

Queen Mary's Grammar School



QMGs updates 10-6-20

Dear parents and students

At a time of national uncertainty and troubles on the other side of the Atlantic, I feel proud to lead a school with inclusion and diversity at the heart of its *Pastoral Charter*. I feel proud to identify an international outlook as one of our four pillars. I feel proud to represent a community where people have their voice and ignorance is challenged.

One of the huge losses (amongst many) of school closure, is the absence of whole school assemblies; our chance to come together as one and talk about issues that are sometime difficult to hear. In my penultimate assembly before lockdown, I told the school the story of me standing up to racism on a busy train back from London the previous weekend. I asked the school the question "Why would you stand on by?" The most memorable assemblies and activities from my time at QMGs have been where people have shared their stories and their journeys. I hope that we can do this again soon, but I am pleased that past and present students have been in touch this week to share their thoughts, which Mrs McPhee captures below.

A think piece for the week

#BlackLivesMatter - where do we go from here? (Mrs McPhee)

I felt energised this week to receive e-mails from current and former pupils eager to ensure that our school plays its role in responding to the Black Lives Matter protests that are taking place in the UK, the US, and other locations in Europe. Once again, I see the drive to make Queen Mary's Grammar School a place where all feel safe, and that different identities are understood, valued and celebrated. One of the aspects of my job that I enjoy the most is that being PSHEE Coordinator means I have a central role to play in this regard, and I strongly believe that education is the answer to many of society's problems (if not all of them). This year alone, we have welcomed a disability awareness campaigner into school, delivered lessons on autism awareness, and continued our monthly visits to Acorn care home. Now, however, is an appropriate time for me to reflect on where we are at in terms of teaching pupils about the systemic racism and biases which led to the death of not only George Floyd, but of course, many, many more black people at home and abroad.

We are extremely lucky at QMGs to welcome pupils from a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and to come from an area enriched by this diversity, but that does not automatically absolve any of us of the responsibility to continue to educate ourselves, listen to the voices of those who have been marginalised and engage in thoughtful discussion. White people such as myself need to move beyond simplistic responses and be open to delving deeper and getting uncomfortable. Being naturally interested in learning from and about people whose life experiences are very different to mine, my reading list from last year included *Becoming*, by Michelle Obama, *A Piece of Cake* by Cupcake Brown, *The Boy with the Topknot* by Sathnam Sanghera and *It's Not About the Burqa* by Mariam Khan, but as I write this, it feels like this too sounds like I'm desperately trying to prove to you, my readers, many of whom are not white, that I am no racist.

Last summer, since my interest was piqued by reading *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* by Reni Eddo-Lodge, I planned, and have since delivered, a Year 10 PSHEE lesson on implicit racial bias and where it can lead. Being only nine at the time of his death, the Stephen Lawrence case is in my living memory, but only as a vague awareness that this was a big news story, and I knew nothing about the long struggle for justice fought by Doreen and Neville Lawrence in the many years afterwards until I watched an excellent documentary last year. I have learned the difference between prejudice and racism, and that the latter runs as a thread through the institutions on which our country is built - education, health, justice - even in the 21st century, when we like to think we are morally superior to the generations that came before us.

My lesson is based to a large extent on one of my stand-out books from last year: *Biased* by Dr Jennifer Eberhardt, a black woman who explains that unconscious ideas and assumptions about those racialised differently to ourselves is to a certain extent natural, but because these biases can influence our decision-making and actions, sometimes - like in the case of Arnaud Arbery in the US in February - with tragic consequences, we need to go through the

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uncomfortable process of making the unconscious conscious. It is not an easy or quick process, and none of us is immune, but if we are honest with ourselves and start to notice when these biases are present, then we are moving in the right direction. I also look for other ways in which I can bring attention to the issue of representation - for example, in the PSHEE lesson on local government, where pupils learn about how town and city councils are run, I make sure pupils know that black and brown people are underrepresented as councillors, and we explore what the knock-on effects of that might be for citizens.

So where do we go from here? The first thing I would say is that we all need to keep learning. We need to accept that we will feel uncomfortable, whether it is while reflecting on our own assumptions, thoughts or behaviours, listening to others when they point out our biased attitudes or actions, or trying to signal to others theirs. We need to encourage a culture of gentle, mutual support in calling out problematic language or attitudes (sometimes disparagingly now called "virtue-signalling") and listen to the voices of others with the intent to understand. Vitally, we need to keep reading. I have already mentioned several titles, and am currently enjoying *Natives: Race & Class in the Ruins of Empire* by Akala, one of Mr Farnell's highly recommended books on the subject. However, for younger pupils, I would suggest *This Book is Anti-Racist* by Tiffany Jewell as a good starting point.

I am very much enjoying my exploration of this issue, and have been brave enough this week to start really engaging in anti-racism. In *White Fragility* Robin Deangelo says that "what we need to be doing for the rest of our lives [is] engaging in ongoing self-awareness, continuing education, relationship building, and actual antiracist practice". I invite everyone reading this, however you identify, to join me on this fascinating, difficult, necessary journey (if you haven't yet embarked on it yourself), and support others on theirs. I am excited and hopeful about what this means for the social and spiritual growth of our school community, and I am ready to hear your voice.

Partial re-opening, DfE guidance and home learning

As I mentioned previously, the new DfE guidance states that:

"Secondary schools, sixth form, and further education colleges to begin [from 15th June] some face to face support with year 10 and 12 pupils, although we do not expect these pupils to return on a full-time basis at this stage"

I attach with this email a separate letter for Year 10/12 parents about our plans for partial re-opening. We have carried out extensive risk assessment and have liaised with the safety advisors to the MAT. Our approach is cautious at this time and guided by our unique circumstances, including how far our students travel. We have consulted with staff on the successes/drawbacks of online learning and how we can expand this further.

For those not required in from Years 10/12, along with all students in Years 7-9, the emphasis on home learning will continue for the summer term and we will maintain to our support via Teams and other online sources. It is important that students engage with this content and liaise with staff if there are issues.

The DfE have also published information, guidance and support for parents and carers of secondary school age children who are learning at home during the coronavirus outbreak.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/help-secondary-school-children-continue-their-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

I will, of course, continue to keep you up to date with changes and developments.

Pupil Senior Leadership Team 2020-21

Following a challenging, multi-stage recruitment process, I am delighted to announce that Matthew Daniels has been selected for the position of Captain of School and Darcy Crocker as Head Girl. They will be supported by a team of 6 vice captains of school: Guruleen Kahlo, Harjeet Wilkhu, Manveer Wilkhu, James Fearon, Laura Serkina, Yash Jiwa

Congratulations to all of these students!

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Year 9 GCSE options (Mr Lax)

I am pleased to inform Year 9 pupils in that they have all got their first choice subjects. This is because we have expanded the number of groups in some subjects in order to accommodate the increased numbers coming through. If any pupils would like to change their options before September, Mr Lax may be able to accommodate some shifting but cannot guarantee that for everyone, as obviously groups will be pretty close to capacity. A parental email to Mr Lax would suffice at m-lax@qmgws.walsall.sch.uk

QM scholars

QM Scholars is for the most curious and intellectually ambitious students of Queen Mary's Grammar School and it (or a version of it) is running in lockdown. If you are in KS4 or KS5, then you can join our MS Team using the code 3dzn80s. Once you have joined, you will have access to the reading material, updated week-by-week. The post function of the Team will be available to you to discuss, debate and ask questions about the ideas at play in the reading.

The third seminar is convened by Mr Dryhurst and deals with the nature and role of comedy. Reading is taken from George Orwell, the twentieth century essayist (attached as a PDF).

PSHEE (Mrs McPhee)

A PDF document is attached to this email from the PSHE Association, advising parents on how to approach PSHE-related issues at home.

In addition, the link below takes you to NewsWise for families, giving parents activities they can do with their children so that they know how to consume the news healthily, which includes how to manage negative emotions as a result of seeing something upsetting on the news:

<https://www.theguardian.com/newswise/2020/mar/21/wellbeing-and-the-news>

Can we also ask that you do read the RSHE policy, circulated previously, and feedback with any issues?

Acting lesson opportunities for Year 7, 8 and 9 students (Miss Richards)

We were in the process of arranging a partnership with the Momo Academy of Drama before lockdown began. It was our hope that we could use the Academy's expertise to offer students the chance to study for LAMDA acting exams and to produce drama showcases.

As it is not possible for us to facilitate face-to-face lessons at the moment, we would like to share this flyer from the Academy (see the end of this email). They are offering online lessons to individual students or to pairs. If you would be interested in exploring this opportunity for your child, please do get in touch with the Academy directly. You can also find out more about LAMDA acting qualifications here: <https://www.lamda.ac.uk/our-exams/all-examinations/performance-examinations/acting>

Supervision of vulnerable children and those with key workers as parents

We have continued to support these children throughout half term and this week. From 8th June, all provision will be based at QMGWS from 9am-3pm. This will not be in the form of taught lessons, rather providing a structured environment to continue with distance learning. The sessions are based in the Sixth Form centre and are supervised by our staff. Please do contact us at enquiries@qmgws.walsall.sch.uk if you would like to use this service.

Pastoral matters

We have continued our 'safe and well' calls across all year groups. An emergency safeguarding number is available on the answerphone if you call the main school number and lots of information is on the website:

<https://qmgws.walsall.sch.uk/safeguarding-and-welfare-concerns/>

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Mr Farnell is available from 2-4pm each week day on a school mobile (07849398033). Mrs Chatwin Can be reached between 10am-midday each week day on 07592 376697. This service is being provided for students who would like to talk to a member of the pastoral team with any concerns or worries that they might have.

QMA

Please don't forget the **Easy Fundraising scheme** – a great way of raising money for the school with very little effort during online shopping. Make sure you register, if you haven't already, at:

<https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/queenmarysgrammar/>

Final thoughts

Please do continue to share good news stories with the school. I have had a number of staff send excellent work through to me from students and I hope to feature these over the following weeks. If any students feel that they want to talk to someone in the school because of stories circulating in the media, please do reach out to us.

With warm regards and best wishes



Richard Langton

Headmaster

Queen Mary's Grammar School, Walsall

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