

14 September 2020

Brighton & Hove City Council

Dear Mr Raw

I am submitting the following letter under Council Procedure Rule 23.3 to be included on the agenda for the Children, Young People and Skills Committee (CYPS) meeting on 14th September 2020.

The Multicultural School Book Fund is a fundraising campaign set up by local parent, Lisa Haygarth, which aims to raise £64,000 to provide 64 primary and secondary schools in Brighton and Hove with a box of books.¹ Lisa is working with black-owned online children's book retailer Black Star Books, as well as local independent children's bookshop the Book Nook, to help source books and resources.

The purpose of the campaign is to ensure every classroom in Brighton and Hove has a rich and diverse range of resources and books championing Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic characters, illustrators and authors.

Books and resources in most schools at the moment woefully under-represent non-white people and this needs to change. A 2018 study found that only 1% of British books feature a main character who is black or minority ethnic, despite around 30% of the children in our country being from BAME backgrounds.² BAME children need to be able to find characters and role models in books that they can identify with, while white children need to recognise and celebrate the diversity that exists in our society.

Since launching the campaign this summer, enough funds have been raised to provide books for one school, Herford Infant and Nursery School. Lisa has also been in touch with Sam Beal from the council's educational team who is contacting schools and making them aware of Lisa's campaign. Schools themselves will be encouraged to raise money to go towards the boxes too.

I'm sure we all recognise that having books sitting on a shelf in the school library alone is not a quick fix to addressing the need for more effective teaching of racial awareness and white bias within our schools. But the books will be a welcome complement to the training and other initiatives being carried out by the council that are being rolled out in our schools as part of our race strategy. This will hopefully help our children to appreciate the contribution of individuals from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds to the society we live in and to thus view the world through a wider, more multi-cultural lens. As central Government continues to squeeze school budgets, schools themselves are unlikely to be able to find the funds to pay for such necessary resources themselves.

¹ gf.me/u/ycmt5u

² <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jul/17/only-1-of-uk-childrens-books-feature-main-characters-of-colour>

I very much support this fantastic initiative and therefore I would like to ask the committee to consider:

- what support the council communications team can provide to encourage people and businesses to donate to this very worthwhile campaign. This may include sharing the fundraising campaign on the council website
- how the council can support businesses to get involved in pledging donations
- a joint statement from the Children, Young People and Skills Committee in support of the fundraising.

Yours sincerely,

Elaine Hills

Deputy chair, Children, Young People and Skills Committee
Green party member for Hanover and Elm Grove