

Issue 166

“In a racist society it is not enough to be non-racist; we must be anti-racist.”

– Angela Davis –



From the Headmaster

As the Black Lives Matter protests in both the USA and UK in response to the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis have gathered in intensity and dominated the media in recent days, it reminds us that systemic racism and injustice remain a genuine global concern. Deep-rooted discrimination and racism require every single one of us to reflect on the roles that we play in addressing oppression. As in every school throughout the world, it is our responsibility to fight ignorance and inequality and to promote diversity, respect and inclusion.

As recent events have reminded us, every society needs to educate; to take responsibility for its daily actions and behaviours; to treat everyone with equal and genuine respect; and to prevent racism, whether it be conscious or subconscious, so that mankind maintains its integrity as a kind and just race. We have a collective duty to work in unison to create a better, more inclusive world for everyone. Schools are not exempt; in fact, institutions such as the RGS have an absolutely central role to play in this both as educators but also equally as employers and businesses.

When we recently re-visited our School Values, we were unanimous that *Inclusivity* should be our headline value. We have publicly and frequently stated that we inherently believe in widening access in a tolerant community where each individual is valued, enjoys a deep sense of belonging and where an atmosphere of mutual respect is cultivated. This message is expressed through assemblies, Tutor Groups, our PHSE programme, and through the curriculum, but we must continuously ask ourselves if we are doing enough. It is beholden on us all to create a more equal and just community, so that no matter our differences, whether they be ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ability, appearance or any of the other aspects that are all too easily the basis of casual and sometimes highly calculated unkindness, everyone feels accepted, equal and comfortable to be themselves without fear of judgement or discrimination. Focusing on kindness, empathy and widening access have long been my stated aims for the RGS. I care passionately about creating a fair and trusting community; we shall continue to keep asking ourselves what the School can learn, or do differently on these issues, so that our response to the events of the past two weeks is meaningful and has long-term impact. We must consider everything from the recruitment of students and staff, to policies and the content of the curriculum.

I am very proud that within the RGS community we have students who sincerely care about others and about challenging topical issues. Equally importantly, however, I am proud that they are confident to express their feelings on a range of topics, which they do most eloquently without fear of censure, safe in the knowledge

that they will be taken seriously. In all instances such as this, the student voice is a powerful tool and an effective way of affecting change among their peers. In this way, students have taken a prominent role in recent years as we have raised awareness, challenged prejudices and misconceptions, and reflected on areas such as gender equality, climate change, the profile of the LGBTQ+ community, and so I could go on. Working collaboratively, collectively and constructively can only be to the benefit of us all.

As the MP for Bromsgrove Sajid Javid noted: *"We must never stand by when it comes to prejudice and discrimination of any kind."* There is so much more to do in eradicating prejudice and creating opportunity and we are fully committed to that effort. A genuine sense of community and inclusivity as well as a set of values which nurture tolerance and respect must continue to be at the very heart of the RGS. Our School Values conclude with *Service* and the events of recent weeks remind us of the importance of, I quote, *working in partnership with others to make a difference, locally and internationally*. And this mindset has to give us great hope for the future.