

**TEACHERS' INTERNATIONAL
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**Birmingham Visits Sochi
February 2004**

TEACHERS' INTERNATIONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Date of visit

14 February 2004 to 22 February 2004

Local Education Authority

Birmingham, England, United Kingdom

Full name of LEA Visit Leader

Mr Paul Walmsley

Study visit to

Sochi, Russia

Types of school visited

Pre-nursery - Secondary

Key Educational purpose of visit

To observe teaching and learning

Group Members

All delegates were from the Birmingham Local Education Authority

Mr Paul Walmsley - Group Leader – Birmingham Local Education Authority

Mrs Susan Tibbits - SS John and Monica Catholic Primary School

Mr Gerry Morrison - SS John and Monica Catholic Primary School

Mrs Margaret Heap – St Ambrose Barlow Catholic Primary School

Mrs Ann Spencer - St Ambrose Barlow Catholic Primary School

Mrs Susan Dawe – Oratory Catholic Primary School

Mrs Geraldine Price - Oratory Catholic Primary School

Miss Caroline Woods - Oratory Catholic Primary School

Mr John Meehan - Oratory Catholic Primary School

Miss Teresa Cotter – SS Mary and John Catholic Primary School

Aims/Objectives/Outcomes

The group of delegates met on two occasions prior to the visit to discuss specific aspects regarding teaching and learning. The group also defined its specific intended aims objectives and expected outcomes. A SWOT analysis, (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats), was used for this purpose.

Aims of the visit:

- To provide opportunities for teachers to explore and develop good practice that will support whole school improvement and raise pupil achievement
- To improve the professional confidence, skills, understanding and knowledge of teachers about teaching and learning within an international context
- To forge and develop links with other educational institutions, thus enabling good practice re teaching and learning to be shared and developed

Objectives of the visit:

- To observe and explore work currently being undertaken on teaching and learning in a different educational context from that in the UK
- To explore and identify practices re teaching and learning that can be transferred to schools within Birmingham, so as to enhance best practice and the ability of schools to meet pupil needs
- To modify practice within Birmingham schools based on the best practices seen, by the production of a school action plan. This in turn will be cascaded to all Birmingham schools to ensure the work on teaching and learning impacts on as wide an audience as possible
- To generate pastoral and curriculum links with schools in the host location, which can be used to support future educational initiatives
- To generate educational discussion and debate by observing and experiencing school-based practice re teaching and learning within a different educational context

Expected outcomes of the visit:

1.Schools will be expected to generate a school-based action plan that highlights how the school will develop or integrate into its practice initiatives/ideas about teaching and learning stemming from the visit. This action plan will need to highlight:

- What provision currently exists within the school for the development of teaching and learning
- Initiatives/ideas to be developed/integrated
- Action points to make this happen
- Success criteria/planned outcomes
- Who will be responsible
- Timescale
- How will progress be monitored/evaluated

2.To generate an overall written report that summarises school-based development re teaching and learning in all the participating schools. In particular focusing upon possible impact, under the headings of:

- Probable school developments
- Possible school developments
- Developments which the LEA might wish to move forward on
- Personal outcomes stemming from the visit

Teaching and Learning in Sochi Schools

Consideration of evidence from each school indicated that there were different policies and practices for teaching and learning in each school. Russia has a standardised curriculum but interpretation in subject areas, is left to individual schools. This tended to give freedom to the structure of lessons and therefore not restrict imaginative approaches. Lessons often used the children's own interests and strengths as a starting point for further development. Dance and drama were often used as the medium for the children to express their emotions, feelings and opinions. The children and their schools had an obvious love for their environment, their town and their country. This was manifest in the session with secondary pupils, where the pupils were very friendly, interested and keen to convey their pride, when speaking, very confidently, **in English**, about Sochi.

A key strength in the educational process was the provision and care given to all children. Schools visited had a very good adult/pupil ratio and a wide-ranging care package that included psychologists and speech therapists etc, on-site, full time. It was noted that obesity in children was very, very rare – probably as a result of the extended time spent in schools by the children and thus the provision of a controlled diet of school meals. Appropriate curriculum entitlement for all children was seen as a vital issue. The schools visited held a philosophy of education that focussed on building self-esteem.

Nursery education was impressive with lots of space provided for both pupil/pupil and pupil/teacher interaction. Wall displays in all schools were effective, informative and up to date, many schools had interesting murals in corridor and classroom areas. Art work and handwriting were of a very high standard, with some extremely high quality pieces of work being produced by children of all ages. The great emphasis on art and craft activities throughout the nursery years, has resulted in children, in general, having high motor skills which they were able to use, to produce very good work in various areas of the curriculum.

Evidence of long, medium and short term planning, was seen at the schools visited; some of this was computer generated. Time for planning was found, both within the school day and outside it. This was thorough and was viewed as a strength. Planning and teaching were often approached from a topic-based starting point and showed evidence of differentiation. The lesson observations undertaken by the study group, showed that in general, lesson patterns were very similar to those in the UK. Lessons were generally shorter than those in England, but had good pace and were broken up with many differing activities and teacher interventions. Children were enthusiastic and always on task in the lessons observed.

Children, in general, in the schools visited, showed a high degree of self-control, yet were relaxed in the presence of adults, with whom, they had excellent relationships. These children also had excellent relationships with their peers and were very supportive of each other. They seemed extremely happy to be in their school, where the teachers' care and love for them was evident at all times.

The Russian education system does have its pressures in regard to testing. Assessment outcomes are, however only used by the school and the Local Education Authorities, to encourage the development of teaching and learning in individual schools. Annual test results are, on the whole, used diagnostically and this is seen as a strength. Where problems did exist, or where weaknesses were identified, a number of carefully structured support mechanisms were instigated, e.g. smaller group work, homework, individual support, the use of psychologists, assistant teachers or advisory support etc.

Teachers are observed teaching on a regular basis and are subject to formal review every five years. Most teachers offer a differentiated lesson, usually to meet the needs of the three traditional broad ability bands found in each class. This approach being based on the belief that the individual educational needs of the child must be met.

Monitoring and evaluation of the children's work, as with our own education system, was carried out through lesson observation, planning scans and book trawls. Lesson observations were regular and planned. Feedback to teachers was carried out and was seen as developmental. Evidence was also seen of strategies for dealing with under-performance.

Reporting to parents was viewed as important and was carried out through regular contact being made with the parent, often at the end of a long working day. Parental co-operation in the reporting process was seen as having a high priority and worth.

In-service work was given high priority through in-house provision and LEA courses, several teachers were able to access "state-run" courses and international professional development opportunities.

Finally, many schools were involved in school, local, city-wide and national initiatives in all aspects of teaching and learning and management and leadership. This was viewed by the Russian schools, as a very important factor in ensuring raised interest and excitement in the educational process; this enthusiasm is to be highly praised.

Reflections on key issues

A number of points might be worth reflecting on here, before moving to the report summary.

- Are the requirements of the English curriculum and testing arrangements constricting to the point of stifling creativity?
- Does the English education system attach an appropriate sense of proportion to testing and to the use of test results as an indicator to whole school performance?
- Could both systems benefit from more teacher-to-teacher support, observation and assessment ?
- Are concerns for health and safety issues overstated in English schools, or is this just a reaction to the move towards a more litigious society? If this is the case, might Russian schools consider reviewing their procedures in case this phenomenon manifests itself in Russian society?

Key Educational Outcomes

The following outcomes are seen as important when assessing the impact of this study visit on schools and on individuals:

- This study visit will allow our teachers and schools to critically examine teaching and learning at class and school level and to develop, where necessary, a balanced curriculum which will allow autonomy for the teacher to develop the creative aspects of the curriculum, whilst maintaining pace, challenge and high standards
- This study visit will allow all participants to reflect individually as practitioners on the new experiences gained and to critically consider the impact these experiences might have on their current practice, at classroom and school level
- This study visit will allow delegates to interact within the international arena in sharing ideas and educational philosophies with our Russian colleagues

- This study visit will promote in participating individuals, an awareness of their role and worth within our schools, Partnership and LEA
- This study visit will allow colleagues to consider the UK's mechanism for the care of the whole child within the educational context

Dissemination of findings

A full report will be sent to the following. Feedback will be requested where appropriate:

- British Council
- DfES
- Sochi LEA
- Participating schools in England
- Participating schools in Russia
- Birmingham Local Education Authority
- All Catholic schools in England and Wales via the Catholic Education Service
- All Partnership schools for discussion at staff and governor level
- The Catholic Primary Partnership forum at management board and cluster level
- Newman College of Higher Education
- Suitable professional papers and magazines

In addition, the report will be placed on suitable websites, including the:

- Birmingham Grid for Learning (Birmingham Local Education Authority website)
- British Council website
- Sochi LEA website
- Archdiocese of Birmingham website
- Catholic Education Service website
- NAHT and other Teacher Union websites
- Participating schools websites

Finally, it is planned to disseminate the findings of this visit via the National College for School Leadership courses. In addition, on request, the study visit leader will attend staff meetings, senior management meetings, governor meetings etc. at schools to give feedback about the study visit. The study visit leader has prepared a power-point presentation for this purpose.

Conclusion

This visit and report are seen as key components of an on-going and developing relationship with schools in Russia. A reciprocal visit from Russian teachers and a possible visit by Birmingham head teachers to Russia are desirable factors in this process.

Existing links will be maintained with Russian schools and teachers via:

- Email links
- Penpal links – at teacher and pupil level
- Video conferencing
- Video exchange

Future developments arising from this visit might well include:

- Reciprocal visit by Russian teachers
- Further visits to Russian schools by Birmingham teachers
- Visits by managers and leaders to Russia
- Reciprocal visits by managers and leaders from Russia

General advice for future visits:

- Information about host country and itinerary should arrive at least four weeks in advance of the visit. This information should include email addresses
- Delegates should be conversant with the general issues around the education system of the country they are to visit
- The delegation should meet at least twice prior to departure to determine aims and objectives for the group visit
- Gifts to present to host schools – preferably about the group's own city, are an appropriate way of thanking schools for their hospitality
- Examples of planning and other associated information are useful to take
- Video conference with hosts before the visit are desirable
- During the visit, hold a meeting each evening to discuss thoughts, reactions and reflections – rather than waiting for a return to the UK
- Planning for visits should be commenced at least six months in advance and should involve local planning whenever possible
- Previous participants in international visits to brief future visitors if at all possible

Finally, this study group would like to sincerely thank the following:

- The DfES and British Council for funding and support

- Sochi LEA – the advisor who was attached to us during our visit
- The Principals and staffs of the schools who facilitated and hosted this visit. All were very accommodating, open and willing to enter into professional dialogue.
- Sveta Sizova, our interpreter, without whom, this visit would have been much the poorer.
- Headteachers, governors and the “staff left behind” in the schools in the UK, for releasing and covering those involved in the visit
- All those involved in the organisation of the study visit in any way

PW2004 - TIPD