



21<sup>st</sup> July 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

Following recent press coverage of our sports day I have been made aware that a number of our parents have been targeted and abused on social media, labelled as racists and mocked for raising concerns with the Academy about children being allowed to express their solidarity with one another in the face of racism.

I wish to make it clear to all of you that prior to or during yesterday's sports day, **the Academy received no emails, calls or messages expressing concern from a single parent.** This aspect of the report is **simply not true** and I am saddened that our community of parents are being labelled as such.

We did have **two communications from two local members of the Reform party**, both of whom claimed that they had been told that we were "forcing" children to "take the knee". Sadly, rather than allow us time to respond to their emails and inform them that this was not true, they chose instead to report the untruths they had heard second hand to the local paper.

It is concerning that we find ourselves in a position of having to defend being anti-racist to local politicians and media outlets. That young people taking part in a gesture of solidarity in the face of discrimination have been publicly slammed by individuals trying to turn the children's hugely positive action against discrimination into a media story designed to provoke, upset and score political points.

The simple truth of all of this is that last week, following the football final, a number of our children and staff experienced and witnessed racially motivated abuse on line, in the community and targeted at sports players. The school council requested that we do something to reinforce our stance against racism and make it clear that as a school community we are proudly anti-racist. So, at the staff and students' suggestion we ran a series of morning assemblies every day at roll call which have explored a range of issues around racism.

Many of the children were confused about the negative press that the gesture of "taking the knee" had had during the Euro football tournament and so we taught them about the history of the gesture; that it was first associated with Martin Luther King who knelt to pray with protestors in Alabama in 1965 before going to jail. The group were arrested after attempting to gain the right to vote. After the prayer, the group peacefully marched to jail. We explained that in recent years, taking a knee to protest against racism was popularised by the NFL player Colin Kaepernick, who knelt rather than stood for the National Anthem as it was played before a game in 2016. He said at the time "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of colour. To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way".

We also talked to the children about what happened to George Floyd and about the male English football team and why they took the knee. We explained that whilst some people have sought to exploit the gesture of "taking the knee", that the whole team did this to show solidarity and protest against racism even though they knew it would likely be met with boos. We talked to the children about the importance of standing up against racism and highlighted the way in which the young men of the English football team have used their influence to try and promote a message of inclusivity and tolerance.

And so, at sports day, students and staff were offered the opportunity to stand united, as one school to proudly demonstrate that we are one community, united against prejudice and discrimination. Some children linked arms, others put their hands on their heart, some made banners which they held above their heads, some bowed their heads in respectful silence and reflection and some took the knee fully informed of its link to sports and how it signifies anti-racism, inclusivity and tolerance. The choice of action/gesture was entirely free for students and staff alike to choose and was simply about standing united as one community against prejudice or discrimination and in celebration of the beautiful diversity of our world.

We are beyond proud of our young people, of their care and commitment to making the world a better place and for having the resilience to make a stand against discrimination in all its forms. We are not afraid to acknowledge that racism and discrimination is real, present and permeates every aspect of this world. We are working hard, alongside our student body to take the next steps on our journey towards making our Academy as inclusive as we can – recently students have worked with us to revise aspects of our uniform code. In the next academic year, we will be working hard to review our curriculum with the aim of ensuring that all children can both see themselves in the world we study and have the opportunity to learn about a diverse range of people of all races, ethnicities, backgrounds and identities and our student body are working with us at present to re-draft and strengthen our anti-racism policy and protocols in school.

Our children are a credit to this Academy. Yesterday they stood together as one and made their stance on racism clear. They actively work with us as a school to help us continually improve and make our Academy a better place for all students and we think they are wonderful.

We make no apology for supporting our children and our community in standing up to racism.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ann Donaghy', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ann Donaghy  
Headteacher