

Letters to a President

Commended Entry Y9 – Dalola Kajopaye

To the Vice President of the United States, Kamala Harris,

Dear Madame Vice President,

My name is Dalola Kajopaye, a Year 9 student of Withington Girls' School in England. I am writing this letter to express my opinions on the issues I feel should be prioritized and tackled in your first few months of office.

Firstly, I want to congratulate you on becoming the first female, first black and first Asian Vice president. It is a remarkable and historic achievement, and I trust your time in office will compliment this. I found the recent presidential election very intriguing and it has given me more insight into American politics because I followed it all through - from the campaign to the inauguration. The first problem I would like to see combatted in America is racial discrimination and its impact on young people. I am sure based on your heritage that this issue is one close to your heart, and being black myself it is one that I am passionate about.

Systemic racism has been prevalent in schools across America for years, and the statistics behind it are shocking. According to the US Department of Education, during the 2015-16 school year, black students represented only 15% of total US student enrollment, but they made up 35% of students suspended once, 44% of those suspended more than once, and 36% of students expelled. During the last presidency, Donald Trump withdrew Obama-era guidelines designed to reduce racial and other types of discrimination in school disciplinary actions. In your time in office, I would like these reinstated, as well as extra measures put in place.

Teachers are basing black students' academic potential on their home and neighborhood environment rather than focusing on the individual pupil and their capabilities. The way black students are treated in class can be greatly detrimental to their performance, and thus lowering their chances of successfully graduating. In 2014, the high school graduation rate for white students in the US was 87%, according to the NCES. For black students, the rate was 73%; an unnecessarily-sized gap of 14%. According to the UN rights of a child, Article 28 states that discipline in schools must "respect children's dignity and their rights", and in my opinion, this means giving black students an equal opportunity of success as their white peers.

If the situation concerning racism in the US improves, their actions will have a greater impact on other nations in the world, including the UK. In my own school, out of the 100 girls in my year group, only 3 are black, and in some of the lower years there are even less. I find this quite unbelievable. Black students already attending these schools have spoken out about the micro-aggressions and racist comments they receive from teachers and peers. Furthermore,

independent schools like mine need to do more to offer bursaries to people of different backgrounds.

Through your actions, I am hoping to make Systemic racism a thing of the past, and am looking forward to a more inclusive, non-discriminative future. Thank you for taking your time to read my letter.