**Welcome Mr. Thornhill!**

By [Vikrant Sabharwal](mailto:22sabharwalv@brooklinek12.org)

Mr. Richard Thornhill is the new principal of the British International School of Boston (BISB). He has devoted his entire life to education and has had some notable experiences in his career. He was the Chief Executive Officer of a federation of schools in London for over 20 years. He was also appointed one of the first National Leaders of Education in the United Kingdom, leaders who work alongside schools to provide high-quality support to those who need it most. In addition, in the UK, he has served on the boards of the Training and Development Agency for Schools, an agency that trains teachers, and the National College for School Leadership, which aims to improve academic standards by ensuring teachers are qualified and motivated. Most recently, he was principal of the British School of Beijing.

We sat down with Mr. Thornhill to learn about how his time here has been so far and the future plans that he has for BISB.

*What most excites you about coming to Boston?*

The thing that intrigues me is that Boston has a very, very long and very rich history of education. Now I have spent my entire professional life in education and therefore to come to a city that has some of the great institutions of world education and have the opportunity to run a school in that environment is something that really, professionally, I could not turn down. I'm looking forward enormously to actually working with the other high-quality schools there to maximize the opportunity.

I think that if you were to come to the British School of Beijing, BSB, from Boston, you would find a lot of similarities. Therefore, I'm looking forward to not just the wholesale change, but that process of improvement.

*What aspect of Chinese culture will you miss most?*

[I am going to miss how] China is incredibly safe, wherever you walk through central Asia, even in Central Beijing, in one of the largest cities in the world at two o'clock in the morning on a Saturday, you will be entirely safe. However, would I let my daughter walk through central London at two o'clock in the morning, on a Saturday, no I would not. But we are perfectly safe here, it's a very law abiding society. There is a price to pay for that though. The laws are very stringent here and justice is not open.

China is a very ancient society and some of the areas that you visit like the Great Wall of China, the Forbidden City, they’re thousands of years old. It has been quite interesting living in a society with such a long history.

*What do you do when you are not working?*

I love cars! When I was much younger, a lot of my qualifications were around science engineering. Through that came a real passionate interest in motor sport. Over the weekend you would find me involved in motor sport and tinkering with cars. America has built some of the world's most iconic cars. I'm looking forward to owning an American muscle car, as I have never owned one. I also play golf, badly, but I enjoy playing it.

*What is one thing that a lot of people do not know about you?*

I have never been asked that before. At a professional level, as a principal your job is to appear confident, happy, presenting a positive picture of the school. But on the inside, [I] worry about whether [I am] doing a good job.

*If you could go back in time to your pre-COVID self, what advice would you give yourself?*

Having experienced a whole year of this, I would tell myself to try and work harder to get thorough international cooperation and sharing of information. Pre-COVID it did not matter as much but now it does. The World has shrunk and it is difficult to fathom. I would have advocated much more strongly for nations to come together to support each other. We have suddenly realized the world is extremely interdependent. So what happened in Wuhan, China is now playing out in Boston, Massachusetts. It takes a different level of cooperation to come together and work through a disaster like this. That will be the lesson that I take forward from [the pandemic].

*How do you think education needs to evolve to the changing world of technology and AI that we are in today?*

Education tends to be quite slow. I think what we need to do is to speed education up. The application of AI will not really replace the teacher, but what it will do is make that teacher far more efficient and effective in their delivery of teaching. And so from a school perspective, we should learn to embrace technology. Nord Anglia has a strategy, which looks at the application specifically of AI to improve things like assessment techniques within the classroom. So the information is available far fuller, far quicker, and is available to all: the student sees it, the parent sees, the teacher sees it, and I, as the principal, would see it.

Therefore our decision-making will become faster and hopefully more effective, but there is a risk in all of that because AI can do many things, but in no way, is it as complex or as complete as the human brain. So what we need to do is to make sure the supremacy of human decision-making is kept and relationships in the learning process are maintained. We are just applying the AI systems to support that process and make it more efficient. And there are ethical issues that we need to consider as well with the privacy of information. Who sees all of that information? How do we manage it? How do we keep it private? So there's quite a few complex questions to answer, but in short, [the application of AI] is about ensuring that we are innovative enough and open enough as educators to embrace AI to enhance what is already there, not replace it.

We are looking forward to meeting Mr. Thornhill in-person and to his tenure as principal at BISB.

