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Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP

Minister of State for School Standards

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Ms Stella Creasy MP

By email: stella.creasy.mp@parliament.uk

Your ref: SC/ZA47617

25 August 2020

Dear Stella,

Thank you for your letter of 8 June addressed to the Secretary of State for Education regarding the National Curriculum. I am replying as the Minister of State for School Standards.

The Department has received a significant amount of correspondence on matters relating to Black and minority ethnic history and the National Curriculum.

There is no place for racism in our society or in our education system. The Government is committed to an inclusive education system which recognises and embraces diversity and supports all pupils to address racism and have the knowledge and tools to do so. We want to support all young people to be happy, healthy and safe. We also want to equip them for adult life and to make a positive contribution to society. Schools are required to actively promote fundamental British values, including democracy as well as the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance of those of different faith and beliefs.

The Government is appalled at the treatment of George Floyd, as the Prime Minister expressed at Prime Minister's Questions on 3 June when he condemned the killing. The Prime Minister also recognised that more action was needed to understand the key drivers of the disparities identified in terms of the impact of COVID-19 and the relationships between the different risk factors. The Minister for Equalities will be taking work forward on this matter alongside Public Health England and others.

The National Curriculum does not set out how curriculum subjects, or topics within the subjects, should be taught. The Department believes teachers should be able to use their own knowledge and expertise to determine how they teach their pupils, and to make choices about what they teach. As part of a broad and balanced curriculum, pupils should be taught about different societies, and how different groups have contributed to the development of Britain, and this can include the voices and experience of Black and minority ethnic people, and other diverse groups. The flexibility within the history curriculum means that there is the opportunity for teachers to teach about Black and minority ethnic history across the spectrum of themes and eras set out in the curriculum.

The Department suggests teaching the following in the curriculum, but the teaching of Black and minority ethnic history need not be limited to these examples. In Key Stage 1, key historical events within or beyond living memory; the lives of key Black historical figures such as Mary Seacole and Rosa Parks or others. In Key Stage 2, a study of a non-European society that provides contrasts with British history, we give as an example Benin (West Africa) c. AD 900-1300. In Key Stage 3, we give an example for a more detailed study on the topic of the impact through time of the migration of people to, from and within the British Isles. This Key Stage also requires teaching of the theme, ideas, political power, industry and empire: Britain, 1745-1901, within which we give examples including Britain's transatlantic slave trade, its effects and its eventual abolition, the development of the British Empire with a depth study, for example, of India. Additionally, local history is an element across Key Stages. There is also scope within the subject content set out for GCSE History to teach Black and minority ethnic history.

Black and minority ethnic history can be taught across many of the themes of the history curriculum by reflecting the contribution of Black and minority ethnic people across the ages in the UK and more widely. This can include historical examples of Black Romans, Tudors, Stuarts, Georgians and Victorians. It can also include the role of the countries of the former British Empire in both world wars, and the part Black and minority ethnic people have played in shaping the UK in the 20th Century.

Teachers make choices about which resources and textbooks to use to support their teaching, and can choose books and resources developed by Black and minority ethnic individuals and groups.

There is also scope to include Black and minority ethnic history and experience in other curriculums, as set out below, and there is also similar flexibility within other subjects. In citizenship, at Key Stage 4, pupils should be taught about the diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding. They are also taught about human rights and the actions citizens can take in democratic and electoral processes to influence decisions locally, nationally and beyond. Pupils should experience and evaluate different ways that citizens can act together to solve problems and contribute to society.

The National Curriculum for English aims to ensure that all pupils appreciate our rich and varied literary heritage. Pupils should be taught to maintain positive attitudes to reading and understanding of what they read by increasing their familiarity with a wide range of books, including myths, legends and traditional stories, modern fiction, fiction from our literary heritage, and books from other cultures and traditions. Teachers have flexibility in their choice of books to teach within the context of the curriculum.

Schools have flexibility to teach topics such as Black and minority ethnic history as part of their Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE) programme and through the introduction of relationships education, relationships and sex education and health education pupils will be taught the importance of respectful relationships in particular how stereotypes, based on sex, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation or disability, can cause damage. All schools are required to teach a balanced and broadly based curriculum that promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils, and prepares them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.

The Department has discussed Black and minority ethnic history with a number of organisations, and we welcome the profile given to the importance of teaching Black and minority ethnic history by groups and individuals over the years, and the support and resources on teaching they provide direct to teachers. We will continue to explore what more we can do to support the teaching of Black and minority ethnic history and welcome the perspectives of committed individuals and groups, building on previous discussions.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Neil', written in a cursive style.