



2022-0002368RWPO

Robin Walker MP

Minister of State for School Standards

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/contactus/df

Dame Meg Hillier DBE MP

By email: meghilliermp@parliament.uk

Your ref: MH74330

28 January 2022

Dear Meg,

Thank you for your email of 19 January, addressed to the Secretary of State, enclosing correspondence from your constituent, [REDACTED], regarding diversity in the curriculum. I am replying as the Minister of State for School Standards.

I am always pleased to hear from young people who are interested in their education, though I was sorry to hear of your constituent's concerns.

The national curriculum for English aims to ensure that all pupils appreciate our rich and varied literary heritage. It encourages pupils to read a range of books, poems and plays to encourage the development of a life-long love of literature. 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.

It is statutory that maintained schools follow the English programmes of study. These do not set out specific reading lists. However, at secondary level, the Department for Education sets out categories from which schools should choose texts. 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 experiences of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people. Academies are also required to offer a broad and balanced curriculum as part of their funding agreements.

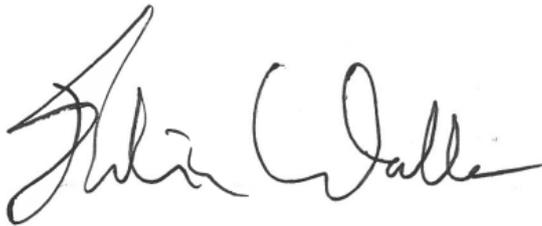
Following consultation on the minimum requirements for the new English Literature GCSE criteria in 2013, the final categories were: at least one play by Shakespeare; a selection of poetry since 1789; at least one 19th century novel; fiction or drama from the British Isles from 1914 onwards. The GCSE specification encourages students to read widely within these categories, to broaden their knowledge of literature and enhance critical and comparative understanding.

Selection of set texts for examination in the GCSE is down to the exam boards, who follow the categories set out above. As examples of diverse texts offered by exam boards, Pearson Edexcel have added the following black authors to their post-1914 selection of texts for their English Literature GCSE: the play *Refugee Boy* by Benjamin Zephaniah, which was adapted for the stage by Lemn Sissay, and the novel *Boys Don't Cry* by Malorie Blackman. AQA and OCR also include works by authors from diverse backgrounds including *Anita and Me* by Meera Syal and *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro. At key stage 3, all pupils must also study seminal world literature.

The Department is committed to an inclusive education system which recognises and embraces diversity, and supports all pupils and students to tackle racism and have the knowledge and tools to do so.

I wish your constituent all the best with their future education.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Wall". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and 'W'.