**Welcome Mr. Gilhooly!**

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

Mr. Andrew Gilhooly is going to be the new Deputy Head of School for the British International School of Boston (BISB) in the next school year. He will work closely with the new Head of School Mr. Richard Thornhill. Mr. Gilhooly is coming to BISB from the British International School of Chicago (BISC), where he is the Head of the Secondary School. Mr. Gilhooly has been at BISC for 14 years, joining the school in 2007 when it was very small and in its early stages. He helped grow the secondary school from 80 students to 420 students over the course of eight years. He also taught math at BISC at the IB level and some science. Before his time at BISC, he taught in Northern England and spent some time in industry. He grew up in Sheffield, England and attended Sheffield University where he obtained a PGCE in secondary mathematics before proceeding to complete a masters in International Education at King's College in London. Mr. Gilhooly is extremely excited to join the BISB community and to get to know the teachers, students, and parents. I sat down with Mr. Gilhooly to learn more about him.

***What was your proudest moment at BISC?***

There are two Year 12 students from BISC who started EcoCiricle. It started as a student-led club for the ecosystem and they have expanded to become a nonprofit. They are now bringing in lot’s of students, not only in our school but in other schools as well, who are interested in making some sort of environmental impact and standing up for what they believe is right. They are also reaching out to students at other schools and giving them the leadership skills to start their own clubs and societies. They were invited to speak at a regional conference recently for Nord Anglia, in front of principals from all around the Americas. The two girls that started this, are examples of two students who were with us a good eight years ago when the school was much smaller than it is right now. And it was really interesting just listening to the journey that they went on as they worked their way through the school. Reflecting on the past 8 years, the different things we have done, the different buildings we were in, it took me back to that journey that we've been through and to see where they are right now, it was just a really proud and humbling moment.

***One of your most remarkable achievements is the way you helped dramatically grow the secondary school at BISC. How did you manage to do that?***

It doesn't happen overnight, I would go to different events around the city [to promote the school]. We would approach middle school students and parents and they would ask, how big is your freshman class? And I'd say, oh, well, there's five students. So you have to really push parents to take a risk in and send their kid to a school that is that small.

We started with a graduating class of one student. She went to one-on-one classes. I was actually one of her teachers; I taught her math for two years at the very top end in school. It was quite an experience, credit to her, she stuck with it and she was all in.

The next year it was four students, then even more the year after, and it just slowly grew from that. For Chicago, it is just simply word of mouth. Those few families we had, go back and talk to their friends and neighbors about their great experience at the school. Then when the following academic year comes around, a few more students come along. They see the school, and realize it works for them.

***What are you most looking forward to about being in Boston?***

This might sound really strange but one of the things I am looking forward to is seeing the winding streets, with that grid pattern in the city. There's just something about the layout of the city that takes me back to where I grew up. And knowing that there are going to be buildings around me that are over 100 years old, that is not a thing in Chicago because of the Chicago fire. The idea of seeing the older architecture and living in a home that was built in the 1900’s is really exciting. I am looking forward to the greenery as well, including parks and trails, Chicago does not have a lot of that. I might want to change that answer within a month of being there though.

***What are you most looking forward to about being at BISB?***

Where I am right now, it is a true inner city school. This is a school where we can see the Willis tower from the windows all around the building. There is an outdoor soccer pitch, but that’s it for the outdoor space. To see where the Boston school is with so much outdoor space, it feels more like a suburban school. I think that will be a really nice change for me.

***What is the first thing that you will look to do in the city when you get here?***

I want to do the freedom trail. I've heard that you can walk it all in about a day. I also really want to get on a boat and go whale watching. At the moment, however, I haven’t got a clue as to where I am going to live. Wherever I end up living, I will explore those areas and find little things to do there.

***What are some adjectives that those at BISC would use to describe you?***

Calm, friendly, and definitely approachable. I always have time for anyone that wants to talk to me about anything that they have on their mind, whether it be an initiative or if someone needs some advice. I am generally interested in learning about people as well as their backgrounds and stories. That helps me really create a sense of community.

***What do you do when you are not heads down at work?***

Before I had kids, I used to play a lot of rec sports, did a lot of rec soccer. I used to really enjoy mountain biking and I am looking to maybe starting that up again in Boston. I enjoy snowboarding as well so I am looking forward to the ski and ride resorts [in New England]. I used to play guitar for many years as well. So I guess there's a lot of things that I used to do and now my time is really dedicated toward family. It's me now watching my children play on a team rather than me playing myself.

***If you had a magic wand and could give your pre-COVID self advice, what advice would you give?***

Before COVID came, I actually started taking education tech initiatives at my own school just because I thought that's where the future was going to be heading for education. I was working at quite a slow place though, because I always thought of it like a long-term 5 year plan. Now looking back though, I wish I'd worked a lot more on that. I wish I had been doing it as a one year plan rather than a 5 year plan. We still did a great job when we went virtual, but if we had progressed our [initiatives] further, we would have been in a much better position. Seeing blended learning play out over the last year, with the effort to provide the same educational experience to both the students in the classroom and those at home, it's not easy.

***How do you think education needs to evolve to meet the emergence of technology and AI?***

Education has gone through an interesting shift in a very short amount of time through the pandemic as education has suddenly had to level up. I mean, it's an industry that has not really changed in 50 years. A year ago, before COVID, I think you could have taken a teacher out of the 1950s and put them into a classroom, and I do not think anything would have been too different. Whereas now after the onset of the Pandemic, I do not think they would be able to adapt.

I still think that there's actually an element of teachers still using traditional teaching methods with devices rather than actually utilizing technology to improve the teaching experience. So for example, on Teams, there is a whiteboard feature which you can draw on. I know some teachers who are using the whiteboard on Teams just as they were using the whiteboard in the classroom. I think with the power of technology, teachers can really enhance the learning experience, and create deeper learning connections with students. So I think now that we have gotten the technology, we need to shift in order to be better at using it. I know there's a lot of trials with education tech going on at the moment and it’ll be interesting to see when the trials are completed, how schools benefit from these technologies. We have kept education very similar for a long time. All of a sudden we're going to see some big changes coming over the next few years.

***What initiatives would you be looking to take at BISB?***

We introduced an entrepreneurship course in our high school, and it has now become a compulsory component for Year 10 and 11. It brings in teamwork aspects with students from different disciplinary areas. Students who are interested in art, engineering, computer science, and other subjects are coming to work together to try to solve some real world problems. It is deliberately set up so that risk-taking is a huge part of it. It is expected that students try things out, get it wrong, learn from their experience, and then try again in the future. Students don’t want to take risks in their normal classes because it could impact their grades, whereas in this particular course, the risk is built in, making it an incredible program for high school students. If this would be of interest [at BISB], then I think it would be a great match. It would be an amazing sight to see students at BISB craft their own business plans and pursue business ideas through doing this program.

***How would you describe the leadership combination you will be able to form with Mr. Thornhill at BISB?***

There's gonna be a big learning curve we are both going to have. There is so much learning that I still need to do about the school. So I really want to make sure that I'm getting into the classrooms, speaking with parents and students to really learn about the community, and then starting thinking about some of the experiences that I have that could potentially help the school. I know Mr. Thornhill has a wealth of experience from being a head of school for about 20 years. So I'd be looking to him for that and listening to his experience. I will be able to share the experiences I have had living and working in America in a competitive market. We will be able to compliment each other’s knowledge and skill set this way.

***What are your biggest apprehensions coming into your new role?***

I have only been at one school in the past so it will be interesting to get to know a whole new group of students, teachers, and parents. I recognize that [getting to know the school] will take some time. I will need to go in there, take a step back, and listen to others to understand the school. So it's a change in mindset of going into a new place that is going to be required.

***How have you been learning about the primary school side of things?***

Before I knew I would be coming to [BISB], I have always been interested in the primary side of things. I would do lesson observations at BISC, including in the nursery classrooms. I even ran a lego club with the primary school students. I worked with students in this club from year one up until year 6. The Lego club was 45 minutes after school once a week, and I was exhausted by the end of it. I have a lot of respect for my colleagues who work with [the primary school students] all day long. When I first joined the school, 14 years ago, I actually had to teach in the primary school because there was not really a secondary school at that point. There's still a lot I need to learn about primary school, but I have a fair understanding of it.

***Any final message to the BISB community?***

I'm really looking forward to getting [to Boston] and meeting everyone. I'm really excited for the move and getting to know BISB.

We, here at BISB, are greatly looking forward to the arrival of Mr. Gilhooly at BISB this August and having the opportunity to meet him in person. We wish him the best of luck in the rest of his time at BISC and successfully moving to Boston this summer.

