

Quakers in Yorkshire

Good morning, we hope to talk this morning about what we are doing as a school and in particular as College, to reinforce the Quaker Ethos at the Mount School and establish links with the wider Quaker community. What follows is by no means all that we do to strengthen the Quaker ethos of the school but does serve to illustrate how important the Quaker ethos is to us as a student body.

Due to timetable changes at Bootham School we no longer meet our friends from across the city at Friargate Meeting House; however, both schools are currently looking to maintain the strong links across the city through meetings between the two Student Leadership Teams. We hope to meet to discuss cross-school Quaker initiatives and we aim to work with members of staff to promote Quaker events and gatherings.

Instead of attending Friargate as two separate Year groups, College 1 and 2 girls now gather as one for a fortnightly Quaker Meeting in the School Hall. We still enjoy at least ten minutes of silent reflection, but we have also introduced some aspects in an effort to widen participation among the girls. The Meetings begin with a piece of music suggested by different College girls that is in some ways important to the contributor. We sometimes examine a series of quotations pertaining to Quakerism and conflict resolution (many taken from Quaker Faith and Practice), and at any point girls are free to contribute points to discussion. We have also had a silent meeting accompanied by a series of thought-provoking images to ponder upon. Later this term we intend to incorporate some of the ideas first seen at the Junior Yearly Meeting including the handing out of modelling clay to be sculptured by girls during the meeting with the small clay statues left on the central table for everyone to see at the end of the Meeting. We also consider links with Friargate and other Friends' Meetings to be hugely important. Later on in the year, we hope as a College to visit both Friargate and Acomb Meeting Houses. The girls reaction to the new Quaker Meetings in College has been very positive and the number of contributions attests to the interest from College 1 and 2 girls.

Having been afforded – alongside the Bootham Leadership Team - the opportunity to visit Woodbrooke on a Quaker retreat, we left with a far greater understanding of the importance of Quaker education. We studied the art of non-judgemental listening, and this has allowed us to further develop the Form Seniors programme in supporting younger students. We are also in the process of using the training to help us with mentoring and in the role of Mental Health Advocates. We have already used some of the 'ice breaker' activities devised at Woodbrook to help to welcome in our new students into College 1. A further element of Woodbrook we have taken and used to great effect is Quaker Business Practice. Having studied Quaker business meetings at Woodbrook we have decided to incorporate this practice into our Termly College Forums. Minutes of previous meetings are discussed in terms of inclusivity and we actively listen to all points of view and discuss the relative merits of each idea. Business meetings may take slightly longer than usual, but we are confident that resolutions reflect the views of all those present.

As a school, we continue to play an important role in supporting the PeaceJam programme established by Peace Laureates. In the past we have established charitable ventures to help child refugees with life-saving aid packages and educational equipment. This academic year we were inspired by Betty Williams who has tirelessly campaigned for peace in Northern Ireland since the early 1970s. Her selfless determination showed us that everyone can make a difference 'one small act of peace at a time'. Girls decided to support Caresent through producing care kits with the aim of alleviating extreme poverty; an eco group chose to push environmental issues at The Mount School and reinvigorated the garden of the Junior School; and two groups focussed their efforts on improving the mental health of students through establishing boards to promote positive mental health and some students have become mental health advocates at the school. PeaceJam is rooted in the school's caring Quaker ethos and we are looking forward to the projects currently being undertaken by girls in College 1.

As I'm sure everyone here will know – this year's Quaker Week theme is 'Quaker Stories'. As a school we are examining stories relating to Quakerism and what it means to be a Quaker. Every year group at The Mount School has chosen one Quaker or aspect of Quakerism to talk about. Year 11 have chosen George Fox himself. Partly for his truly remarkable story and partly due to the wish to sing the hugely popular 'George Fox Song'. Other year groups are examining The Friends' Ambulance service during the First World War, the prison reforms of Elizabeth Fry and of course the role of Quaker Schools in history and in the future. Of equal importance, the morning meetings dedicated to Friends associated with the school, have allowed us to see a personal dimension to Quakerism and reflect on our own paths.

Since Quaker Week, two Friends from local meeting houses have also been into school to tell their Quaker Stories in our Morning Meetings and we look forward to other Friends coming into school across the course of the academic year as we keep the theme of Quaker Stories at the fore over the coming months.

Thank you for listening and affording us the opportunity to talk about our continued commitment to maintaining a great Quaker ethos at The Mount.

College Leadership Team 2019-2020