

**TEACHERS' INTERNATIONAL  
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**Birmingham Visits Toronto  
February 2005**

**TEACHERS' INTERNATIONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
STUDY VISIT - TORONTO, CANADA**

**Date of visit**

*12 - 20 February 2005*

**Local Education Authority**

*Birmingham, England, United Kingdom*

**Full name of LEA Visit Leader**

*Mr Paul Walmsley*

**Study visit to:**

*Toronto, Canada*

**Types of school visited**

*Junior Kindergarten to Grade 8 (Ages 4 - 14)*

**Key educational purpose of visit**

*Benchmarking of pupil performance*

**Group Members**

*All delegates were deputy head teachers from schools in the Birmingham Local Education Authority*

**Ann Connolly**

St Edward's Catholic Primary School

**Teresa Cotter**

SS Mary and John Catholic Primary School

**Mike Doyle**

Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School

**Margaret Grew**

Maryvale Catholic Primary School

**Maura Judges**

St Anne's Catholic Primary School

**John Meehan**

Oratory Catholic Primary School

**Caroline Reilly**

SS Mary and John Catholic Primary School

**Eileen Walker**

SS Peter and Paul Catholic Primary School

**Mr Paul Walmsley ~ Group Leader**

Birmingham Local Education Authority

## **Aims and Objectives**

The group of delegates met on two occasions prior to the visit to discuss specific aspects regarding the theme and for administrative purposes. 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 and the benchmarking of school performance within an international context*
- *To forge and develop links with other educational institutions, thus enabling good practice re teaching and learning and the benchmarking of school performance to be shared and developed*

### **Objectives of the visit:**

- *To observe and explore work currently being undertaken on benchmarking of school performance in a different educational context from that in the UK*
- *To explore and identify practices re benchmarking of school performance 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 the benchmarking of school performance 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 and the benchmarking of school performance within a different educational context*

## Expected outcomes

**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 and the benchmarking of school performance 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 and using benchmarking data*
- *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 and using benchmarking data 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*

**This final report will be sent to the following. Feedback will be requested where appropriate:**

- *League for Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers (LECT) (UK)*
- *League for Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers (LECT) (Canada)*
- *Toronto Ministry of Education*
- *Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board*
- *DfES*
- *Birmingham Local Education Authority*
- *Birmingham City Council*

- *Participating schools in England*
- *Participating schools in Canada*
- *Universities in the West Midlands*
- *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)*
- *League for Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers (LECT) websites*
- *Toronto Ministry of Education website*
- *Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board website*
- *NAHT and other Teacher Union websites*
- *Participating schools websites*

Contact with the visited schools and teachers in Canada will be maintained via:

- *Email links*
- *Penpal links - at deputy head teacher, teacher and pupil level*
- *Video conferencing*
- *Video exchange*

This visit and report are seen as key components of an on going and developing relationship with schools in Canada. A reciprocal visit by vice-principals and teachers from Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board and further visits to Canada by Birmingham head teachers, deputy head teachers and teaching staff are desirable factors in this process.

Finally, the findings of this visit will be disseminated 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.

## **Context and Background**

The study visit to Toronto, Canada was funded by the Department for Education and Skills through its Teachers' International Professional Development (TIPD) Programme of short-term study visits.

The organisation of the study visit was undertaken by the League for Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers (LECT).

As previously stated, the group of delegates met on two occasions prior to the visit to discuss specific aspects regarding the theme and for administrative purposes. The group also defined its specific intended aims objectives and expected outcomes. A SWOT analysis, (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats), was used for this purpose. In addition, the LEA group leader provide the briefing paper detailed below for the Toronto Ministry of Education, the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board and the participating Canadian schools on benchmarking in the UK and in Birmingham.

## **Visit Itinerary**

The Toronto Ministry of Education and the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board had planned a very comprehensive itinerary for the delegation. The programme summary was as follows:

### **Saturday 12 February 2005**

Departure from London Heathrow

Arrival at Pearson International Airport - Pick up and then transfer direct to Best Western Primrose Hotel, Toronto.

### **Sunday 13 February 2005**

Cultural activities

### **Monday 14 February 2005**

#### **AM**

Welcome meeting at the Ministry of Education, Toronto - Ted Whittaker at Ministry of Education, 15th Floor, Mowat Block, 900 Bay Street, Toronto, Ontario

- *Overview of Education System - Canada & Ontario*
  
- *Workshop: Education Foundations Program (Literacy and Numeracy in grades K-6)*

#### **PM**

Turnaround Schools: Workshop coordinated by Ministry's Turnaround Schools team

## **Tuesday 15 February 2005**

### **AM**

Programme at Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board based at St Cecilia's School

### **PM**

Visit to St Kevin's School

## **Wednesday 16 February 2005**

### **AM**

Visit to SS Martha and Mary School

### **PM**

Visit to Our Lady of Peace School

## **Thursday 17 February 2005**

### **AM**

Programme at Catholic Education Centre, (Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board), to meet consultants and Assessment and Evaluation Coordinator to discuss Benchmarking

### **PM**

Attend in-service session on Early Reading Strategies and Assessment.

## **Friday 18 February 2005**

### **AM**

Visit to St Raymond School

### **PM**

Debriefing session at Ministry of Education

## **Saturday 19 February 2005**

Airport - Evening Departure.

## **Sunday 20 February 2005**

Arrive London Heathrow

Each Canadian school had planned a comprehensive programme of activities for the Birmingham deputy head teachers, including:

- *Campus tours*
- *Briefings on school curriculum*
- *Talks on continuing professional development*
- *Lesson observations*
- *Lesson debriefings*
- *Management and leadership discussions*

- *Talks on the UK education system*
- *Talks from Canadian curriculum leaders*
- *Discussions with Canadian students*
- *Observation of extra-curricular activities*

## Study Visit Findings - General

Canada does not have a national educational strategy, each province and territory has jurisdiction with respect to education at all levels. Education, legislation, policy, funding and curriculum are somewhat different in each province and territory.

The *Education Act* is the legislative framework that supports the education system of Ontario. The Ministry of Education is responsible for administering the *Education Act* and its regulations. The *Education Act* delegates responsibility for governance to District School Boards. The roles and responsibilities of the District School Boards are defined by the *Education Act*. Schooling is free and compulsory from age 6 to 16.

The school system in Ontario is made up as follows:

- *Elementary schools - Junior Kindergarten to Grade 8 (ages 4 - 14)*
- *Secondary schools - Grade 9 - 12 (ages 14 - 18 or 19)*
- *Provincial schools - for the deaf, blind and severely disabled students*
- *Private schools - about eight hundred registered in Ontario*

In Ontario there are five thousand plus schools, attended by two million students, all under the jurisdiction of seventy-two district boards. Thirty-five of which are public (secular) and thirty-seven that are Catholic. Elected trustees determine board policies and school board officials, superintendents, principals, teachers; other personnel are employed by the school boards.

The key responsibilities of the District Schools Board are to open and close schools, administration and enforcement of policy, implementation of programs and the delivery of curriculum. In remote and sparsely populated regions or in institutions (hospitals), schools are managed by school authorities.

The Ontario curriculum covers all subject areas and is based on learning expectations in terms of knowledge and skills. Curriculum documents are accessible on the Ministry website: [www.edu.gov.on.ca](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca)

In terms of assessment, tests are carried out annually to improve student achievement. These are carried out province-wide at:

- *Grade 3 (age 8) in reading, writing and mathematics*
- *Grade 6 (age 11) in reading, writing and mathematics*
- *Grade 9 (age 14) in mathematics*
- *Grade 10 (age 15) in literacy*

Assessments are conducted by an autonomous agency - The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). Results are reported for individual students, for schools and for the whole province. School Boards are required to prepare and submit action plans for improvement to the EQAO.

Electronically generated report cards are used at elementary and secondary level and teachers use *Achievement Charts* to evaluate pupil progress and this progress is commented on when reporting to parents.

The Ontario College of Teachers (OCT), was established under the *Ontario College of Teachers Act (1996)*. The College:

- *Licenses teachers in publicly funded schools*
- *Regulates teaching qualifications*
- *Investigates and disciplines members charged with professional misconduct*
- *Accredits teacher education programmes*

The Teacher Federation (Union) is a very strong force in Ontario.

## **Visit Findings - School Specific**

Schools visited were larger than the average UK school and the availability of space led to additional opportunities in curriculum provision.

### **Religious life of the school**

Catholic ethos was evident in all schools. Collective worship was conducted using the school intercom system. Singing of the national anthem was incorporated into the act of collective worship. Little evidence of the presence of clergy was observed during the visits to schools, although this was reported as variable across the group of schools. The mission statements observed were often adult-orientated and sometimes not prominently displayed. A prayer focus was established in most classrooms, and very often, display boards, especially in corridor areas, had a religious theme.

### **Staffing**

The role of the vice principal varied from school to school, with entitlement to vice principal support being tied to school population. Very little evidence of the use of classroom assistants was observed. PPA time was often achieved through the teaching of French. Leading teachers were used to promote curriculum development. These were nominated and selected by schools. The use of learning teams was observed. These teams were made up of a minimum of three teachers and maximum of seven. They met during the school day and set the agenda for improvement. At one school, up to thirty students had been attached at one time to complete their teaching practice!!

### **Curriculum**

Literacy was seen as the vehicle to deliver large parts of the curriculum. Cross-curricular work was well resourced but not widely observed during the visits. Word walls were in evidence in every classroom visited. As a result of the reliance on literacy as the vehicle to deliver the curriculum, children were very fluent readers. In mathematics, a lot of time was spent on the investigation of problems, often using an approach that required significant written evidence about process. Often a two hour reading block was timetabled in to the morning sessions. The use of literacy rooms in most schools, enabled the widest use of materials from a centralised stock etc. Display was variable in content and quality. Many schools had a heavy reliance on textbooks. The issue of twenty minutes guaranteed physical education time was seen as a challenge to schools in terms of finding space in the available curriculum time. Lessons usually followed the pattern of teacher modelling, followed by ability-based group work and a culminating task.

### **Pupils**

Children were well behaved, responsive, mature and very co-operative. In addition they were positive about school and their work. There was a very quiet and calm environment in all the schools visited. Class size was small and schools were aiming for a maximum of twenty pupils at early years. Several schools used a colour-coded discipline system.

### **Special Needs**

Special needs provision was seen as a strength, with high levels of involvement of outside agencies being evident. Psychologists, speech and language specialists, childhood youth workers, school social workers and other link agencies visited on a weekly basis. *Reading recovery* material was in use in many of the schools visited and was well funded and therefore was viewed as successful. An “at risk” checklist was completed on entry and was used as a tool to identify those children in need of *reading recovery* intervention.

## Study Visit Findings - Benchmarking Specific

- Consideration of evidence from each school indicated that there were fairly consistent approaches to benchmarking of pupil performance. However, the Canadian interpretation of benchmarking was different to the UK approach laid out in the group leader's briefing paper. The Canadian interpretation of benchmarking was that the individual's performance in their studies would be benchmarked against the class, school and local standards and almost always related to reading standards, thus:

*Level 4 (A) Always answer in complete sentences*  
*Level 3 (B) Generally answer in complete sentences*  
*Level 2 (C) Poor comprehension skills*  
*Level 1 (D) Very poor comprehension skills*

- The Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board reported that target setting in mathematics was to be commenced in the near future
- Running records were completed during teaching periods, this being possible as a result of the smaller manageable class size
- State portfolios were used to aid the moderation of pupil work. Pupils had their own portfolios that were passed up at the end of each academic year
- Reports were sent home three times per year
- Little evidence was seen of baseline assessments being carried out, nor of phase targets being set or scrutinised. In several schools a learning questionnaire/initial assessment was administered on entry. This was often in the form of a tick list, and although not passed on, was used for planning
- Pupil tracking was in evidence in several schools but was often based totally on reading or writing targets
- Schools reported that the targets set by the Ministry of Education were often at odds with actual achievement
- Assessments followed a clearly structured process – diagnostic, formative, summative. All schools followed the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board's assessment document, *Guidelines for Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting, Elementary and Secondary*
- Pupil-to-pupil levelling of work was observed. Also pupils knew what level they were working at and were aware of the steps needed to improve

- EQAO testing can be completed over an extended period of time and SEN children have about twice the time allocation to complete the tests. Absentees are accommodated within the extended testing period. Tests are opened in advance of the tests and are often administered in the classroom. Adjustments in timetables are often made to accommodate these tests. A high level of phraseology was used in the rubrics for assessment. The tests encourage the use of higher order thinking skills and are aligned to Ministry of Education expectations. At the end of the testing period the booklets are returned to schools, where parents can view them. These papers are returned without marking being made on the texts themselves. There is a formal complaints procedure for parents to follow. Training is available for new Grade 3 and 6 teachers on how to prepare the children for the test, the correct language to use when administering the tests and classroom layout etc.
- The consideration given to compensatory factors when compiling test data was not a priority. Comparative analysis against schools of a similar nature or national results, were not reported to be in use. The data from testing was used as a mechanism to drive school improvement. If however, there was a discrepancy between the test and teacher assessment reasons would be sought as to the cause
- The use of mid-year assessment papers helped the pupils and teachers prepare for the actual tests. These were voluntary and not mandatory as far as schools were concerned
- At Kindergarten to Grade 3, the expectation of pupils' progress in reading was a twenty six level spread:

*Kindergarten - Level 3*

*Grade 1 - Level 16*

*Grade 2 - Level 20*

*Grade 3 - Level 26*

## **Key findings**

- In the schools visited, literacy was viewed as the absolute corner stone of the curriculum; an integral part of the entire working day
- The schools visited in the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board area relied heavily on literacy as a vehicle to deliver and manage many other aspects of the curriculum
- The Canadian interpretation of benchmarking is different to the UK approach. Canadian benchmarking concentrated on the individual's performance in their studies and is benchmarked against the class, school and local standards and almost always related to reading standards, rather than making comparative analyses against schools of a similar nature or against national results
- A thinking skills approach is often taken to curriculum delivery, this ensures that the development of skills takes priority over content

## **Other findings**

- Special needs provision is seen as a strength, with high levels of involvement of outside agencies being evident
- Notwithstanding the strong position of the teaching unions, commendable levels of trust existed between the teaching force, senior management and educational administrators
- Schools visited were larger than the average UK school and the availability of space led to additional opportunities in curriculum provision
- Catholic ethos was evident in all the schools visited

## **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 approaches to teaching and learning at class and school level and to develop, where necessary, a balanced yet manageable curriculum that 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 Canadian colleagues
- This study visit will promote in participating individuals, an awareness of their role and worth within our schools 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

### **General advice for future visits:**

- 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 etc.
- 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 on the study visit
- Video conferencing with hosts before the visit is 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
- A visit by the delegation leader to the venue for preliminary planning is very worthwhile
- Groups might consider taking with them a PowerPoint presentation on their school and their own town or city

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

- The DfES and LECT for funding and support
- The staff of the Toronto Ministry of Education and the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board for their logistical and personal support, and for their accommodation of the group within the city's education system and very willing co-operation
- The Birmingham Local Education Authority for support before and after the visit
- Head teacher, staff and governors from participating schools in Birmingham
- Principals and staff from participating schools in Toronto, who were all very accommodating, open and willing to enter into professional dialogue
- Pupils from schools visited for their warm welcome and interest

- All those involved in the organisation of the study visit in any way

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