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Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

Study visit group report

Group	447
Title	Community Cohesion in Leicester Schools
Theme	Strengthening intercultural education & its contribution to social integration (European Year 2008)
City, Country	Leicester, UK
Type of visit	General education
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I. **Findings**

1. 3 most important things we learned during the visit.

- The importance of school leadership & organization in developing intercultural education & community cohesion
- The inclusive nature of all the educational institutions visited; catering for a range of individuals & groups with different needs by, amongst other things, the mainstreaming of EAL provision & outreach into communities
- The importance of continuing professional development & networking to develop & disseminate good practice, e.g. the iCoCo Community Cohesion Learning Network,

2. Good practice learned about during the visit (both from the hosts and from each other):

- Host families (Barcelona and now other places in Spain) - families who know the school well support the parents of new children. The varied needs of new families are matched to what the longer-established can provide and it works very well.
- Working with parents (Denmark – Arhuis Technical College) - foreign parents are visited where necessary, told about the education system and jobs, e.g. the advantages of being a craftsman (high salary, possibilities of further education, possibilities of gaining your own company).
- Family learning – Aqoon Children & Parent Centre, Leicester www.aqoon.org (Abdish Tarah): working with families (parents and children). The centre offers a nursery service in the week and education (2 hours) to complement school learning every weekend. They also offer family learning for new arrivals through English language classes.
- Family learning (Andalusia, Spain) - in the afternoon twice a week foreign mothers learn Spanish together with a teacher through the Cervantes Institute (e-learning), while their children (4-12 years old) learn with another teacher & the younger ones are looked after in a nursery.
- Parents (chiefly mothers) of ethnic minority children are involved in extracurricular activities (Germany) such as reading (in mother tongue) to their children and are then given awards for involvement - the idea being to bridge the gap between school and ethnic minority communities.
- Community Sports Facilities (Antalya, Turkey) - sports areas in the school gardens are used by parents. When mothers take their children to school they stay on at school, do some exercise and meet school staff. They learn about school events and also deter the unemployed teenagers who might disturb the children.
- Schools providing information and opportunities to local communities.
- Girls, Let's Go To School (Turkey) - a campaign by the national and local authorities and civil organisations to encourage more girls to have primary and further education. Teachers, advisors and volunteers visit families. Free transportation is provided to schools, and high schools have opened dormitories.
- School twinning – schools with different ethnic populations are brought together in the One Leicester Learning project, as part of the national School Linking Network – www.schoolslinkingnetwork.org.uk

- Bridge Between Hearts (Turkey) - students from eastern and western parts of stay with their peers' families. They get to know about the different cultures and traditions and also the difficulties faced by some students in rural areas in getting to school and studying. It also provides a break for students who can't go on holiday.
- Multicultural mediators (Spain) to resolve potential conflicts.
- Value added calculation in national Ofsted inspections (UK).
- Student's self-evaluation against lesson objectives (St Paul's).
- Local financial management of schools – autonomy in decision-making, including financial, (UK & Flanders, Belgium).
- EAL (English as an Additional Language) integrated into all curricular work, with an emphasis of language of education (CALP - cognitive academic language proficiency).
- Supporting mother tongue – primaries in Leicester.
- Responding to individual needs, ranging from students who want to go to university to those who cannot read and write.
- Flexible curriculum to connect with children's backgrounds & meet learning needs.
- Philosophy for children (Bridge Junior) – T.I.O. (Think It Over) – daily time to give pupils opportunities to practise thinking skills; linked to morals, citizenship and responsibility; based on the explicitly calm, kind & caring principles that are the basis for behaviour in the school.
- Libraries & ITC accessibility - use of books taught & encouraged.
- Written behaviour rules on walls about values are to be seen all over – in every class room and every corridor, even in the toilet areas.
- Displaying the children's work on walls in order to make them proud of their work and boost positive sense of self-identity and belonging.
- School councils, including at the primary level, develop citizenship through participation in the concerns of a larger community.
- Coordination of all the multicultural activities.
- Ethnic minority teachers and teaching assistants used all over.
- Networking – with locals, national and international.

* N.B. where no specific reference to school or place is made it must be assumed it's all or some of the Leicester schools visited: Rushey Mead Primary, Rushey Mead School – Sports & Science College, Bridge Junior, Leicester College, Madani High School & Community Centre, Thurnby Lodge Primary, St. Paul's Catholic School & Moat Community College Specialising in Science.

3.1 Findings concerning common approaches that are met in all or some countries (both host and participants') regarding the theme of the visit:

- Valuing **mother tongue**, encouraging speaking and integration of learning support as seen in all state schools is also on the agenda in most participating countries.
- **Parents** being more involved in the education of their children for example through Complementary Community Centres like Aqoon (Somali community) in mediation, translation and consulting on educational issues for parents. Here newcomers and their families get induction into new systems and procedures.
- More and more countries favour **integration and inclusion** as a central part of dealing with problems regarding different abilities of children.
- Improving **thinking skills** might be an answer to diverse faith and life views to facilitate reflection on values in a secular society. The Philosophy in Education " (TIO etc) approach, e.g. at Bridge Junior School, fulfils the function of enhancing cohesion across ethnic barriers, acting as a secular

alternative to values-oriented confessional education and also to the nil-values, 100% academic-skills-focused approach.

In addition:

- **Professional development** for this area.
- **Community cohesion** is on the agenda of more and more local governments because of increasing diversity in towns and an increasing number of racist incidents.
- Beside the general need of understanding local communities' needs and issues, **schools as a frontline service** make the first experiences of having closer links and contacts in these communities. All visited schools have widely developed experience in this.
- **Intercultural mediators** from different ethnic minorities, e.g. as seen in all primary schools, help understanding the subjects of the school and issues of the students and parents.
- **Libraries** in many countries are regarded as centres for the support and promotion of learning, especially for students with a foreign mother tongue.

3.2 Common challenges that are faced by all or some countries (both host and participants') in their effort to implement policies related to the theme of the visit:

1. Most of the participants have been facing the problem of the **underachievement** of some student groups, not related just to being emigrants but also of the natives.

2. **Issues to do with diversity have been increasing** in most participant countries. Most of the diversity is probably caused by families' different social, economic, cultural, religious and language background. The migrating families and consequently their children may not have felt secure enough to work hard and achieve. They might not be sure about settling down in the area they have chosen to live. Economic factors may push the families to move from one place to another quite often.

3. **Positive responses to diversity are not integrated enough into the educational systems** or the national curricula in most of the participant countries. The government, local authorities, headteachers of the schools, teachers, students, parents and citizens are not trained or informed or well-prepared to face diversity or to overcome problems around diversity; or, even more importantly, to see the benefits to the community. Government and media should support the benefits of diversity. However, the media has been focusing on differences not supporting harmony.

4. **State funding** should be increased to solve all the problems. In most participant countries most of the **school buildings** are old and not well equipped. **Class sizes** are too big and do not allow teachers to support students' individual and personalised educational needs. The **schools lack autonomy**: most of the decisions have been taken by the state authorities. Educationalists and teachers have to follow procedures even if they are not suitable for their schools.

5. In most of the participant countries the place of **public or state religious schools** in the education system has not been discussed by the government or citizens in terms of community cohesion and diversity. Discussions about religion and education are more about problems and less about the contribution of the values of different faiths to the

whole community. Increasing diversity will probably cause thinking about new approaches to the educational system to cope with it.

3.3 Effective and innovative solutions we identified that the countries (both host and participants') apply to meet the challenges mentioned in question 3.2:

1. **Under-achievement** of some groups:
 - Inclusion policies in schools allow students to be supported individually, and according to their academic needs (literacy and numeracy).
 - An earlier start and attending school every day would be important to ensure ending up with proper academic results, not only in terms of language skills but also all other fit-for-school basic skills (socializing, etc.). Families need to be encouraged to allow children to leave home and socialize.
 - Parents need to be involved in the schooling process. Networks can be created between educators, families, health centres and libraries to encourage reading practice at an early stage (e.g. the Born to Read programme in use in Germany).
 - Links should be made with higher education as a kind of mentoring between students (graduates) and pupils, to support the latter with their academic achievements.
 - In secondary schools examples can be introduced of successful careers in the same ethnic group. Advisers and mediators, working with teachers, need to have an eye open on talent, not only in language.
2. **Increasing diversity**, change (turbulence / churning) and educational responses to diversity
 - Twinning is needed between schools with a high level of ethnic population and those which have not been exposed to great ethnic diversity. Also between schools belonging to or catering to different ethnic and confessional communities. Twinning needs to be prepared with care and a great deal of preparation, in cooperation with the communities, families, etc.
 - Schools need comprehensive policies and to be prepared to respond to new challenges, not only those that are expected (e.g. illiteracy).
3. **Teacher education** – initial teacher training. Head-teacher and teacher recruitment
 - Migrant/ethnic minority people should be encouraged to become teachers (not only assistant teachers) and head-teachers. This should also concern head-teacher recruitment.
 - Job shadowing is good practice as regards teacher training: mentoring of young and would-be teachers by experienced ones.
 - Teacher training at the teaching practice stage should involve experience of ethnic diversity.
4. **Funding** to support development / Cooperation with the government (government control vs. school autonomy) / School management & mutual support.
 - Schools in socially deprived areas (inner city, etc.) should have more funding (also as concerns teachers' pay).
 - Schools should have autonomy in hiring new teachers: this will allow heads of

schools to build strong and mutually-supportive staff, ready to comprehensively address issues, such as multi-ethnicity.

- School networking and close cooperation is necessary for any given area – schools should be obliged, or at least encouraged or given incentives, to enter into networks. External oversight is needed. Underachieving schools will be able to obtain the support of more successful schools.
 - Government should be careful when publishing results of examinations. In some schools at least, added-value should be more important than straight assessment and examination results. The stigma of poor ranking is an unnecessary burden for schools to carry.
 - Another type of support (different to that under 4.) ought to concern reduction of form-size in socially deprived and ethnically diverse areas.
5. **Religion in secular societies** – place of religious schools in the school system
- Schools (following the examples of Belgium, for instance) should work out a system of values or “moral philosophy” (ethos) that will bridge gaps between the different ethnic and religious backgrounds of the students.

Most importantly: though many challenges will bring in ready-made solutions, schools need an environment in which they can be creative in dealing with the problems they face.

3.4 Policies and practices that can be further explored and possibly transferred to other countries:

Most of the good practice in the previous section could be useful in our own and other EU countries, if the strategies are adapted to accommodate different contexts and stage of development.

Ideas for future cooperation that have evolved during meetings and discussions.

- Twinning between schools now that links have been made, e.g. Moat Community College & Instituto de Ensenanza Secundaria Montes Negros, Spain
- Website for work (art and other work) dealing with identity now set up by Assistant Head, St Paul's
- Belgian delegation to visit Leicester College of Further Education
- Opportunity to go to the Get-in! network conference, Spain 2010
- Italy, Germany & Poland plan to work together
- German delegation to visit educational institute in Antalya