

Dear Mr McMahon,

Recently with the events taking place and highlighting the prominent racial discrimination issues and police brutality in the US, Australia and around the world, we students who are heavily involved in these types of activism would like to address a few things that are important to us.

It is truly heart-warming to see so many people addressing what's been happening in the world recently. To see people realising how broad issues of police brutality and racial injustice are in today's society is amazing; we genuinely believe change can and will be made with such widespread support. We would like to thank you on behalf of Shalom College for speaking out about these issues, as not many people in such an influential position would do so. We are proud students of Shalom College and we love that we are learning in such an inclusive environment.

Firstly, we would like to address the letter in the newsletter addressing racism and the 'all lives matter' movement. We understand that you are in a difficult position regarding these topics, and you have a large audience of people looking up to you and critiquing what you say. We greatly admire that you have spoken out about this topic, and again thank you. We are certain that you meant this in a positive way. However, the 'All lives matter' movement was originally started in around 2016, to counter the black lives matter argument. When people of colour would protest for their right to be treated equally, they were met with counter-protesters claiming that all lives matter. The only reason these counter-protesters would protest was to drown out the voices of Black Americans. The people preaching 'all lives matter' in 2016 were prominently groups of people who refused to educate themselves about this subject and assumed that the phrase is saying, 'only black lives matter'. So, the reason that we are saying Black Lives Matter and not All Lives Matter is because, now more than ever, it is imperative that we draw attention to Black history, in an act of equity as opposed to equality. White people have never had to protest for basic human rights (regarding their race) as people of colour have had to. As protests erupted late last month, this came into the spotlight once again, and so did the phrase 'all lives matter'. Obviously, all lives do matter! But, all lives can't matter until black lives matter too. Black Lives Matter doesn't mean that non-black lives don't matter. It simply means, 'black lives matter too'.

Secondly, we would like to address the rally being held today. Again, we are certain this event was organised with the best possible intentions in mind and it is great to see action being taken. However, a large amount of both students and parents found this rally problematic in a number of ways. The fact that this rally is the only voiced support for this movement is worrying; as part of the Shalom community, we are extremely privileged economically, and are in a position where we as a school could make donations, as we have in the past. To truly show support for people suffering violence due to race, perhaps a fundraiser could be organised, with the proceeds going towards charities fighting these sorts of issues. Many students that I have spoken to have shown great enthusiasm in running these operations and donating. Alternatively, Shalom College could make a direct donation to charities. A rally that is during school lunch hours can be seen as performative activism. This means, using activism for personal gain, for popularity or other means that solely benefit an individual. The majority of the time, people performing this type of 'activism' don't genuinely care about movements and don't want to make a change. The last thing we as students want is for our school to be shown as performing fake activism for its own gain, especially since we care so deeply about these subjects and want to bring genuine change. While this rally is excellent in educating students and the community, it doesn't really contribute anything positively to the people affected by police brutality and race issues.

The way our school is connected by technology is truly amazing; and another way to support this movement would be utilizing our resources such as emails and sending around petitions which support this cause. We students have signed hundreds of petitions over this past week or so via social medias, and petitions are an excellent way to make a difference for anyone not in a position to donate. Change.org has a number of amazing petitions supporting the black lives matter movement, both in the US and Australia, and a lot of these petitions personally support bringing change. Change.org is an extremely reliable and safe site, so there would be no issues in making these links available to students. If this was an issue with security, a number of students would be happy to start our own petitions to share.

While things are extremely difficult due to Covid-19 surrounding protesting, a very positive and constructive thing the Shalom community could do is organise an out-of-school 'protest' (or rally) not only limited to Shalom students during school hours. If social distancing is an issue, a large amount of people could gather on the Shalom oval on a weekend to protest, while maintaining social distancing. Shalom has excellent facilities and seeing these facilities utilised for an important cause would be amazing. We understand the situation with protests and Covid-19 is an ever-evolving situation, and this may be difficult due to restrictions. However, if restrictions permit or ease, we students would love to see this happen. By making the protest available to the general community and not only students of Shalom, the protest would be attended by many more people; people who could donate, for example, or hold other rallies elsewhere inspired by the Bundaberg community at Shalom.

We would be happy to have more conversations about these topics any time. Again, thank you so much for using your position to speak out about these issues that are so relevant in today's world. This year will be the year we finally see change, and it's happening right before our eyes. We students are the next generation of leaders, and we feel it's important to be heard when we voice concerns about these issues. Thank you so much for considering our concerns.