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# Embracing internationalism



**Mungo Winkley, Head of EAL, shares his passion for the truly international**

**community at Millfield and explains why experiences and friendships at school can be the best foundations for becoming global citizens of the future.**

For me, what makes Millfield such an exciting place to be, a truly exceptional educational environment, is the cultural diversity on offer. Never has it been more important to have a global perspective than in today's society. With over 70 different nationalities in the Millfield community, it is normal for our pupils to have friends from all over the world, and to be aware of, and involved in, different cultures.

According to the British Council,

"Diversity of students, and therefore viewpoints, is a cornerstone of a global education and as such, acceptance and integration of international students must be an essential part of an internationalisation process." Very few of the young people with us now will find themselves within the confines of one country for the duration of their professional lives, so the chance to experience and learn about other cultures has become an essential part of their education.

The international foundations of Millfield are something everyone within our community knows well. When six young princes arrived from India in 1935, they helped create the culture here. The ties that exist around the world today are stronger than ever, formed in the classrooms, on the sports pitches and in boarding house common rooms over the last 80 years. It is not "them and us" and that is why it works.

Of course, exposure to different cultures

comes in many different forms, but genuine friendships cannot be forced. Be that bonding over a shared love of a particular cuisine or national dish, to hitting it off on the playing fields or in an arts performance. The simplest activities can be the basis of a firm friendship and a boarding school such as ours is awash with girls and boys who have done just that.

Akanksha, Lower Sixth, was this year asked to look out for a friend's sister, so when she first saw Jiya, she went straight up to her and said "Hi". They soon discovered that they shared a love of Lebanese cuisine and Bollywood dancing. They've been friends since then and now make sure they catch up over lunch every Friday. Akanksha even spent New Year with Jiya and her family in Dubai and she is now hoping to spend the summer in Beirut with Jiya.

Two British pupils, Zoe and Polly have also visited Akanksha in Bombay, learning about the culture and visiting Hindu





temples with her family. Polly commented that it has been amazing to be able to meet and live with international friends as she didn't know any before she came to Millfield. That really is what is so special here.

Many international pupils will be boarding for the first time and unfamiliar with our education system and social expectations. Whilst they will want to 'fit in' and learn about British customs, it can be a daunting prospect but, as many find, starting at a new school is challenging for everyone. We try our best to help pupils settle in and look for similar interests to help them find a natural groove with another pupil. Of this year's Year 9 pupils, Zoe, an expat from Abu Dhabi, talks of how "Emily and I were put in touch by Millfield during the summer before we started because we both have a real love of horse riding. We spoke on Skype and emailed each other and met for the first time in front of Wells Cathedral." At this first meeting, the girls laughed about little differences in language ("What's queuing?", "Oh that's what you call waiting in line!"), and by the time they started school, their friendship was formed. Now Emily and her family are looking into a family stopover in Abu Dhabi "on the way" back to Tennessee.

Boarding house life is a hugely important



*Jiya and Akanksha soon discovered a shared love of Lebanese cuisine and Bollywood dancing. They've been friends ever since and always catch up over lunch every Friday.*

backbone to many friendships and Will and Max are a very good example of how living together can be the basis of a firm friendship. Will commented; "We lived opposite each other in house and despite being in different year groups, our friendship still (somehow) developed due to me constantly borrowing Max's speakers from his room when he wasn't there!" During the Christmas break Will visited

Max in his home country of Hong Kong and even spent time working with Max's Dad during his visit, "I loved it so much, I stayed until Christmas Eve."

Of course our international pupils have to adjust to fit into the school they have chosen, but they also have a huge developmental part to play in it. They will be keen to improve their English language skills and to learn new things in class. Their role in the school as learners is obvious. But they also play an invaluable part in the school as international educators. They are role models for their country, and the conversations they have, the insights they give and the way they behave, has a profound effect on the educational experience of our British pupils.

Our pupils might not yet fully appreciate the intrinsic value that cultural knowledge and awareness brings as they move into adulthood, but there is no doubt in my mind that the school community is richer, more diverse and truly reflective of not only the global outlook we must all take care to share in, but our roots from over 80 years ago, which are even more relevant now than they ever have been.

*Will and Max lived opposite each other in house and despite being in different year groups, their friendship still developed.*

