

# Passport to Pimlico

by Bruce Bawer



**Last week in central London**, hundreds of pupils at a top-rated private secondary school, the Pimlico Academy, staged an angry walkout. The target of their wrath? Headmaster Daniel Smith, who, upon his arrival at Pimlico last summer, introduced himself to parents with a letter saying that he had “the highest expectations of conduct and achievement for all.” Somehow he didn’t realize that, in 2021, them’s fightin’

words.

In keeping with his high expectations, Smith instituted a number of changes at Pimlico that the protesters condemned, in cartoonishly “woke” terms, in a written manifesto. For one thing, he established a dress code that they opposed because, by specifying proper clothing for boys and girls, it ostracized “non-binary” pupils. As part of this code, Smith forbade hairstyles that “block the view of others” (which, protesters charged, was racist code for “No Afros”) and prohibited brightly colored hijabs (anti-Muslim, of course). Note that similar rules are in force at many other English schools (and that in French schools, the hijab is banned entirely).

Smith also introduced a so-called “knowledge-led curriculum,” including courses in British history that, in the view of the malcontents, included too much information about “white kings and queens” and too little about “BAME [Black Asian Minority Ethnic] figures.” (As one black girl told a reporter on camera: “Tudor kings and queens don’t reflect who we really are.”) For good measure, the protesters accused Smith directly of “racism, Islamophobia and transphobia” and faulted him for paying insufficient homage to the Black Lives Matter movement.

Smith came to the 1200-pupil Pimlico from the Ebbsfleet Academy in Swanscombe, Kent, where he was vice principal. By all reports, he was as strict at Ebbsfleet as he’s been at Pimlico – but there was apparently not a whimper of outrage in response. How to explain this difference? Well, one factor is that the kids at Ebbsfleet are mostly working-class whites, whereas Pimlico is overwhelmingly non-white, mostly black Caribbean and African. Many have only rudimentary English; some are Muslim. Plenty of them, it’s clear, have drunk deep from the Black Lives Matter wells. During the walkout, somebody scrawled on the school’s outer wall: “White schools for brown kids are u mad.” Another graffito read: “Pimlico Academy...run by racists...for profit!!!”

My first thought, upon reading the manifesto and graffiti, was: where did these kids – most in their early to mid teens – pick up this rubbish? Are they being used by adults? It's notable that many of their parents support the protest; at last week's walkout, kids and parents alike carried professionally printed BLM posters bearing the logo of the weekly *Socialist Worker* newspaper. Most of the teachers also backed the protest; last Thursday, they voted to declare "no confidence" in Smith's management. On Friday, the *Daily Mail* noted that the influence of the far-left National Union of Teachers on this revolt cannot be underestimated. On Sunday, the *Mail* [reported](#) that, sure enough, the Socialist Workers Party had been active behind the scenes of the protest.

Given the protesters' palpable hostility toward British freedom, culture, history, and capitalism – in short, toward *everything* British – it was no surprise that the symbol of their beef with Smith was the Union Jack. Shortly after Smith took up his position at Pimlico, he hoisted the national flag outside the school. In response, pupils took it down and burned it. (By the way, what happened to those kids? None of the accounts I've read answers that question.) Smith put the flag back up. Much of the walkout rhetoric addressed the issue of the flag, which the protesters regard as a racist symbol. "Ain't no black in the Union Jack!" read one graffito, quoting an old racist slogan that was a favorite of the British National Party. "The flag has become a symbol of us not being listened to," one pupil [whimpered](#) to a manifestly sympathetic *Guardian* hack. "It's strange but feels like we are being colonized."

Obviously there's a problem at Pimlico. The problem is this: too many of its pupils, parents, and teachers have no respect for the country in which they live, let alone for ordinary rules of conduct, and no comprehension whatsoever of the meaning, value, and purpose of real education (as opposed to

ideological indoctrination). Their own graffiti shows them to be semi-literate, while their manifesto suggests that, in place of historical knowledge, they've had their heads stuffed with Howard Zinn-style claptrap about the evils of Western imperialism and colonialism.

Reportedly, Smith treated these kids precisely the same way he treated the ethnic English pupils at Ebbsfleet. But while the discipline and the demands were accepted at Ebbsfleet as legitimate elements of serious schooling, the kids at Pimlico – along with many of their parents and teachers – saw only a white man ordering around dark-skinned kids as if they were his slaves.

In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* against racial segregation in the schools. In 2021, at places like Pimlico, the kids are basically insisting on separate *and different* education. A dress code? The Norman Conquest and Magna Carta? That's *white* education, a.k.a. "white schools for brown kids." These kids – and their adult supporters – really seem to believe that because they're not white, everything about their education should be different: less demanding, less disciplined. They plainly don't grasp that Smith, by holding them up to the same standards as the white kids at Ebbsfleet, was not being racist – he was being *respectful*.

Over the course of his career in school administration, Smith has developed a reputation as a stern disciplinarian whose toughness breeds success. Well, that's done with forever. Last Wednesday, in an obsequious letter to parents, he caved. He loosened the uniform rules. He promised a watered-down curriculum, including history classes focusing on matters of "truly current" interest – apparently meaning BLM talking points and other "woke" bilge.

Instead of putting his pupils in their place with some tough home truths about education, patriotism, and other things they

don't understand in the slightest, Smith sucked up to them shamelessly, claiming that they "inspire me daily," praising the hooky-players as "bright, courageous, intelligent young people, passionate about the things that matter to them and acutely attuned to injustice," and apologizing to them for not having listened "closely enough" to their voices. Nonsense: he should've made it clear to them that it's not his job to *listen* to them; it's his job, and that of his staff, to teach them successfully enough that one day they may actually have something to say worth listening to.

And, yes, he pulled down the Union Jack, "pending review." Review? Review of what? "This symbol," he explained, "is a powerful one which evokes often intense reactions. We have listened to the concerns of students, parents and the wider community about it." What pusillanimity! Natives of undeveloped, undemocratic, poverty-riddled countries who've been given the great gift of a life in the United Kingdom – but who dare to express "concerns" about its flag – should be told politely but firmly to go back to where they came from.

On Saturday came the most degrading news of all: it turned out that on Wednesday, Smith was filmed fleeing down a school corridor from a pupil – *one* pupil – who tried to engage him in conversation.

At least a few Tories in Parliament shook their heads over Smith's pathetic surrender, and especially over his craven removal of the flag – which, several of them pointed out, is a symbol of all Brits, so that (as one of them put it) "disrespecting the flag disrespects us all." Nigel Farage warned that this kind of socialist mischief in the schools "has the potential to be the most divisive and dangerous thing we've ever seen in British society." Nor, predictably, did Smith's backdown satisfy his critics. (Only a fool would have expected otherwise.) After the no-confidence vote, it seemed likely that teachers and parents would do everything they could to get him fired. We can only hope he *is* fired – and

replaced by someone with backbone. Alas, given that the left won this battle in a rout, such an outcome seems highly unlikely.

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