

### Community Conversations @ Edmund Waller Primary School

Community Conversations is part of the school's work to widen engagement with the parental community, particularly those who are traditionally underrepresented, both within the school walls and outside in the general population. This work also aligns with Lewisham's borough wide mission to [tackle racial inequality](#) within education and the school's own [Equality Objectives](#).

Over the past 6 months, the Deputy Head has been visiting other Lewisham schools, in particular Rathfern & Rushey Green Schools, to see their work in this field. This exploratory work has led to a partnership with Citizens UK, with whom the school has entered into an official partnership. This has a financial implication and in the current challenging fiscal climate, is representative of the commitment from the school to make meaningful progress on this issue.

Citizens UK explain that their mission statement is to, "overcome injustice". The aim is to bring together everyday people and local organisations to build a better, fairer society. They aim to effect change through community organising. This means that they work with people who are part of civil society organisations (such as schools, universities, faith institutions, charities and unions) to connect them to other organisations in their local area, who then work together to make change.

Last week, we hosted the first Community Conversation, here at Edmund Waller. This meeting was facilitated by Emilia Campos and Erica Scott from Citizens UK, supported by Mr Absolom and Ms Henry from the school staff. The agenda and questions were provided by Citizens UK. We were thrilled to have parents who represent 18 children from within the school community. This was a high turnout for the first meeting and stands up well when compared to meetings attended at other schools. Attending parents were asked to respond to the two following prompts:

P1. Tell us about a moment that made you think about race within the school community.

P2. What is one thing you would like to change either within the school, or outside, about race inequality?

Parents and carers spoke openly and emotively about their experiences within the school. They also commented on how constructive they found the meeting to be. Parents spoke about their children's experiences around feeling different due to religion, skin colour or coming from another country. They spoke emotionally too about how inclusive (or otherwise) they found school events such as the upcoming Winter Fair. However, they were unanimous in their account of feeling that the school itself was warm, welcoming and supportive of families and children.

By and large, they could not identify any particular 'thing' they would like to change within the school in response to the second prompt. Whilst this is very nice to hear, we feel that with more interrogation and exposure to a wider range of concepts, parents will begin to identify specific areas with greater clarity (Is the community fairly represented in the Edmund Waller curriculum? Do the reading books available fully represent our school community? Does the diversity of the school staff mirror that of the children?) As we develop these meetings, we expect those attending to become increasingly able to hold the school to account. However, this is clearly a very positive starting point and a positive position for us to begin our work from. Emilia Campos remarked that it was, "very unusual" for parents not to have numerous areas of development for their school.

Again, in response to the second question, in terms of 'things' they would like to change *outside* of the school, families were much clearer - cost of living, social injustice, prejudice & bias to name a few. By far and away the greatest area of concern was housing. One family was travelling from Tooting every day to keep their children at the school they love. Families reported poor upkeep of their homes and the challenges of dealing with landlords and councils. There was also a discussion about the complete lack of social housing and the worries of the growing inequality within the housing market.

Overall, the meeting was very well-received and the attending adults spoke of their hope and appetite for future meetings. Parents explained they were happy with the time and would work to bring members of their own personal networks to future meetings. Emilia agreed to set up a WhatsApp group, including all those present, to help arrange the next meeting.

Since the meeting, several members of the community have approached the Deputy Head or parents who attended the meeting and expressed an interest in becoming involved in the future. A date for the second meeting, in January will be circulated before the end of the Autumn term.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dan Absolom', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Dan Absolom  
Deputy Headteacher  
December 2023