

Birmingham Schools of Sanctuary

Newsletter No. 4 December 2019

Welcome to our latest newsletter in which we are delighted to announce that Halesowen College is our first COLLEGE OF SANCTUARY! Some of us went this morning to look at the portfolio and we were impressed by the range and scale of the work they are doing - more details will be in our next newsletter after their award ceremony in January.

We are also pleased to tell you that since our last newsletter, Washwood Heath Academy has been granted the Sanctuary Award. Updated awards have been presented to St Chad's Primary, celebrating five years as a School of Sanctuary, and to St Vincent's Primary, marking four years since they received their award. These events, like all others in our area, are of course noted on our Birmingham City of Sanctuary website and Facebook page and on the national City of Sanctuary website,.

Our links to Birmingham City University (BCU) continue to flourish, and we have been invited to a meeting in December with staff from different faculties. We have also been invited to switch on the Christmas lights at their Macmillan Tree of Thought ceremony!

We are also working closely with staff from Birmingham City Council, who are putting together a "Toolkit" to support schools which receive migrant and asylum-seeking children. The input from some of "our" schools is proving invaluable.

In this newsletter, you can read about our participation in a conference in Athens, ideas for the maths curriculum, updates on the poetry workshops, a portrait of Chandos Primary School, which received the Award in July, and an article about dealing with the sensitive issues of LGBTI+ relationships in a primary school in a highly religious community.

With many thanks for your continuing commitment to Schools of Sanctuary and wishing you all a restful break over Christmas and New Year,

Best wishes from the Schools Team

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Athens Here We Come!

Denise Macdonald of Somerville Primary School reports on a conference in Athens.

Taking part in the **Open Schools for Open Societies** conference in Athens in October was a result of our involvement with Birmingham City University in their **Open School Doors** projects. This is an Erasmus funded European project looking at how schools can engage with families from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds and particularly those who are asylum seekers or refugees.



Several of Birmingham's Schools of Sanctuary supported BCU in gathering examples of good practice to be included in the training materials being devised. BCU and their partners from Austria, Hungary, Germany and Greece decided that the conference would be a good venue to launch the training package and asked the schools to join them. When I said yes, I didn't realise I would have to speak!

Once I got started it wasn't hard to think of things to include. As in all Schools of Sanctuary, there are so many everyday aspects of our school which could be shared that it was harder to decide what not to include.

Four members of the Birmingham Schools of Sanctuary network attended the conference: Erdington Academy, Halesowen College, Oasis Academy Foundry, and my school, Somerville Primary. When the four of us who were presenting got together, it was clear that our different settings complimented each other very well. We come from two primary schools, a secondary school and a further education college. We each gave a short presentation about our ethos, what's important to our staff and the families we serve and what we do to provide a welcoming, supportive environment. We combined to give a wide ranging picture of how many schools in Britain are addressing the challenges of migration and inclusion.

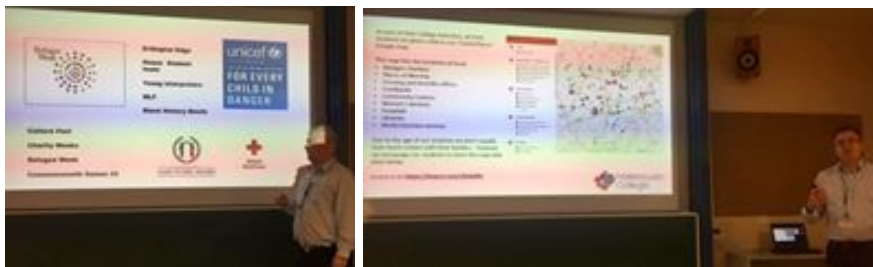


The team from BCU (led by Professor Alex Kendall, left) and their counterparts from the other participating countries made us very welcome. Each of us tried to give a flavour of our setting and from the questions after each presentation it was clear that we had given the delegates a lot to think about. Despite the concerns we feel in the UK, we are further along the path than many European countries. Some of the challenges come down to funding, but there are also issues about

hearts and minds which aren't merely a question of finance. Opportunities for parents to come into school for social events or senior staff being available at the school gate are more about attitude than cost.

It was a wonderful opportunity to share and to learn, together with an all too brief opportunity to soak up the sights and sounds of Athens.

The Birmingham presentations from the conference (photos courtesy of Mary-Rose Puttick of BCU), clockwise from top left: Erdington Academy (Francis Johnson), Halesowen College (Jamie Green), Somerville Primary (Denise Macdonald), Oasis Foundry Primary Academy (Emma Johnson).



For more information about the project, see <http://openschooldoors.org/>

Maths in a School of Sanctuary

Erdington Academy has incorporated international and multi-cultural elements into its Maths Curriculum. Work on coordinates includes finding key places relevant to pupils on a world map, temperatures in other countries are discussed in work on negative numbers, and significant buildings around the world are brought in as examples of shapes and angles, 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional shapes, perimeter and area. Collecting and displaying of data are exemplified by looking at the structure of questionnaires and how misleading data is sometimes used in newspapers. The misleading use of terminology is also brought into learning about average and range. Different types of numbers are discussed, for example Bengali numerals. Population issues and real world examples are used to bring fractions, decimals and percentages to life. Work on transformations includes reflections, rotational symmetry, cultural patterns, Islamic, Hindu and Maori tessellations. Cultural attitudes to gambling are discussed while learning about probability, and links between key variables and correlations can be exemplified by looking at life expectancy around the world. And not to forget simultaneous equations - these can be studied using restaurant bills and prices from local restaurants.

Francis Johnson, EAL coordinator at Erdington Academy, also drew our attention to the following article: *Is maths really a universal language for EAL learners?*

<https://www.axcultures.com/maths-eal/>

If your school has examples of how to incorporate real-life examples from around the world into maths or any other subject, please share your ideas!

Poetry Workshops during Refugee Week

In our last newsletter we reported on the poetry workshops which were held during Refugee Week (and which we hope can be repeated around Refugee Week 2020 (15th-20th June). We can now report that an indefatigable member of our Schools Team has typed up all the poems which were received (thank you Judy!) and that we are hoping that we are now on track to producing these in a booklet form.

In each of the seven participating schools, three pupils were awarded the top prizes, and these winning poems were then all passed on to Professor Michael Hulse of Warwick University, a noted translator and poet. He commented that “the poems from the inter-schools competition impressed with their imagination, their thoughtfulness, and their compassion. Some of the poems entered into the fears and sorrows of people in the past, while others were written about present-day anxieties - or even present-day contentment, which makes a good contrast if you want to think about unhappiness.”

The three overall winners were a Year 5 pupil from Bellfield Junior School whose poem includes “an effective twist, reversing what we expect to happen, and sheds light and hope in a place where we might expect neither.” The second place, to a Year 10 newly-arrived pupil from Erdington Academy, “shows how quickly families can be torn apart, sometimes for ever. And every time it means heartbreak.” The first prize went to a Year 6 pupil from Welsh House Farm (now in Year 7 at Harborne Academy) whose poem is “crowded with vividly imagined details... it doesn’t say anything about fear or misery, and the speaker of the poem is simply positioned among the details of this new existence in a camp. That’s a strikingly mature way of writing a poem - allowing the circumstances to speak for themselves.”

Professor Hulse congratulated all the pupil poets and also the teachers “who had a (terrific) shot at writing their own poems too”. He went on to comment that “behind all of the writing that went into these poems lies the fragility of happiness, and it’s worth holding tight to the feelings that went into writing the poems, because they were the feelings that value love, family, community, togetherness, all of those things that bond and protect us, and preserve our happiness.”

Many thanks to Professor Hulse for the time and care he took in judging the poems, and to Vanwy and her team for running the workshops.

The winning poem overall:

I come from....

*I come from a rectangular grey hut as grey as the moon,
The skinny little boy with sad brown eyes,
Scruffy hair like spaghetti, as dark as a devil's heart.*

*I come from muscular soldiers patrolling our lives,
Thick green uniforms showered in badges,
Bullying children and chattering about war.*

*I come from mouldy soups and a thick lump of rock-hard bread,
No showers and sleeping on the floor
With rats nibbling my toes.*

*I come from black and white striped pyjamas, tight and rough
Working endlessly under the sizzling sun,
Stale beer stench from the soldiers' dinner hall.*



One of the winning poems from the teachers' competition was written by Heidi Otis from St Anthony's School, Chelmsley Wood. Here she is, delighted to receive the news of this win and her prize!

Chandos Primary School

Head Teacher James Allan gives us the background to their Sanctuary Award

Chandos is a two form entry primary school in Highgate, a short walk from the city centre. We serve an ethnically diverse community with upwards of 40 different languages and dialects spoken by our families. We also have to manage high levels of pupil mobility - in 2018/19 we had almost 100 in year pupil leavers and another 100 new pupils over the year. This can be due to a range of reasons including: families moved at short notice to a nearby sheltered housing facility; families relocated by the Local Authority to Highgate; newly arrived families to Birmingham and the UK; pupils placed through the Syrian refugee programme.

A culture of tolerance and respect in all that we do

Everyone in school, from governors, senior leaders, teaching, pastoral and support staff, understands that managing newly arrived families to our school is seen as a feature of our school's context, but never as a barrier. It is at the heart of our ethos and mission statement, it is embedded in all that we do on a day to day basis.

A welcoming "wrap around" offer from the start

We ensure that every family has a positive welcome to the school - they meet teachers and support staff, they have a tour of their part of the school and also meet some of the children - especially those who may speak the same language. We are fortunate in having staff who can speak a variety of languages, and occasionally we may ask another parent to help translate. Every teacher receives a simple one page overview from the pupil/family induction meeting detailing a new child's initial learning, EAL, medical, safeguarding and pastoral needs.

We assess the child's needs - the whole picture

We assess the child's grasp of English language when we first meet. The child may have an initial daily provision to develop early English skills with our EAL support worker, but the

intention is always to have the child fully immersed in their classroom learning experiences at the earliest opportunity. They will be buddied up for the first few weeks with a class friend, who shows them around the school, and helps with translation if needed.

If there is evidence of mental health issues or emotional trauma, the child will be referred to our Pastoral Team for support and monitoring, which might take the form of developing a small social peer circle of support, access to music workshops, one-one pastoral support. If there is evidence of medical needs a swift referral can be made to the school nurse who can liaise confidently with the GP service and ensure all medical assessments and checks are complete.

We assess the family's needs and offer support

We encourage families to build a trusting relationship with the school and known adults. We also encourage parents to attend our in-house ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes, run once a week by our EAL support worker. This focuses on developing spoken and written skills to access services eg: opening a bank account, applying for housing.

We signpost families according to need to supporting agencies, foodbanks, charities and local community groups in the local area.

Curriculum Ethos and Access

We continually maintain a high profile of our school values and an ethos of respect for all, through our curriculum and assemblies - including the exploration of homelessness, immigration, religious celebrations, links with St Alban's Church and local homeless charity Sifa Fireside.

We have named pupil Language Ambassadors whose role is, on occasions, to provide support in a new child's mother tongue.

Newly arrived children's progress and the emotional peer support they get from their friends in class is actively celebrated in our weekly achievement assemblies.

We are fortunate in being able to maintain an EAL support worker who provides daily group interventions to address early English development. To enhance engagement to whole class learning, we are developing the use of Flash Academy software for children new to English.

We are now committed to the UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools programme. The key elements of this commitment are being built into our SMSC provision, which maintains a high profile of young people's rights across the world.

We have a growing number of staff trained in Mental Health First Aid, which is being built into our pastoral provision as well as our curriculum. Year 5/6 pupils attend workshops building an understanding of mental health. While unable to deal with complex mental health needs, our staff have an enhanced awareness of the symptoms of possible mental health problems. The child can be swiftly referred to our learning mentor and, if needed, to external agencies.

Wider family engagement in school life

We hold regular coffee morning drop-ins, focused on inviting newly arrived families to meet and mix with established members of the school community. Parents are actively encouraged to attend assemblies, celebrations and other events over the year.

Each term every class runs a parent workshop with a chosen curriculum focus, with staff available to translate if needed. The parents join their children and participate in a range of learning activities, taking away suggestions about how to support learning at home.

Over time we have built a growing and very positive climate of engagement with many families, which has culminated in some lovely family-led events. Over the last two years parents have organised community pic-nics in the local park, inviting all the new families to join them, a chance to meet new neighbours. Families have also created a celebration of home cooking from across the world managing the food stall at our Summer Fayre (raising almost £800 from food alone this year!).



Well done to Chandos School for such a dedicated and comprehensive programme for all their children and families!

The City of Sanctuary charter has as its first principle that we ‘offer a positive vision of a culture of welcome and hospitality for all’ - here is an example of a school of sanctuary that is putting this into practice.

The Charter can be found at

<https://cityofsanctuary.org/2017/05/16/city-of-sanctuary-conference-and-agm-2017/>

Talking their talk, walking our walk

A discussion of a primary school’s success in teaching an LGBTI+ inclusive curriculum within a religious community

Approaching LGBTI+ issues in the primary sector has its challenges, as we have recently seen in education in Britain and worldwide. Stonewall offers fantastic training into these issues, and ensures a school is equipped to deliver a curriculum that is inclusive to all families. But how do we ensure the curriculum is being delivered inclusively whilst still being respectful and sensitive to the religious views of a highly religious community? This poses many challenges, and although some professionals argue, “Well it is the law, so they need to just accept it!” this does not ensure that this type of work is going to be received in a positive light. This type of work needs everybody on board, singing from the same hymn sheet. Myths and hysteria need to be avoided at all costs, and clear, transparent communication needs to be had between parents/carers, religious leaders and the school.

Our school ensured that all staff were trained in LGBTI+ issues, whilst also creating an action plan addressing homophobia, transphobia, and how to deliver a curriculum that is inclusive to all families. We shared the motto “Different Families, Same Love” and discussed this openly with our children. A power point was made with images of different families such as, two black parents with an adopted white child, a grandparent and a granddaughter, two Sikh mums and two Christian dads, amongst many more. The question tag was “Did you see your family?” Pupil responses ranged from “It doesn’t matter what your family is, as long as you are loved” and also “All I can see is love” once we had shared this PowerPoint to the song “Everybody’s free to feel love”.

Behind the scenes of this work, senior leaders met with religious leaders and the wider community to ensure we were crystal clear on what exactly was being taught. We approached these issues using cultural capital to ensure a collaboration between the school and community on these issues. A discussion about the third gender took place, and how LGBTI+ people are in all communities, under many different names. We explained how this work was inclusive to all people, and that all people were “God’s children”. Because we approached this with language the community understood, it opened up healthy conversation, respect, acceptance and tolerance of curriculum expectations within our community. We ensured that children were exposed to all the different families in the world, reading books with diverse families included in them as normal, everyday practice. We celebrated each other’s families, researched about different LGBTI+ people and even had a discussion about how intolerance and discrimination can affect communities and people. Parallels were formed in Upper Key Stage 2 between homophobia/transphobia and racism.

We were able to complete this piece of work because we were transparent as a school, included the community and approached them with language they understood. We posed questions to them that enabled them to reflect on their own community, and then discuss if it is right to miss people out for being just that – people! The writing the children completed was phenomenal and our inclusive policy still stands to this day, with teacher and pupil having open conversations about different families in a safe and respectful environment.

For the safeguarding of children and staff, the school is remaining anonymous.