

Caroline Robinson, Director of Music, Warminster School

Alpine adventure: Career direction change & mountainous inspiration

The amazing opportunities MMA members can offer one another: Caroline Robinson (Warminster School) and Brian Martineau (Aiglon College) are previous colleagues, but have recently met up with great results for them both...



The transition from teaching GCSE and A level music via a long maternity break to taking on a prep music department in need of invigoration was a challenge I relished. The nursery children seemed tiny and getting down to their level singing with teddy bears, a large piece of stretchy lycra and a duck-quacker were an interesting swap from the upper sixth analysing Shostakovich. Energetic youngsters calling out my name as they walked down to lunch was not what I had been used to, and a far cry from the grunts of year nine pouring gravy on their cheesy chips (my previous full time position being in Loughborough). The challenge of moving music forward at Warminster Prep has been stimulating to say the least, and five years down the line I am hugely proud of what I have done. Managing to encourage 96% of the school from reception upwards to attend choir at least once a week has to be my proudest achievement. However, unbeknown to me everything was set to change. Being promoted to take over music for our entire school (including Senior) was not only a huge compliment but also just the challenge I realise I needed. Every waking hour I am now thinking of new and exciting projects I can undertake with the senior pupils. Would they prefer Disney, Les Mis or Rutter? I think to myself as I trawl through brochures of choral

repertoire. How easy is it to set off pyrotechnics in the school concert hall, how quickly can I get back up to scratch on the double bass to play in Jazz Band and how soon shall I start to think about foreign music tours?

However, the most exciting (and effective) way to prepare myself to return to senior school has to be the invitation I received to adjudicate a music competition at the prestigious Aiglon College, high in the Swiss Alps. Being able to experience a successful music department in an international school first hand seemed the perfect preparation for my forthcoming role.

On arriving at the school it is impossible to avoid the awesome and dramatic backdrop. 360 degree views of uninterrupted mountains, both snow-capped and forested, dominate every wrap-around classroom window. The walk from the music department to the staffroom is a short hike up the side of a mountain and the smartly fitted out buildings are filled with a friendly mix of diverse international charismas. I believe that in order to inspire you must yourself be inspired and in Aiglon I have discovered this in profusion. Brian, the Director of Music, exudes enthusiasm both for his students and all music, and is delighted to impart his experience and knowledge for running a vibrant, buzzing and

eventful music department. Competitions and music can be a contentious mix, so I spent much time prior to the trip pondering the balance between praise, encouragement and structured ideas for improvement. As the audience poured into the magically back-lit concert hall, the importance of the occasion took hold and I felt a heady mix of being both honoured and overwhelmed as I pondered the task ahead. I scribbled copious notes on each performance and hoped that I had got the balance right. From the opening class playing one of my favourite Sarah Watts recorder pieces, Mike Oliver's Tank Top to a piano performance of Indian Pony Race, the concert delivered an efficiently executed mix of both high standards and varied styles. ICAUFO took me a moment to decipher before a year eight boy performed it on the drums. The audience, packed with parents, staff and pupils, seemed to appreciate my words of advice and encouragement offered to each performer, and the cup winners were both delighted and gracious in their acceptance.

In our careers as teachers, I believe the most important role we play in the classroom is that of inspiring our learners. I have received this in abundance over the past few days and cannot wait to get back to school to communicate it to my own pupils.