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26 June 2017

Dear Parents and Carers

I am writing because you may have seen some articles in the press and on social media about Thomas Tallis. They are sensationalist in tone and contain inaccuracies which I should like to correct. May I assure you at the outset that, despite press reports to the contrary, no child has been asked to write his or her suicide letter. This is what happened.

A parent contacted us with concerns about a written exercise given to a class studying Macbeth in year 8 English. The exercise was to write a letter *from Lady Macbeth to Macbeth* explaining her decision to kill herself, a crucial development in this timeless drama. The exercise is a well-known method for helping students understand Shakespeare's characters. In fact, it was specifically praised in our 2014 Ofsted report as part of a lesson in which children 'made very rapid progress when they were sharing their ideas about Lady Macbeth's feelings'. The task set is also in the textbook we use for the play, as below:

**Characters**

**'The queen, my lord, is dead' (in pairs).** How did Lady Macbeth die?

*At the end of the play, Malcolm reports that she committed suicide, but that may not be true (because history is written by the victors). Talk together about how you think she might have met her death, then either write her farewell letter or write an obituary for a newspaper in which you give an account of her life and her death.*

(Cambridge University Press 2014)

We appreciate that the exercise was upsetting to the family and have discussed it with teaching staff. I met with the parent 10 days ago. I apologised wholeheartedly on behalf of the school and offered reassurances about the actions I had taken in a meeting that was friendly and cordial.

The Royal Borough of Greenwich Press Office has been handling the subsequent press coverage on our behalf, as we are a community school.

We try to teach imaginatively at Tallis so that our young people can think about serious issues and develop empathy. The teaching of literature, like all great art, opens up questions about human experience. We care deeply at Tallis about the emotional wellbeing of our students and, of course, wish no distress to be caused to any of our students so we always aim to discuss and debate difficult topics such as these in a supportive and sensitive way. However, we have listened to the concerns raised and will teach this aspect differently in future.

While we have had many supportive comments about the matter, I regret this press coverage which has not shown Tallis at its best. There is much for us to learn from the experience.

Please contact me if you would like to know more.

Yours sincerely

Carolyn Roberts  
Head