

# International Partnerships *News*

learning to realise potential



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## *Internationalism beats hard and strong at the heart of Winchmore School*

By Noel Thompson - (Deputy Headteacher)

Why do we at Winchmore School want our students to see and experience as much of the world as is humanly possible? Because we believe that the worldlier, our students become, then the more tolerant, well rounded, forward thinking, knowledgeable, questioning and successful they will be. Indeed, well-travelled students will be better decision makers, able to transfer skills from one specialist area to another. Furthermore, these crucial skills and qualities will last them for a lifetime. Taking a student beyond the classroom develops cultural capital and most importantly understanding the world around them. It, therefore, cannot be emphasised enough that international travel improves a student as a learner and consequently their life chances.



There is plenty of evidence to suggest that international companies struggle to find suitable applicants who possess the necessary skills, particularly skills which enable them to operate in the global market place. As an international school we are proud of our reputation for fostering international relationships, which certainly help to promote cooperation and global understanding, but also, helps to prepare our students for exciting careers in international settings.

The French novelist Marcel Proust said:

*'The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeing new lands, but in seeing with new eyes'.*

The more we connect with other nationalities, the more we learn about other cultures, ideas, and lifestyles. This education beyond the classroom, widens horizons and triggers a thirst for greater adventure and ambition.

So, it should be no surprise to anyone connected with Winchmore School that bringing the world into our classrooms is at the heart of who we are, and what we do. We are a welcoming 'outward facing' community with an inimitable mission; that of bringing textbooks to life. We are a community where different and diverse cultures are celebrated through lifestyle, art, music, fashion and food in an International Evening Gala which is a joyous occasion that epitomises the heart of Winchmore School. A place of freedom, expression and also the compassionate understanding of each other and where we come from.

Take our foreign language assistants, for example. They bring France, Germany and Spain into our classrooms. They are like walking, talking, breathing textbooks. They provide an extra motivation for students to delve into the language beyond the words and pictures on a page. We learn their language, and they provide a first-hand, up-to-date experience of their country, their lifestyle, culture, food, traditions, and festivals. We are grateful for the richness they bring to our community, and we are so lucky to have them with us.

We also take our students abroad on a variety of shorter trips such as the Year 7, day-trip to Boulogne or Lille. Such trips may be something of a taster, but once you have been there and bought a souvenir in a French shop, or a Macdonald's burger (well you try to stop them!) you really have stepped out of the textbook and turned a page into a real living experience.

Then we have the longer 'sleep-over' visits to places such as Normandy and Berlin. We make a priority of visiting places of major historical importance. The Sixth Form visit to the Auschwitz Holocaust Museum is always a priority. Observing other visitors in the museum, some of whom may have been touched directly by

the horrors of the holocaust, can offer the greatest insight. Watch as the visitor gazes into the dimly-lit display cabinets. Discreetly, watch as they draw tears at the sight of a child's single shoe, or the broken lenses of wire rimmed glasses. We are left with a feeling that reaches deep into the soul. Whether, it is about the Normandy Landings, or the visit to the Holocaust museum, the experience becomes part of us. It shapes our understanding of the world and it's history. Yes, so that we never forget about what happened, but also, so we can play some part in ensuring that such an event should never happen again. Which brings us back to the here and now. What we are witnessing in Ukraine and other areas of the world, currently, highlights the need for greater international understanding and cooperation. Reaching out to other countries has always been a noble cause, but recent global events has turned a noble cause into something more urgent. International learning may trigger interest, intrigue, questioning and all the points mentioned earlier, but it also prompts discussion, debate and a desire to find solutions to difficult and complex problems in pursuit of international cooperation and world peace. Consequently, we all have a part to play.

In addition to the trips described above, we have been extremely privileged to organize 'host-family' student exchange visits across the world, where we have been able to 'dig a little deeper'. Our visits to China, New York and Spain have enabled us to twin with other schools in those countries. We have signed, or intend to sign,



memorandums of understanding with the schools, which formally acknowledges our partnership. The memorandum describes what the partnership looks like, the benefits and the ways in which we intend to take the relationship forward.

At this point, I could write a book about how we connected with China, New York and Spain. From the moment Jim Owen asked me to lead a delegation to the Shunde Wonder School near Hong Kong, to where we are today. But I'll save you the long read and suggest you check out our website where you will find lots of information, photos and other images of our visits to our partner schools. In China, we shared teaching and learning experiences with our Chinese counterparts, so that students and teachers are able to benefit from the exchange of practices, knowledge and expertise. This has positive implications for teacher training and professional development in both countries.

The Covid pandemic and the war in Ukraine have certainly been a barrier in moving the school forward internationally. However, last summer we were able to change the proposed destination of our school exchange visit from Smolensk, Russia to New York, USA. This has already opened a new chapter in Winchmore's long-term, long-haul international journey. The visit to New York was both mind-opening and mind-blowing. The visit has provided us with the stimulus and context for exploring a new partnership with a school in New York. Transatlantic zoom meetings have already taken place, and plans are afoot!

At Winchmore we have been very fortunate to access government funding for some student exchange visits using the Turing Funding Programme. The Turing scheme is a UK Government programme to promote international opportunities for students, so that children can experience some of the 'awe and wonder of the world in which they live'. (Ofsted re: cultural capital) Turing has helped to subsidise the travel expenses for many students so that they can afford to take full advantage of the travel opportunities we have been able to offer. <https://www.turing-scheme.org.uk/>

All students who participate on the trips tell us how inspired and motivated they are. They want to maximize all opportunities available and achieve their best. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that visits to foreign lands, short or long-haul, widen horizons, deepen ambitions and heighten aspirations. Robert Browning said that our 'reach should exceed our grasp'. This resonates when it comes to students travelling across the world. To achieve great things, a person should attempt even those things that may seem daunting and look impossible. We know that the impact of international travel on our students, particularly those who move on to 'Russell Group' universities, has been tangible and profound. Rising to the challenge, being independent, managing change and difference; and seizing the day are what our exchange students needed to do when they lived with a Chinese family for a week. It took guts! But, what preparation for any future challenge life may present. Yes, as we have said, international travel promotes global awareness and international cooperation, but it also impacts very positively on life chances and social mobility.

The final part of our international experience is based on adventure and fun. The kind of outdoor pursuit trips which are based on having a great time, but still offer challenge and opportunities to learn. They also help bind our school community together. Our ski trips and water sports adventures are regular features of the Winchmore calendar. The trips to Ecuador, Iceland and Costa Rica brought students and staff together on inspirational and unforgettable adventures, and it didn't stop there. When back in school, the experience was shared with other





students through assemblies, lessons, displays and on the website. It's a win-win experience for all! We cannot leave this section without mentioning the way in which our students rise to the occasion when travelling at home and abroad. Trip after trip, we receive fabulous comments about the excellent attitude and behaviour of our students. There is so much evidence of them being a credit to themselves, to their families, and being true ambassadors to the school. Furthermore, we mustn't forget to acknowledge and thank the staff, who always 'go the extra mile' to make the trips happen. The planning, preparation, risk assessments, itineraries and much, much more, is

a huge amount of work. On top of this, the twenty-four-hour responsibility for looking after the students and keeping them safe during the visit, often with some challenging activities, is a true sign of commitment, dedication and determination. A sign of teachers wanting to provide our students with the widest and best opportunities so that they can witness some of the 'awe and wonder of the world'.

Today, our digital age offers huge opportunities for greater communication and partnerships across the world. New and exciting ways are available to bring the world into our classrooms via Zoom for example, or Microsoft Teams, or Google Meet. Video conferencing has been available for some time, but it is only recently — with on-line learning, due to the pandemic that so many more teachers and students have gained the necessary skills and confidence to successfully participate in remote learning. At least one silver-lining from the pandemic. The 2023, New Year offers ground-breaking opportunities, as more schools, including Winchmore, 'get together' with other schools across the world...and all at the flick of a switch!

We often joke when Jim Owen, our headteacher, says that he is never happier than when the school is empty because the students are on school trips, enjoying learning in the real world. So, we scale it back and be reasonable. Jim's philosophy, which is shared by so many, beats hard and strong at the heart of Winchmore, ensuring that every opportunity is provided for students to travel, learn, have adventures and tell great stories. This is what makes Winchmore an International School, with a heartfelt reputation for being the school that never sleeps. Or, to conclude, perhaps our spirit and philosophy is best summed up in the words of Helen Keller who said:

*'The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched – they must be felt with the heart'*

Thank you to everybody, known and unknown, who have contributed to this article!

