

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

– Angela Davis –

From the Headmaster

Over the past few months, provoked by the shocking death of George Floyd in Minneapolis and the subsequent protests, issues surrounding race and systemic injustices have been at the forefront of people's minds. It has, quite rightly, provoked passionate conversations among people across the world and made us all look much more deeply into our own society and question why progress in many areas has been slow to take place. The RGS is no exception and, as I have listened to the experiences of our Old Guildfordians and parents, my overwhelming emotion has been one of sadness that inequality, intolerance and injustice should ever be experienced at any level, including in schools and education.

I feel very strongly about these issues and I am committed to long-lasting changes at the RGS rather than *window dressing* through reactionary responses. As a result, I spoke to the whole school in assembly this week to provide an update and reassurance that a lot has been going on, behind the scenes, to address the issues raised. We are making progress but it is, as I stressed, only a start.

A working party comprising senior members of staff is looking into diversity and inclusion at the RGS; listening and talking has allowed us to get a clearer idea of the issues in question. We shall be working with specialist consultants in this area providing thorough training at every level of the School including for governors, the Senior Management Team, staff, parents and boys. We are also looking into our curriculum, our speakers and our PSHME (Personal, Social, Health, and Moral Education) programme, as we work alongside the wider staff body and students to bring about visible changes.

You can't change a culture overnight. To make long-lasting changes takes time, so please be patient; however, you should start to see some changes at the beginning of the next year. I know this is a topic of great importance to many of you, so I shall keep you regularly updated. I can understand the frustration of some at the pace of change. Some changes, such as seeing greater diversity in the staff body or the governing body, cannot take place immediately.

Inclusivity is one of our core values and we want to ensure that it is a reality for all our students, not just rhetoric. We believe in not just being non-racist, but in being actively anti-racist. John Amaechi was the first UK-born NBA star who is now a consultant psychologist and speaks very wisely on issues of race. He talks about how to be anti-racist rather than non-racist. Creating an anti-racist society is absolutely the responsibility of every single one of us and particularly those of us who have never faced racism.

I want to empower all students while at the RGS, and then at university, in the workplace, and as responsible citizens, to take whatever steps they can to make society more just, more tolerant and more representative. As I concluded at the end of the assembly: “As Headmaster the happiness and wellbeing of each student in this school are of the utmost importance to me: we are listening, we are reflecting on the mistakes and ignorance of the past, and we are changing. Thank you for your support and your patience.”