



Dear Old Cranbrookians, students, and parents,

I am writing in response to your letter of 11th June regarding the Black Lives Matter agenda and the stance of Cranbrook School on this issue.

First things first: we were appalled by the death of George Floyd and the circumstances surrounding it; we recognise that the deep-rooted racism which scars American society also exists closer to home; we understand the crucial part which all schools play and need to play, none less so than Cranbrook, in building a better and more equal society.

I have always considered Cranbrook School to be uniquely well placed to adopt an important and credible position on the matters such as race relations and equality of opportunity. As you well know we are an unusually diverse school because of our long-standing commitment to boarding. The proportion of our boarders from overseas, primarily Nigeria and Hong Kong, currently runs at 38% of the boarding community. This hugely enhances our overall diversity, but also makes us acutely conscious of the need to think deeply about and implement policies and practices which foster harmony between students from all backgrounds.

More recent leavers will also be aware that Cranbrook has made considerable sacrifices to ensure that it is more inclusive than was the case in the past. It has done this by expanding its age range from 13-18 years to 11-18 years. We have also changed our Admission Policy so that Pupil Premium (PP) and Looked-After Children (PLAC) candidates are given the highest weighting in our Oversubscription Criteria. Furthermore, on average two-thirds of our intake now come from local maintained primary schools into Year 7. These recent reforms have aided social mobility and inclusion in our area significantly and hugely enhanced the diversity and inclusiveness of the school. I am sorry that you were not able to take these into account when you wrote to us.

At the start of this academic year, following the introduction of our new three-year Quality Improvement Plan [click here](#), we asked ourselves what core aims should underpin our next three-year development. This is how the Governors and senior leaders responded, in no order of priority but equally weighted:

High Priority (2019-20) Action Plan 1 – Mental Health and Wellbeing

High Priority (2019-20) Action Plan 2 – Inclusion and Diversity

High Priority (2019-20) Action Plan 3 – Partnerships

Focussing on Inclusion and Diversity, we build on training initiatives on ethnic diversity within boarding and in the classroom and extend to workshops for staff and Governors.

These ensure that staff and students of all ethnicities and social backgrounds enjoy harmonious relations at all times. We are actively seeking a BAME Governor to ensure the school population is properly represented. The Governing Body recognises that it needs to become more ethnically diverse. We are embedding and keeping under review the

school's Fair Access Protocol. This helps ensure we are best informed about the changing demographic of the school in terms of class, ethnicity and faith.

You will understand then that we were all more than a little perturbed to read of the allegations about the experiences of two former BAME students at the school. I am happy to apologise to them on the school's behalf. I have no idea why the wearing of the hijab should have aroused such a disciplinary response. It certainly would not now. Regarding the other two incidents mentioned, they cannot of course be defended. I would like to think that the content of our curriculum and pastoral provision we have in place now make the likelihood of something similar happening extremely remote.

Your comments and recommendations about curriculum content and suggested reading have been duly noted and circulated to other senior leaders and our Heads of Department for further discussion.

Our enrichment programme, as you will be aware, enables cultural or sporting visits to countries such as South Africa, Tanzania, Nepal and India. In recent years students have encountered the historical realities and cultural legacies of apartheid and of British colonialism. Cranbrook students and staff visited Robben Island in 2019 and have a long tradition of visiting Tanzania and the sub-continent to raise their awareness of current issues facing former British colonies. Whilst I understand the "white saviour" argument, I would defend the continuation of such cultural activities because of the transformative power of first-hand experiences such as these in bursting the bubble created by an early childhood and schooling in such privileged and affluent corners of the world as the weald of Kent. The educational value of such activities both to the students involved and to those in the rest of the school who are in turn better informed as a result of subsequent Assemblies, is invaluable.

To conclude, we are fearful that the crisis caused by the pandemic will widen the gap between disadvantage and privilege still further. The haves and the have-nots in educational terms will either benefit from the shift to online learning (the former) or fall further behind (the latter). It is therefore in all our interests for schools, including Cranbrook, ask further, searching questions about their stance not just on race, vital as that issue is, but on all the protected characteristics of gender, disability religion and class. If there is one phrase that captures where our school is focussed at the moment, it is "social mobility". Typically, this is about reaching out to families who do not think grammar school education is attainable or even worthwhile. Increasingly however it is for us about improving access to what we have to offer to the widest possible cross-section of our local and international community, regardless of their social, sexual or ethnic identity.

It is heartening that so many of you have chosen to write. I and my colleagues are always happy to meet with former students or other members of our community who want to discuss matters of such importance. We are not a complacent school, I hope you'll agree, and on this matter, we look forward to long and lively debates when we are re-united in the post-pandemic (one hopes) coming up in the autumn.

Kind regards,

Dr John Weeds

Headteacher

