



How I became a part of the BIS community

Arijeet Patil, Student, Grade 11



When I first sat down in the auditorium to witness the IB orientation at Gilbert Building in July 2019, I only expected a fraction of what I now know about Bombay International School. The school's name suggested that it was 'international', meaning that its thoughts and ideas disregarded increasingly artificial national borders. But what mattered to me more was that the school, its faculty, its students and the general ethos paid no heed to the borders that we repeatedly come across in our daily lives, based on belief, skills, abilities and so many other checkpoints. The school's mission of 'inclusion' has made me feel a sense of belonging, not merely as the school's first legally-blind student, but rather as someone who is an equal and is as much a part of the community as my peers.

First of all, I cannot extend enough praise to the faculty members, who have worked tirelessly since the beginning to make me and my skills, talents and personality stand out rather than stand apart from my fellow students. They have taken into account my needs, and worked hard to create a level playing field – whether by allowing me the use of a computer, permitting extra time for tests, instantly forgiving an assignment submitted late due to technical constraints, or taking pride in my participation in a class that involves the analysis of visual data. All these instances showcase their exceptional warmth, hard work and dedication and prove that BIS has stretched the wings of inclusion in every direction. It has also taught me – in keeping with the school's philosophy of independent and empowered learning – that independence is not about managing with absolutely no help whatsoever. It is more about knowing when and how to ask for help to achieve my potential. It has taught me that to be independent is to be empowered and to be empowered is to be independent.

And yes, how could I forget, the most important people at this school are its students, who lead lives based on collaboration, determination and service. My classmates have contributed to my sense of being "another one of them" rather than "the One among them".



Engagement during group projects, in-class and out of class descriptions, taking time out of an exhaustingly hectic day to solve doubts, whole-hearted encouragement of my achievements – for example when I was the first one to reach my CAS crowd-funding target – are but a few of the hallmarks of the relationship between my peers and me. Shakespeare once said in Twelfth Night that "friendship is closer than kinship". To me it has been even closer because, rather than developing a competitive identity based on who I am against who they are, it has helped me realise who I am with respect to myself and they with respect to themselves. This has brought out our mutual qualities, supreme among them being helpfulness, care and generosity.

However, I have faced some challenges during the course of my journey. A notable example in the classroom environment has been descriptions of visual content in the middle of discussions. Often, my peers interpret parts of the image or diagram which the teacher has failed to notice, which prevents me from interpreting it for myself. On a larger scale, while we await a positive response from the IB regarding specific accommodations for me, my family and I feel somewhat anxious and apprehensive. But in spite of this all, knowing the kind of school that BIS is, we can rest assured that we are in good hands and that everything is being done.

In my opinion, inclusion is not just about integrating an outsider when he or she feels left out. It is about making everyone, both inside and outside, feel at home in a community that is as diverse as this school. From my experience as an insider, BIS is ensuring the success of its inclusion initiative with every passing day. After all, action leads to more action, and more action ultimately leads to success.

