlight the importance of having inclusive and interdisciplinary subjects. The Macpherson Report, produced over 20 years ago, showed that cultural diversity within the curriculum is one of the ways to prevent racism. The more recent Windrush Review recommended that colonial and migration history should be taught. Although it is not currently compulsory in the UK to teach colonialism, we urge you to change the exam board or engage with exam boards to implement such a change. In a recent [Impact of Omission Survey \(data may have changed since the time of writing\)](#):

- 86.2% of pupils were educated on the Tudors in-depth as part of their curriculum, whereas only 9.9% learned about the role of slavery in British Industrialisation
- 72.6% learned about The Great Fire of London, whereas only 7.6% learned about Britain's colonisation of Africa.
- 72.1% were taught about the Battle of Hastings, whereas only 36.6% learnt about Transatlantic slavery.

These are aspects of history that should not be ignored or brushed over. The study of colonialism is one of the most important ways to understand the roots of economic processes, global politics, social relations and power dynamics. We have found that Burgess Hill Girls' social science curriculum lacks a critical perspective of the UK's racist and colonial past. For instance, in History, crime and punishment is discussed at length, but to what extent does the curriculum delve into the unjust criminalisation of black people in the UK and America? While we can acknowledge that The American Civil Rights Movement is taught in History at GCSE level, the teaching doesn't go far enough in making students socially aware of how active racism still is in our society today, with the racism in the UK possibly being on the same scale as America. There must also be acknowledgment of the reality of colonialism, slavery and post-slavery and an honest portrayal of the British colonial empire. As alumni, we feel we left school ignorant of these subject areas. We want to make sure that compulsory education no longer produces generations that are oblivious to our nation's

darker history. Therefore, we are appealing to you to make an urgent effort to help change the state of British education; it is in your hands.

We ask that you consider adopting modules such as:

- **OCR GCSE** (9–1) History B specification Migrants to Britain, c.1250 to present. [Details here.](#)
- **OCR A Level** History Y320 From Colonialism to Independence: The British Empire 1857 - 1965.
- **OCR A Level** History Y321 The Middle East 1908 - 2011: Ottomans to Arab Spring.
- **AQA A Level** History 1J The British Empire, c1857–1967.
- **Edexcel A Level** History Paper 3 Option 35.1: Britain: losing and gaining an empire, 1763–1914.

Resources to support creative teaching for some of these modules can be found [here](#). Adopting modules like these would be a starting point, but it is not enough to leave this education as optional GCSE / A Level choices.

Other ways we suggest you can change the curriculum:

- **History** should go beyond the UK's achievements and acknowledge the realities of colonialism and slavery. Topics such as WWI and WWII should include the forced inclusion of citizens of the commonwealth and events that went hand in hand such as the Bengal famine which killed around 3 million Bengalis and the British concentration camps in Kenya created under Churchill's rule. It is imperative that we are not biased in the way we retell history, and give space to hear about other countries' histories. Another example would be to study Hong Kong's relation to British colonisation, especially as a large proportion of international students are from Hong Kong. It would certainly mean a lot for those students to see that the struggles of their ancestors is being acknowledged by the school they've chosen to enroll in.
- **English** literature at GCSE level studies well-renowned texts such as those of Shakespeare or E.M Foster, and while they are important works to study, there should be an inclusion of Black-British authors who establish alternative perspectives of love, belonging and identity. Studying books by black authors that do not engage with race as a main theme is still celebrating black art and legacy, it is a way of decentering whiteness and gives way for a broader representation of what English literature includes. The Author Chimamanda Ngozi gives an amazing Ted Talk discussing representation in literature and in life [here](#). Brilliant authors such as Bernardine Evaristo, Reni Eddo-Lodge, Jackie Kay, Nikesh Shukla, Hanif Kureishi and Akala offer novels or books from a post-colonial perspective. Such books encourage students to engage in informed conversations about race and class within society, which are essential in dismantling inherent harmful systemic ideologies.
- **Life Lessons** felt like a missed opportunity to really engage with topics like Black Lives Matter. While we saw an array of classic films, we believe that the time can be used to engage with more current and relevant topics. For instance, during Black

History Month, making an effort to show documentaries, TED talks or Films about or produced by Black people during Black History Month.

- **Economics** should include an assessment of how colonisation laid the foundations for the UK's economic model and shaped ideas of modern commerce;
- **Geography** could further address 20th century British and European colonisation in African land and how their actions exploited Africa. It should also highlight the underlying classism of Malthusian population theory which targeted poorer families, in order to contextualise problematic population discourse of today. Other aspects that should be addressed are the pitfalls of globalisation, neo-colonialism, trade and migration to really understand the roots of modern human geography.

What we are essentially pushing for is that social science subjects are studied with intersectionalities in mind, particularly race, class and feminism (although there are many other intersectionalities to consider). Without regard to these intersectionalities our analysis of these subjects falls short and carries limited perspectives.

Marcin B. Stanek (2019) *Decolonial education and geography: Beyond the 2017 Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers annual conference* is a well-written piece that argues why changes like the ones we have suggested are needed.

We also ask that you also seek out educators who are working to decolonise the curriculum, and hire them to help you achieve this across year groups. Examples are [The Black Curriculum](#), an initiative that teaches Black history in schools to 8-16 year olds, and [Decolonising SOAS](#), a workgroup at the School of Oriental and African Studies focused on decolonisation.

As a school with an overwhelmingly high proportion of white students, we urge you to not only teach about British Black history, but also include conversations such as white privilege, white supremacy and systemic racism. For those of us who are white, it is our duty to engage in such conversations in order to really understand how we are complicit in racism and upholding structures that benefit us over any other ethnicities. Books that have been circulating this past week include 'Why I'm no longer talking to white people about race' by Reni Eddo-Lodge, 'Me and White supremacy' by Layla F Saad and 'White fragility' by Robin DiAngelo. This is not just applicable for students, but for staff as well. Staff need to have knowledge of anti-racism in order to educate students adequately.

Another point to note is the lack of diversity of staff. When we were in school there was no BAME staff members to our knowledge in the early to mid 2010s. It is important to not only give equal opportunity to educational workers, but bring in wider knowledge and perspective. There is a wealth of research to support the benefit of having a representative staff team and the attainment of students. The more diversity within members of staff, the more likely it will be that there's diversity within students wanting to enroll in the school. Representation matters, it's important for students to have members of staff in this position and be able to look up to such people.

We are trying to go beyond not being racist, but being actively anti-racist through education reform. We would like to use our white privilege to enact positive change in our community, and for us that starts with our school. Please join us in making your interest in this matter known to the government and exam boards so they might take our calls for reform more seriously.

We look forward to your response.

Signed by:

Alice Gonzalez Roskilly 2012-2016

Issra Wiheba 2008-2016

Phoebe Slade 2008-2016

Lucy Puddephatt 2011-2016

Beth Howell 2006-2016

Hatty Paine 2013 - 2015

Caroline Welford 2009-2016

Nikita Khandwala 2009-2016

Phoebe Honey 2009-2016

Phoebe Holder 2008-2014

Aisha Mohammed 2011-2016

Cherry Ho 2012-2016

Daisy Hector 2011 - 2015

Eleanor Dalton 2015-2017

Ciara Fowler 2013-2017

Tilly Loughton 2007-2016

Lizzie Fuller 2004-2016

Olivia Harding 2014

Nicole Fung 2004 - 2016

Olivia Charles 2009-2014

Megan Hector 2006-2011

Nicola Whelan 2009-2016

Scarlett Scotland 2014

Rachel Spofforth 2004-2011

Bea Farmelo 2000-2011

Millie Farmelo 2000-2008

Robyn Lacey 2008 - 2015

Becky Davess 2013 - 2015

Marica Macnamara 2008 - 2015

Ellie Powell 2008 - 2015

Molly Comerford 2009-2017

Alexandra Wright 2005 - 2015

Lois Lacey 2011 - 2013

Lydia Hayman 2008 - 2015

Chloe de Souza 1996 - 2011

Tara Springate 2006 - 2015

Sophie Springate 2006 - 2017

Emily Hayman 2010 - 2018

Charis Robinson 2011-2018

Hannah Graham 2004 - 2018

Tatra Blewett-Mundy 2011-2018

Apoorva Singh 2014-2018

Kelly Smith 2004 - 2011

Katarina Graham 2006 - 2013

Harriet Housby 2006-2015

Claire de Souza 1996 - 2004

Catherine Swainston 2016-2018

Nadine Nagen- 1998-2006

Sophie Lightfoot 2000 - 2006

Tanya Savage 2004 - 2011

Florence Merrett 2013 - 2018

Phao Wheatley 2002-2013

Holly Johnson 2006-2011

Zoe Jag-Nathan 2006-2013

Katie Kenward 2008 - 2011

Rhiannon Deere 2001-2006

Kayley Rainton 2005-2013

Hannah Pilley Rabbs 2008-2013

Cydney Sturley 2011-2016

Anna Morgan 2011 - 2018

Isabel McQuillin 2011 - 2018

Emma Clarke 2002-2017

Nell Sumners 2013-2018

Jessica Smith 2009- 2016

Sabrina Draude 2008-2013

Samiah Khan 2008-2014

Hannah Spofforth 2002-2009

Hannah Mactear 2005-2013

Claudia James 2000-2014

Hannah Fitzpatrick 1998-2013

Lucy O'Reilly 1999 - 2012

Georgina Labus 2000-2014

Emma Fisher 2007-2012

Avalon Ridler 1998-2013

Lauren Charsley 2003-2011

Amelia Harding 2002 - 2012

Amy Scott 2006 - 2014

Ferne Miller 2008 - 2017

Chloe Miller 2006 - 2015

Romy McCutcheon 2008 - 2019

Alice Reffin 2008-2017

Kristina Marsh 2009 - 2016

Cara Eckstein 2014-2019

Charlotte Vint 2009 - 2017

Kate Mactear 2003-2011

Sorrel Peel-Yates 2013-2020

Ula Charles 2014 - 2019

Alicia Critchley 2009 - 2016

Georgie Wallwork 2012 - 2019

Isobel Critchley 2009 - 2019

Megan Stone 2006 - 2017

Freya Loughton 2005 - 2014

Beth King 2007 - 2014

Jessica Hurst 2010-2019

Katie Phillips 2007 - 2012

Hannah McLennan 2007 - 2015

Saskia FitzSimons 2012 - 2019

Sophia Davies 2004 - 2014

Sophie Rowson 2008 - 2019

Sarah Rogers 2009 - 2015

Millie Peel-Yates 2012 - 2019

Sophie McGee-Hilton 2011-2017

Maddy Bravery 2006 - 2011

Olivia West 2004 - 2015

Luella McCarthy 2006-2020

Dawn Zandile Ngakudzwe Khaya Biza 2006 - 2013

Alice Bravery 2001 - 2008

Sophie Brown 2001 - 2006

Laura Page 2011 - 2021

Sauda Husna Imam 2013 - 2017

Megan Watmough 2019 - 2021

Rhiannon Whelan 2004 - 2010

Madeleine Whelan 2008 - 2012

Catrin Jones 2001 - 2008

Emily Hutchinson 2013 - 2020

Lara Norris 2015 - 2020

Hannah Drage 2015 - 2020

Jemini Chanda 2016-2020

Katie Lane 2008-2015

Millie Hall 2001-2015

Elizabeth Edwards 1999 - 2015

Sophie Swan 2002-2008

Lily Frost 2002-2014

Anna Frost 2004-2015

Fiona Goring 2016 - 2018

Freya Ward 2008-2015

Hattie Roberts 2012-2017

Chloë Gibbons 2001-2008

Abigail Suggate 2004-2011

Rosie Henderson 2009-2012

Rebecca Noyes 2006-2008

Hollie Spencer 2001-2015

Imogen Orchard 2001-2015

Sally Emerson 2004-2015

Emily Kelly 2007-2015

Harriet Jenner 2001-2015

Katharine Bull 1996 - 2008

Alice Fodder 1999 - 2008

Harriet Bull 1998-2010

Anna Prendergast 2002-2011

Florence Moon 1997 - 2011

Constance Moon 1998 - 2013

Xenia Bellwood 2013 - 2015

Georgia King 2005 - 2012

Annabel Locke 2004 - 2014

Sarah Locke 2004 - 2010

Sophie Floydd 2002 - 2012

Olivia Floydd 2006 - 2019

Shabnam Gould 2000-2012

Emma Battishill 2016 - 2021

Adeorite Adele-Adewole 2014-2019

Felicity Coghlan 2004 - 2010

Emma Lawrence 2010 - 2019

Lynn Yip 2017 - 2019

Normandie Milkins 2015-2019

Georgie Bendall 2012-2019

Prissha Ganesan 2017-2019

Anna Kelly 2011-2020

Mia Arditi 2006 - 2020

Freya Burleigh 2011-2020

Emily Church 2018-2020

Stefani Hiestermann 2016-2019

Amy Edwards 2011 - 2020

Issy Wallwork 2010 - 2017

Lucca Peel-Yates 2017-current

Jessica Colley 2007-2010

Hannah Dunsby 2011-2020

Lottie Hinton 2013-2020

Harriet Pringle 2016-present

Nadia Bartlett 2012-2019

Esme Godkin 2014-2020

Eleanor Reffin 2008-2018

Thea MacDonald 2001-2015

Simi Ramshaw 2015-2020

Emily Dunsby 2011-present

Emma Naunton 2013-2020

Verity Clarke 2011-2020

Alice Beaumont 2009-2017

Lucy Bennett 2012-2020

Sophie Duffield 2010-2015

Dora McDowall 2011-2014

Olly Player 2012-2018

Nico Howells-Green 2000-2010

Georgina Wrigg 2014-present

Mollie Izzard Davey 2004 - 2019

Helen Aitchison 2017-2019

Chloe Shilton 2007-2016

Emma Adams 1997-2010

Aminah Zahrah Chowdhury 2007-2017

Elizabeth Cody 2004-2010

Sophie Scott -2014