

HYDESVILLE TOWER SCHOOL

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“Multi-cultural schools offer one of the best chances to stop ignorance from breeding hate,” says Mr Warren Honey, Headmaster at Hydesville Tower School, Walsall.

Sometimes, a series of stories in different parts of the world can converge with worrying portents for the future. At the heart of many of them is an ill-informed or misguided fear in some cases, or a hatred in others, with people of different ethnicity or belief as the target.

The first suggestion of a move in the attitudes of the masses of this country was UKIP's showing in the 2014 European Parliament elections. The number of MEPs they secured at this time was largely considered to be due to their stance on Europe and immigration, rather than a reflection of Nigel Farage's appeal to the voters. Some saw it as a protest vote, a waving of the fist at the coalition government to make sure that come the general election, manifestos would represent the views of the electorate.

Forward three years, and what have we seen since? A Brexit vote that few predicted on the basis of opinion polls in the run-up to the referendum. A US President elected in part through his promise to build metaphorical and literal walls around the country, and so protect American interests and jobs. A French election, with Marine Le Pen of Front National reaching the final voting stage for President. And now, in recent weeks, Germany has seen its first sign of a far-right revival since the end of World War II. AfD secured its success based on the same, tired rhetoric as the previous examples, appealing to the voters through their own financial and job insecurities, with a fervour for hateful blame of an easy target – “foreigners”.

Only a couple of weeks ago, as I drove to school, the horrible story broke of a man on his way to evening prayers at his mosque. He was attacked by two men, in what was described as a hate crime, and was fortunate to escape with his life. The fact that it was later revealed that the man had been one of the surgeons helping out after the Manchester Arena attack may have made some “haters” pause for a moment and consider their actions and attitudes. What a shame that such a coincidence is required at all.

Multi-cultural schools offer one of the best chances to stop the ignorance from breeding hate. On one of my summer visits, I sat down with some Year 5 pupils who proudly told me that they were great friends and then unprompted, reeled off their faiths. For them, it was as simple as saying their names: indeed, they took pride in the fact that four faiths were represented amongst them. Great schools recognise that as well as educating the pupils (and prepare them for the inevitable exams), it is also key to help them develop as people who will play a positive, significant role in society.

At Hydesville Tower School, we actively encourage and develop our pupils' appreciation of religious awareness and tolerance. Our RE curriculum across the school provides children with the opportunity to explore and develop their knowledge of other religions as well as those who choose not to follow specific faiths; and in our Senior School we investigate a range of ethical issues, including animal and environmental ethics, prejudice & discrimination and euthanasia and abortion and we draw on current affairs to demonstrate the real world application of these topics. Furthermore, British Values is a key aspect included in our teaching across the school, right from our youngest pupils in Nursery. We use PSHE sessions to explore matters such as democracy, the rule of law, and tolerance and acceptance of all people.

Hydesville Tower School's community is a great strength, both within class and beyond the school gate. We need to keep the message reverberating clearly for the future generations. Neither race nor faith should be a means of dividing us.