



# Chew Valley School

Learn      Grow      Achieve

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Dear Alumni of Chew Valley School,

Thank you for sending us a letter that details your concerns about the curriculum taught at our school. We are incredibly proud that you have all gone into the world and taken with you the values of your families and our school. We value your peaceful activism in a world which needs people to speak up against things that are wrong with society. It genuinely is lovely to hear from our alumni – particularly when they want to make the world a better place.

We also want to state really clearly that we recognise that racism has no place in our community and that much needs to be done to ensure that we do not allow anyone to believe it has a place in our school. We too recognise and agree that black lives matter.

You will remember, possibly because you took part in them, our Change and Create committees which decide on, campaign and change things in school and the world. These are still going strong. Our Climate Action team was on BBC Breakfast recently talking about their work, before going to the march in Bristol attended by Greta Thunberg. All of this was supported by us. We are very proud of the work these teams do to ensure we make good decisions in shaping our school.

For the last few years, we have been reviewing our curriculum to try and ensure that it fits with the values of school and the idea that a knowledge rich curriculum is a way to gain power. You mentioned in your letter that you would like the curriculum “decolonised” and by that we presume that you would like the voices of a variety of people to be heard, rather than simply those of the white, male heritage.

The curriculum content we teach in school is defined by two things: firstly the National Curriculum; secondly at GCSE and A level by exam boards. We have been an academy since February 2018 and this has now allowed us more freedom to choose what we teach in some areas.

For example, the “new” English Literature GCSE has removed the study of all American writers. Our English department felt that removing texts such as “Of Mice and Men” and “To Kill A Mockingbird” were wrong, so they are now taught in Year 9. In fact, the whole of the curriculum in English in that year looks at the ways different people and cultures are represented. It’s entitled “Civil Rights, Prejudices and Respect”. So students study “The Merchant of Venice” looking at anti-Semitism; poetry from other cultures and traditions to think about identity and belonging; how different groups are portrayed in the media; and civil rights reportage.

The history curriculum has also been radically changed in the last two years. In your letter you ask why we teach a white, Eurocentric curriculum. In fact our curriculum topics in Year 7 have a comparative study of British and Roman empires exploring the nature, impact and the problematic legacy of the British empire. In Year 8, we cover the American Civil rights movement and link this to the bus boycott in Bristol. Students also study Independence in India, and in Year 9 students have a choice of assignments one of which being on migration to Britain. There are also many more areas where the themes of power and protest are explored in great depth, across GCSE and A level. Our History department have also brought in a focus on Black History month for the last two years, and have led Remembrance assemblies that highlight the role of BAME people, women and Commonwealth subjects in fighting in the two World Wars so that different stories are being told to our students.

Our PSHRE curriculum has also shown strong advocacy for representing “difference” in their resources and lessons. During the last two years they have tweaked and changed their curriculum to better elevate the voices and representation of BAME people. The voices of LGBTQ+ people have for many years been clear in this area and across the school, but in drop down days on human rights in Year 9 and diversity in Year 8 the many and various stories of BAME people are being told. We are also incredibly proud of the work our Equalities Team does to ensure that we have kept on with this work over the course of many years.

Our geography curriculum has distinct units on all of the continents but specifically teach Asia and Africa as stand-alone modules which look at diversity and culture.

And as you would expect, we can show you how our art, music, dance and drama curricula also tell the stories of different countries, peoples and their cultures. This is also true of the representation of “inspirational” and “memorable” BAME people talked about in our assembly and pastoral programme.

You asked about how we support the development of our BAME colleagues and we can tell you that we have a systemic process for developing and supporting our staff, which is tailored to their wishes and needs.

While we know this is not a work that it is completed; it is still work in progress and needs more attention, so we are grateful that you have reminded us to look deeper, check our standards and keep working on ensuring that we make a curriculum that shows all communities in a conscious light. We have met as a staff group this week to discuss how we can move forward so that we can plan sustained action to continue to improve.

Our commitments to you are these:

- we will continue to develop systemic processes that support and develop our BAME students and staff
- we will be self-critical and recognise that this is a long term project, not a “quick” fix; this is not discussion, it’s rooted in practice
- we will engage with you, and other stakeholders, about how we’re changing and developing

Please stay in touch and come to visit us to follow up on how we’re going with our progress. If you would like to keep communicating or visit us, when we can do this, please contact [enquiries@chewvalleyschool.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@chewvalleyschool.co.uk) and we can meet. We’d love to see you.

Kind regards

The ‘Black Lives Matter’ staff working group on behalf of the school.