



Ann Haydon is keen for her girls at Surbiton High School to get involved with the outside world

Two worlds, one vision

Schools on different sides of the globe who are doing their utmost to be the centre of the community

Words IAN HUNT

Mohan Valrani, an Indian businessman and one of the top 15 most influential Indian business leaders in the Middle East, is a very special kind of investor. In a world where British curriculum schools are opening all over the world, he stands out as a visionary in the way that he has approached the opening of his own school in Dubai. Ann Haydon is special too. She is the Principal of the highly acclaimed and successful Surbiton High School in South West London. Together they share a joint vision and belief that their schools should be the centre of the community in which they are located.

Schools today can be so much more than just educational spaces for children. And it is the wider context that both of these educational leaders are looking to support. Schools no longer open their doors at 9am and close again at 4pm. Many schools are recognising their place as a central part of the wider community.

Valrani, always looking to learn from current best practice, recently visited Surbiton High to see how they were



Mohan Valrani's Arcadia Preparatory School

engaging with the community and what plans they had for the future. The relationship between a school and its surroundings is critical, especially when it is shoe-horned into a site such as is Surbiton with 11 different locations making up the school.

In Dubai, the increasing traffic issues are forcing schools to look more to their local communities for children. But this is not the main reason for the Arcadia Preparatory School (Valrani's first educational project) to engage with local residents. He genuinely wants the families of the Jumeirah Village Triangle and its adjacent communities to feel a part of the school. Thus, like Surbiton, he intends to open it up for adult education

classes, offer the use of the swimming pool, sports hall and theatre for local use. Craft fairs, off site learning walks, and cultural festivals are all part of the plan. Local area clean ups and joint regeneration projects show a care for the wider community.

It is not lost on Haydon that as soon as anyone steps onto her campus, they are subjected to a marketing onslaught that shows what a top school Surbiton is, and no doubt Arcadia will be the same. The feeling of vibrancy in the learning environment and the self-belief of the pupils as displayed in their work cannot be ignored. However, there is a genuine engagement with not only local families, but also businesses. It really does help to bring everyone together.

For Valrani's Arcadia Prep in Dubai, and Haydon's Surbiton High in London, community engagement is high priority. And it shows that lessons learned from the UK are creating ever higher quality British curriculum schools overseas.

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