

**LGGS History Department Statement regarding 'Decolonisation' of school History Curriculum, teaching fully inclusive and representative history in light of recent anti-racism protests and calls for action.**

As many of you will know, a number of recent tragic events and media coverage of these events, has in turn led to widespread anti-racist protests around the globe. There have been significant large demonstrations here in the UK and extensive calls for action to tackle and address the continued problems of racism, institutional racism and racial inequality that continue to blight our society. This has consequentially caused many people to re-examine their beliefs and assumptions about the past and present and the relationship between them. There have been calls for action in the media, and from many other interested citizens, for schools to do more to reflect the racial diversity of our society, better representing BAME students' backgrounds and needs, and do more to tackle the abhorrent presence of racism.

The school History Curriculum and history teaching has been a key focus in this important and on-going public discussion and debate. It has been claimed that history teaching and learning within schools is currently not always doing all it can in teaching a curriculum that recognises the full diversity of our society and student population, as well as the crucial and significant contributions that people of BAME origin have made to our past, and continue to make in our present. History in schools, has for example, been accused of teaching narratives and approaches which may even perpetuate continued racially stereotyping, developing an inaccurate, unbalanced view of the past and in particular British history. Examples of such criticism include approaches which ignore some of the full horrors of the Transatlantic slave trade and colonialism, or teaching such topics from a very Anglo-centric perspective only, overemphasising the 'positive' impact of British imperialism with non-white historical participants playing passive roles.

Many people, both in the UK and around the globe, continue to suffer inequality, exploitation and oppression because of historical precedents which continue to shape and control our present. As citizens and teachers of History, we in the LGGS History Department are pleased to see, and welcome, history being re-examined and considered in such a way. We hope wider learning and public discourse about our past can lead to much needed changes and improvements in the present; a change to the status quo and too much passive acceptance of continued, sometimes subtle racism and inequality. After all what's the point in studying history if it doesn't inform who we are and what we do now? We can't erase the past, but we can and should recognise the realities of it, learn from it and honour the memory of all people by trying to improve the conditions of the present. History is about people, all people, regardless of race, gender, class, sexual orientation or any other social, cultural, political or economic difference. History is about 'Us', 'Then'. 'Us', 'Then', in all our

diversity and difference. As history educators we should seek to teach and represent in the classroom the history of us all from as many different perspectives as possible. We should, and do, continue to constantly review and seek to improve our curriculum in this light, learning and developing all the time. In doing so perhaps we could help make some contribution to making the present better, fairer, more equal, by tackling and trying to destroy negative legacies of the past such as racism and prejudice. Education and schools are obviously key in any attempt to tackle and erase racism and racial inequality from our society today and the History classroom has a part to play in this, like many other subjects and aspects of school life.

Firstly, I would like to say that myself and many of the history educators I know, work with, or have worked with, have always placed narratives and approaches about topics such as slavery, racism, imperialism and exploitation at the heart of our curricula. Within this and other topics, myself and many of the educators I have worked with clearly understand and recognise that Black History is British History and British History is Black History. You can't separate the two, or teach them as separate entities. In essence, both myself and many others I know and work with, have striven for a 'decolonised' approach within the classroom, trying as best we can to consider different and inclusive representations, perspectives and interpretations of the past. This is very much the basis of any 'good' history or balanced historical approach. However, that is not to say that we should not be open to learning and improving. We always seek to identify best practice and learn from other professionals and scholars. Recent events force us to look again at what we do, how we do it and how it could be possibly improved. Nonetheless, the following must be noted as constraints upon what we can, and can't do with schools history:

1. We are bound and expected to follow the National Curriculum, see here: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/239075/SECONDARY\\_national\\_curriculum\\_-\\_History.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/239075/SECONDARY_national_curriculum_-_History.pdf)

As an academy we can make diversions from this, if we can justify that what we put on our curriculum and teach in the classrooms is 'better' than that stated on the National Curriculum. The reality is most schools closely follow and are expected to follow the National Curriculum and recent changes in Ofsted guidelines and expectations had strengthened this expectation. As we know the reality is elected governments have an important influence over what is taught and happens in schools and what schools are 'incentivised' on. British History is predominant in the National Curriculum at Key Stage 3 and there are clear guidelines on limits and variety of the topics we can study.

2. We have a limited amount of time in Key Stage 3 to cover a great breadth of historical content and topics as laid out in the National Curriculum, with a chronology ranging from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It is always a challenge to cover

depth and breadth of historical knowledge, skills and understanding in as much detail as we would like to, with on average 1 weekly hour of History. This equates to approximately 37-39 hours per school year. Students have approximately 100-120 hours of classroom learning in their history lessons between Years 7-9. In essence we would like to give more time to more historical topics and approaches, but it must also be noted there are many varying demands, expectations and voices that seek to influence and shape what is taught in schools and in the history classroom. We do try to cover as much ground and as many different perspectives and representations as possible in the time we have. The 'purpose' of History and historical study are areas of great debate amongst scholars, educationalist, politicians and policy makers.

3. GCSE and A-level syllabi are very much dictated to us via HM Government, Ofqual and Exam Boards. On average approximately 40% of LGGs students opt to study GCSE History while approximately 35% study A-level History in the LGGs 6<sup>th</sup> Form. Education and schools are obviously key in any attempt to fully tackle racism and wider issues to do with inequality, however there are many other factors that affect this, including among others; media representations, government policies and decisions. We should, and do seek to constantly learn, improve and evolve. The study of the past ('History') is after all, at least in part, a battle ground of the present.

There have been well-publicised calls for schools to 'do much more to tackle racism both in their teaching and their whole school culture and ethos'. Some have identified the history curriculum and aspects of history teaching in schools as problematic in this regard and claims have been made that it does not provide students with a fully rounded understanding of the history and ongoing realities of racial inequality. Furthermore, topics such as European colonialism, the American Civil Rights movement and the Transatlantic Slave Trade were ignored, only touched upon and that students perhaps did not learn about these in a suitably thorough or critical way and that approaches to this learning were from a very Eurocentric perspective. In conclusion it has been stated that more should be done to show the perspectives of black and ethnic minority communities in the aforementioned periods of history. It is not really pertinent to comment on what happened in the past at LGGs or any school, but I felt it might be useful to set out a few of the ways in which we try to address such concerns in the current LGGs history curriculum, how we attempt to deliver a fully inclusive and representative history curriculum for our pupils, and how we might continue to improve in this area in the future. We recognise that there may be differences and changes in the way forward regarding being anti-racist and a definition of what being anti-racist involves.

### **Key Stage 3**

- At Key Stage 3 we teach skills, concepts and understanding alongside historical knowledge through our curriculum using the *LGGS History Ten Commandments*. All of the historical content we cover is considered and approached through these core skills, concepts and ways of understanding. These are shared openly with students and referred to throughout teaching and learning in Key Stage 3. Perhaps the most relevant to note in regard to the issues discussed here are the following two:

### *7. Citizenship, Identity, Diversity*

- Develop understanding of the diverse experiences and ideas, beliefs and attitudes of men, women and children in past societies and how these have shaped the world today.
- Consider the importance of cultural, ethnic and religious differences and their effect on the past and present.
- Develop an understanding of who you and others are, where we come from, consider where we might be going?
- Engage with history in the news and current affairs.

### *8. Interpretation, Debate & Judgement*

- Understand how historians and others form interpretations.
- Understand why historians and others have interpreted events, people and situations in different ways.
- Evaluate a range of interpretations of the past to assess their validity; come to your own judgement.
- Engage in historical debate.

- In the Key Stage 3 curriculum we spend at least one half term (6-8 weeks) in Year 8 studying the History of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and slavery from the 1500s-1800s. In teaching this topic we refer to and engage with the strong local links to the Slave Trade and the legacies of it. Our school town, Lancaster, was at the heart of this trade being the 4<sup>th</sup> largest slave trading port in Britain in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Having recently reviewed and rewritten our Year 8 curriculum we had planned to introduce a new school trip to develop this further; the Lancaster Slave Trade Walk. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and school closure we were not able to do this but plan on making this a new and continued aspect in the next school year. We also consider the role of the wider regional community and the North West as part of the system of international slave trading at this time and the continued legacy of it when considering the role of Liverpool the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest slave trading port in Britain in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In recent years all Year 8 students spent a study day and educational visit at the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool. This is an award winning museum heralded by many scholars of slavery and the 'Black Atlantic' as well as anti-racism campaigners. The museum considers the history of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and its legacies, including modern day racism and intolerance in great detail and from many different perspectives. Students attended seminars and workshops examining artefacts linked to slavery,

race relations, racism and prejudice, led by museum and LGS staff collaboratively, as well as completing guided study tours and research in the museum itself.

When studying the topic of slavery we also spend some time considering African communities before, during and after slavery and the impact this trade had upon them and the development of colonialization and further colonial exploitation. We also look in detail at the experience of slavery from the perspective of enslaved peoples, including their key role and agency in resistance, rebellion and abolition of the slave trade and slavery. We certainly don't believe this to be an overly Eurocentric or 'colonised' approach to the study of this hugely important historical topic and process. We hope to further develop and incorporate more aspects of Black Britons in this topic, considering the experiences and contributions of some Africans and their descendants who travelled to Britain during and after this period. We are currently reviewing and rewriting aspects of our Year curriculum and are planning on including a unit of study on this, possibly up-to-and-including the experiences of 'Windrush' and the Windrush generation post World War II.

- We continue on, and develop from our study of slavery in Year 8 with more than the first half term of Year 9 dedicated to the study of British and European Imperialism with a detailed case study focused on India. The causes and consequences of British imperialism and the impacts on India are studied in depth, with a particular focus upon some of the horrors of British rule in India as well as Indian resistance and rebellion in events such as the Indian Rebellion/First War of Independence in 1857-8. This event is also a key part in the end of unit assessment on this learning. We again certainly don't feel that we shy away from any of the exploitation, cruelty and brutality that can be seen as part of the process of European colonisation in our study and seek to give as balanced, accurate and nuanced an understanding as possible. Our approach towards imperialism and colonisation is certainly not triumphalist or celebratory, rather I would hope, critical and reflective and from a variety of different perspectives and experiences.
- Another half term of study and assessment in Year 9 is taken up with the study of the Holocaust where students consider in detail the full horrific implications of racist ideologies, prejudice and racial violence during Nazi rule of Germany and later occupied Europe.

#### **Key Stage 4**

- GCSE syllabi are prescribed by exam boards after instruction from Ofqual and HM Government. However, there is some room for selection within the AQA History syllabus and we select a number of units to study what we feel help students develop more rounded, representative understanding, considering the limited exam options we have. The best example of this is Paper 2, Section A, Option C (25% of the course) where we study *Britain: Migration, Empires & People*. As the specification states: *This thematic study topic gives students an understanding of how the identity of the British people has been shaped by their interaction with the wider world. It considers invasions and conquests and the country's relationship with Europe and the*

wider world. It will also consider the ebb and flow of peoples in and out of Britain. It will evaluate their motives and achievements, along with the causes, impact and legacy of Empire upon the ruled and the ruling, in the context of Britain's acquisition and retreat from Empire. Students will study the importance of the following factors in influencing Britain's dealings with the wider world: war, religion, government, the role of individuals and science and technology. This unit studies in detail European & British discovery, conquest and colonisation of the Americas, the impact on indigenous people, the development of the slave trade, resistance, rebellion and abolition of the slavery and the further development of racism. It also studies British Imperialism in detail in Africa and Asia with case studies on India, Kenya and Nigeria included. We also study resistance to colonisation and the process of decolonisation and creation of independent African and Asian countries following World War II, finally leading into migration to Britain post-1945; the Commonwealth Act, the Windrush generation and their experiences of life in Britain, including racism and prejudice, as well as the crucial role such groups have played in modern British culture, the development of a multi-cultural society, and the contributions BAME individuals and communities have made to modern Britain. For example carrying out a case study on the work and contributions of Claudia Jones to British society.

- We also study a unit on modern American History in Paper 1, Section A, Option D (25% of the course), *America 1920-1973: Opportunity & Inequality*. This unit studies the legacy of slavery via continued racism in American society to this day and considers in detail race relations in modern America, from the 1920s onwards, including aspects such as: the system of segregation, racist ideas of white supremacy, the Ku Klux Klan, the Great Depression and the civil rights movement, including iconic figures such as Martin Luther King & Malcolm X, ideas of Black Power and Black Nationalism. The course focuses upon considering the position and status of different social groups within American society, including oppressed, marginalised and minority groups and the façade of the 'America Dream' for many of these people.

### **Key Stage 5**

- We study 16<sup>th</sup> century units on the English Reformation and Spain in our A level course and we are limited by the exam board content and form of assessment in this. However, the Spanish Unit does consider in depth Spanish discovery, conquest and exploitation of the Americas and native peoples and the subsequent impact of this on European society. Along with this it also studies the Spanish Inquisition, the causes and consequences of extreme religious and racial intolerance and prejudice including the conquest of Granada.
- Many students continue to select topics that consider 'Black History' aspects and foci in their coursework (20% of course), they are actively encouraged and supported in doing so. Every year a significant amount of students study the following topics and have to take a wide ranging approach towards their study: Civil Rights movement and campaigns in America in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Abolition of Slavery in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Indian independence and decolonisation in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>

centuries, American Civil War and abolition of slavery. These remain popular options for students, although they have a free choice in the individual, topic and events of history they study in a 100 year period as part of this Non Examined Assessment Unit.

- We have a very active LGGGS History Society which often enjoys lectures delivered by academics who take a 'decolonised' approach to the past. Recent lectures have included lectures critically reflecting upon the partition of India. This took a scholarly and critically reflective look at this topic. We invite and enjoy regular lectures from scholars that cause students to think above and beyond the curriculum and take critical, reflective approaches to their historical studies, much like they would at undergraduate level. We regularly have speakers and seminars on race relations related topics and for example have hosted talks by well-renowned and respected scholars of the 'Black Atlantic'.

### **Additionally**

The above is only a summary of the main features of provision within history, where we strive to be as representative and inclusive as possible. We also promote and celebrate Black History Month heavily within school. We have displays organised by the department throughout the school and every year group in the school have assemblies on Black History Month delivered by department staff and the LGGGS History Society Committee. See summary of events for BHM last year here: [Black History Month Celebrated at LGGGS in 2018.docx](#) Whenever, and wherever possible, we look for extra-curricular opportunities for our students to broaden and challenge their learning in these BAME history areas, for example, the department recently promoted the '100 Great Black Britons' writing competition with all our students years 7-13. We regularly recommend watching, reading and exhibitions to all our students related to inclusive BAME History and historical approaches e.g. we recently put in the Library and recommended Akala's, *Natives: Race & Class in the Ruins of Empire* to relevant students. One example of many. Dept. staff are engaged with and follow scholarly debate and best practise on such issues utilising works such as Akala's to inform and develop their understanding and teaching practise as well as other critically acclaimed approaches such as that of historian Prof David Olusoga e.g. *Black & British: A Forgotten History*.

Hopefully the above has given a better feel of some of the ways in which we meet the requirements of a broad, inclusive and representative history curriculum at LGGGS, perhaps challenging some misconceptions. In addition, I hope this also highlights how we are open and responsive to learning and improving our teaching and practice in all areas of diversity.

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