Ms. Rathina Sangralingam is the new Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) leader at BISB. She teaches Year 5 as well as Year 7 math. She has been integral to the development of teaching and learning across all year groups, improving the learning environment and assessment systems. Ms. Sangralingam has had several interesting experiences including a trip to Uganda where she worked to develop teaching practices in schools. She has also played a major role on the extracurricular front, leading four whole school musical productions in the past.

We sat down with her to learn about her new role as the DEI leader.

*What does the DEI role mean to you?*

I think it's a really important role in general and not just for a school. Equity, diversity and inclusion is something that everyone should be striving for worldwide. Regardless of whether it's a school, company or university. I think it's great that we have a role in place to ensure that we, as a school, are striving to achieve great expectations for equity, diversity, and inclusion across the board.

For me, it’s about making sure everyone has equal access in our school, that there are no barriers to anyone. That’s what kind of the aim of this role is: figuring out if we have any barriers, and determining how we can reduce them. How can we make sure everyone has a sense of belonging in this school? And when I say everyone, I mean, not just the students, but every staff member, and everyone in the parent community.

*What motivated you to pursue this role?*

It had never been here before. I would have conversations about the possibility of the role as it was something that intrigued me. Nord Anglia has always encouraged DEI so Mr. Darren Nicholas and I had been taking small initiatives without having a role in place. We introduced more diverse books into our primary curriculum for example, and did other things like that. A lot of the staff had also been very invested in promoting diversity in their teaching as there was a lot of discussion regarding DEI among the teachers. So when Mr. Thornhill arrived and realized there wasn't a dedicated role in place, he realized DEi was something that he would like to enforce and created the role. Then, I just applied for it.

*Where do you see the current status of DEI at BISB?*

So there's been really wonderful efforts that have been put in place prior to this role. In middle school, for example, students have the opportunity to discuss different topic areas related to DEI in their mentor times. I know in our primary school we have IPC lessons, which have been a really good opportunity to touch different cultures and backgrounds. But it's about pushing it a step further now and really thinking about ways that we can deliver a curriculum that allows all our students to critically engage with different DEI issues.

*How are you starting your role?*

I started with a student and staff survey, which was very helpful. It was interesting to read different people's perspectives. Since it was anonymous, people were able to share things freely. The results, which showed a range of opinions, highlighted certain barriers for some people. I cannot get into anyone’s specific situation]. Now that I am aware of some of the issues specific to staff and students, I can go to our senior leadership team and say, right, these are some of the issues facing some of our staff or student members; let's think about what we can put in place to address it. My next step is to deliver a parent survey so I can find out more from parents. I'm going to use the feedback from these surveys to come up with a plan for things that we can start to embed within our school, starting from hopefully next term. We can also have a huge plan for next year of what issues we will focus on.

I'm also going to have student-led webinar sessions. Additionally, we're currently celebrating our cultural calendar. Every month we will celebrate different themes: this month is women's history month, while last month was Black History Month. We are distributing posters and trying to spark discussions about these themes through embedding them in our curricula. Meeting with senior leadership to develop and implement our initiatives is going to be very important.

*How do you plan on enlisting the role of students to help you with this role?*

The AFA is a group that's existed for the last couple years, and they are playing a major role in supporting my efforts. They will be leading the way through hosting the student-led webinars that I mentioned, for the school community to learn about DEI. I think it's important for me to look and find different guest speakers with a background in DEI that can come and speak to students in school. This is important to generate awareness because of the way some students get confused about certain things related to DEI. So my next steps are to create a calendar of events that will take place to promote DEI among students and staff.

*What do you feel can be done to increase diversity and inclusion in school curricula?*

It’s always going to depend on what subject is being taught. One thing I have encouraged is to think about voices and think about perspectives. So where is this text from? Depending on what subject you're covering, what source have you used? Is this the perspective of just one side, or does it present a variety of perspectives? This is important to consider to support diversity, because what you learn is going to change depending on whose voice it is.

There have been great examples this year of teaching including DEI practices in their teaching, especially in subjects you would not expect. For example, Mr. Ian Boote has lessons using statistics where he has displayed statistical information related to DEI issues. He did this through looking at graphs from news channels, asking his students how this could be deemed biased since what the news channels were showing were not accurate. Math knowledge is so important here in combination with the DEI issues because someone who's not aware of how these graphs work, may be misled by what the news channels were showing. So it was a great statistics lesson with a twist with the way it incorporated these issues.

*How is the IB curriculum significant in promoting diversity?*

The IB curriculum is phenomenal in terms of bringing other voices into the picture and getting a world view on different issues. I know just from my understanding and from conversations with teachers, that TOK is a really great place to kind of have really critical and open discussions that can bring in DEI themes. Additionally, Ms. Karen McWilliam does a great job of promoting diversity by handpicking so many books and other materials for IB English. It's an essential part of the IB English curriculum to have a diverse range of text types, including texts from different regions and cultural backgrounds, which makes it so great.

*What kinds of DEI projects are taking place around the school?*

I'm aware that there are some great projects happening around the school. Ms. Minto is working on an eight week project with the middle schoolers where they have to think of a topic related to DEI and present it to each other. This is great to stimulate engagement with DEI among students, because this kind of project forces them to do research and dive deeply into the issue they are exploring.

It is clear that BISB is making great progress when it comes to DEI. Having a role that is specially designed for it, is an important step in the right direction and shows how much the school has come to value DEI. As DEI becomes an even larger theme around the world, it is essential that BISB practices it to an even greater degree. Ms. Sangralingam is working hard to try and make this happen. We thank her for taking the time to sit down with us and appreciate her work and commitment to DEI. As the first DEI leader that BISB has ever had, she has a tremendous opportunity to lay the foundation for BISB to become a school that puts the themes of diversity, equity, and inclusion at the forefront of all their practices.

If you would like to learn more about diversity, equity, and inclusion at BISB, please reach out to Ms. Rathina Sangralingam at [r.sangaralingam@bisboston.org](mailto:r.sangaralingam@bisboston.org).

