Opening up a window on the wider world

IF WE have learnt nothing else over the last 12 months, we should have certainly grasped that the world is a very small place. The lack of opportunities for travel, and the fear of a virus that enjoys the interconnectedness of our global societies, has potentially made us rather insular and our attitudes increasingly parochial.

Here in beautiful Wiltshire it is sometimes easy to forget about the importance of having a global perspective, but it is something we take particularly seriously at Warminster School.

We welcome pupils from all around the world and celebrate 30 different nationalities: we are proud to have pupils from Bermuda, Mexico, Thailand, Norway and Slovakia to name but a few.

All of our boarders make Wiltshire their home whilst they are studying with us, but we never forget where they come from or stop them sharing their own cultures and experiences. We obviously do this through a variety of means, but an important aspect of our educational offer at Warminster is the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma. We were one of the first schools in the region to offer this qualification when we gained the status of 'IB world school' around 10 years ago and have enjoyed great success since. The IB at Warminster sits alongside A-Levels as an alternative sixth form pathway. It is a highly regarded and internationally recognised qualification, which is not only accepted by British universities, but very much welcomed due to the rigour, breadth, and depth it provides

Behind the IB is not just an academic approach, but a holistic philosophy of education: *"The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect."*

The nuts and bolts of the course are that pupils study six subjects over two years, three at higher level and three at standard level. This clearly allows pupils to keep a breadth of study not permitted by the narrower focus of three or maybe four A-Levels. The subjects are clustered in six groups: Studies in language and literature, language acquisition, individuals and societies, sciences, mathematics and the arts.

In addition to subject specific study, pupils also tackle 'the core' which is made up of three areas: extended essay – a 4000-word dissertation on a topic of their choosing; theory of knowledge – a course designed to let pupils reflect critically on diverse ways of knowing and to consider the role and nature of knowledge in their own culture, in the cultures of others and in the wider world; CAS (creativity, activity and service) which allows not only creative and physical opportunities for pupils, but involves voluntary service for the benefit of the community.

The IB looks at educating the 'whole person', whilst maintaining a global perspective not present in other qualifications. It is a rigorous course that is not for the faint-hearted, but it provides pupils with an extraordinary range of experiences, knowledge, and skills that will set them up for life – wherever in the world they decide to live it.

I have three children at Warminster and whether or not they decide to take the IB diploma, I feel very lucky that they get to make friends and share their learning with children from all over the world. At a time when there seems to be much division and separation of nations, I firmly believe we need to teach togetherness and solidarity.

I am sure many of you, like me, were enthralled and moved by the words of Amanda Gorman in the poem *The Hill We Climb*, written and performed for Joe Biden's presidential inauguration. Gorman's performance was seen all around the world and was heralded as offering some rays of light at a time of darkness:

"And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us, but what stands before us.

We close the divide because we know, to put our future first, we must first put our differences aside.

We lay down our arms so we can reach out our arms to one another.

We seek harm to none and harmony for all.
Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true:
That even as we grieved, we grew.
That even as we hurt, we hoped.
That even as we tired, we tried.
That we'll forever be tied together, victorious."

It has been the most difficult of years, but I firmly believe we must embrace internationalism and celebrate the rich diversity of this world. WL

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• *www.warminsterschool.org.uk*