



**International Learning and Research  
Centre Bursary Programme**

**International Learning Visit by  
Katherine Wilson, Assistant Headteacher  
The Grange School and Sports College**

**to**

**Kuopion Klassillinen Lukio School and  
Hatsalan Klassillinen Koulu - Finland**

**7-14 February 2008**



## Report by Katherine Wilson for the learning visit to Kuopio Finland

Profile of Visit	
Local education authority:	South Gloucestershire
Name of School (UK):	The Grange School and Sports College
Theme of visit:	Curriculum Innovation-14-19 Citizenship and the international dimension, culture, identity and diversity.
Country/region Visited:	Finland-Kuopio
Dates of Visit:	7 <sup>th</sup> February -14 <sup>th</sup> February 2008
Types of Schools Visited:	Upper Secondary, Lower Secondary
Age of Students visited:	Main age group for visit 16– 19 years

### INTRODUCTION

#### Intended aims of the visit

Please provide details of the specific focus and areas you wish to investigate:

#### Aims of the visit:

- To consider how the two schools in Kuopio develop Global Citizens through the Personal Development Curriculum and Citizenship to ensure that students are offered a curriculum that allows them to explore the concepts of the uniqueness of each culture and how this influences cultural identity.
- To consider the Eco School Programme in the UK and to share the concepts or re-cycle, re-use, reduce with the schools in Kuopio in order to develop sustainable futures. To consider these elements in Finland and to investigate how both schools work on projects that focus on the maintenance and quality of life without impacting too much on the planet of our future.
- To focus on the breadth and balance of the curriculum and the place of Citizenship within it in the two schools in Kuopio. .
- To carry out a comparison of Finnish and English practice on celebrating choice, challenge and diversity leading to the transfer of some aspects of Finnish practice to the classrooms within The Grange School and across the schools within the Kingswood Partnership .

- To investigate the potential for increased globalisation of lessons and the importance of the English language in Finland and the impact of the European Union upon Citizenship within the curriculum.
- To understand the reasons why many more students stay on in full time education and then progress to University in Finland and to investigate the importance and development of work related skills through Citizenship in a local and national context.
- To continue to develop and enhance the triangular partnership between The Grange School and Sports College, Klassika High School and The IB School in Rohtak, India and the development of the eight Global Dimensions in each school.

### **Expected outcomes of the visit**

- Comparison of Finnish and English practice, leading to the transfer of some aspects of Finnish practice to our classrooms and school
- Increased globalisation of lessons; importance of language; international resources
- Understanding of factors that affect learning, e.g. the environment, mental and physical well being within the Personal Development Curriculum
- To gain new knowledge and experiences to enhance the quality of the learning experience that can be offered within the Kingswood Partnership
- To understand the reasons why many more students stay on in full-time education and then progress to University in Finland

### **Report of the Experience**

The visit was a very successful experience as a result of the meticulous planning and preparation by the teachers from both of the schools. The four and a half working days were spent predominantly in one school with a brief amount of time spent in a second school on the same site. A visit also occurred to the Education Authority to meet with the Director of Upper Secondary Education Heikki Turunen.

The visit provided an opportunity for many of the intended aims to be investigated, however, in the time available it became apparent that it would not be possible to look in detail at all of the learning objectives considered within the original proposal. Some of the focus areas that had been identified were more difficult to pursue, due to the less explicit way in which these aspects are covered in both the Upper and Lower Secondary School and the optional nature of courses within this educational system

In addition to observing lessons, time was spent with the two Headteachers, the Assistant Headteachers, the teacher in charge of Special Education, the School Nurse

and the Study Councillors. The pastoral system is very different to that of an English school; if academic or attendance problems are identified then one of three student councillors will see a student to discuss issues. The Special Education teacher supports reading and will do some work on helping learning styles, but this is in an early stage and the teacher is only at the Upper Secondary School for two hours a week. The school nurse is available three days each week and will see all students for a medical once in their career at the school (a doctor will also see the boys as a preliminary to their National Service). Health issues are very high profile and help is given with diet and mental well-being. Drug abuse is not a big issue, but alcohol problems do have a high profile and mental health issues are addressed with referrals to psychologists or psychiatrists for therapeutic rather than medication-based treatments. The school nurse is to be found in a very impressive medical room, she often has queues of people waiting to see her and there is no stigma attached to visiting her. The incidence of under-age pregnancy is very very low and the nurse seemed to be intrigued by questions on this topic. Members of the teaching staff also see the school nurse if they have any medical issues during the day.

A Year one Students' Parents Evening was attended and a presentation was given to them on the history of the schools reciprocal linking and the mutual benefits of the collaboration. This evening provided an opportunity for the staff to meet with parents and to chat to students, who attended, in a more informal context. All of the parents were highly interested in the professional development opportunities that this partnership offers and were enthusiastic about the idea that the teachers within this school would have an opportunity to learn about the English Education system.

Learning was individualised in as much as the order of compulsory courses at the Lower and Upper Secondary School could be chosen and then optional courses taken with these, so that the correct amount of study was done to fulfil the curriculum requirements. Grades were kept centrally using WILMA software, which students can access (and parents could also access, with their children's permission!). This system also monitored messages, attendance and timetabling issues.

Vocational teaching was undertaken at another local school and it was clear that the selection of the correct pathways is important for individual students. After Lower Secondary School, students chose academic or vocational education, the choice determined by achievement. Some staff stated that they were pressurised to give good grades, particularly as they were individually responsible for the final assessments of students in their own classes. The Lower Secondary school has 600 students and last year was the fifth most successful school in the region and the most successful school in the teaching of the Mother tongue. The four schools above this school were all much smaller so relatively speaking with the number of Ninth grade students it was the most successful school.

The unexpected learning outcomes of the visit have been huge. It was fascinating to observe how motivated the majority of students are; even though many of them openly

admitted to thinking that they are lazy. The extreme climate in which students live from day-to-day, does not appear to impact on their learning and is simply a feature of their every day living. The students seem to be more resilient than our students in the UK and this may well be reflected in their successful learning outcomes.

The students observed undertaking Health Education studies took a mature approach towards tackling issues which some adults may find to be a challenge. They undertook an investigation into a vast range of health-related aspects which indicated a high level of awareness of their own and others' physical, emotional and mental well-being. This was an interesting approach to the Personal Development Curriculum.

The students who are a part of the elite sports programmes are highly motivated and are able to transfer their skills of discipline from sport to their working life and are highly focussed on success, both within sport and in their academic courses. Some athletes may need to take a fourth year to complete their Secondary High School due to the amount of time that they are absent from classes due to their commitment to training and competitions. Ordinarily students will graduate after three years in the Upper Secondary School. The system for the development of Gifted and Talented sportspeople in the school goes beyond that currently set up at The Grange School and Sports College and it was very informative to observe the strategies in place to ensure academic and sporting success. In other areas of the school, the focus on Gifted and Talented students was not as well developed as we experience at The Grange.

Whilst visiting Klassika High school I met a group of students and teachers from Germany and Sweden who were on an exchange visit programme. The Swedish students were part of a Gifted and Talented programme for sport and they took part in the elite training sessions from 08.00 each morning with the Finnish athletes.

On Thursday February 14<sup>th</sup> 10,000 students across Finland took part in Penkkarit which is the Third Year's leaving ceremony. The students dress up on this day and 'deliver' lessons and a show to the students in Years 1 & 2 in the Upper Secondary school. This is the official ending of all classes for these students who then undertake a period of study leave prior to completing their final examinations. At this time of the year students in Year 2 take all of their options for the forthcoming academic year and the staff work hard to personalise the curriculum for all students.

## **EVALUATION**

### **Summary of the key educational outcomes**

I was privileged to take part in this visit and I would like to express my gratitude to the International Learning and Research Centre for the bursary awarded. Although I have been unable to fully address all of the intended aims, I feel that I have gained an understanding of the place of. The programme allowed me to see lessons across the age ranges and with some mixed ability classes also. Boys did tend to be less on task than the girls in some classes but still had an ethos of needing to work and valuing their

education. Technical subjects did attract more boys than girls and practical activities did allow boys to make the first move on collecting apparatus and 'doing' rather than listening/writing as in England. However, all students had an inherent respect for themselves and others and no-one disrupted learning. This enabled teaching to occur and learning followed from that as individuals worked at understanding concepts met. This was often by working from a textbook. Boys are equally as successful as girls in many subject areas, but it is felt that they lack the high level of motivation that is demonstrated by the majority of girls. I was informed that a new English exam is to be introduced which may offer better opportunities to the boys to be even more successful. The questions are designed to require short answers and not longer essay type responses. It was felt that this type of examination would also be more accessible for boys in England.

The administrative system in Finland is very different to that of the system in operation in the UK. The process of self-evaluation is less evident. Teachers are encouraged to identify and to address their individual developmental needs, but there appeared to be less of a coherent structure for whole school development. Teachers are used to working more individually and they approach their CPD needs in a more discrete and individualised manner. Targets for students' learning do not seem to be set in the same way as in England, although some features of Assessment for Learning were observed

A more rigorous and robust approach to lesson observations and evaluations is to be introduced into the region.

### **Proposals for future developments and continuing links**

The Grange School and Sports College has already included plans within the School Improvement Plan International dimension to investigate the viability of taking students to Kuopio in 2008 to spend time learning there. This is part of the DIFID planning in collaboration with the IB school in Rohtak, India. Students from Rajala Primary school will be visiting Courtney Primary school in May 2009 in conjunction with The Grange. The Headteachers from Hatsala and Rajala will be visiting Bristol on February 26<sup>th</sup> 2008.

### **General advice for other visitors to the country/region**

As I visited in February, I expected some acclimatisation. At the start of the visit, I was met with several centimetres of snow and a temperature of 0°C ( very mild for this time of the year ) which provided none of the problems we would meet in England – schools simply do not shut as they are well-maintained and everyone is prepared for what we would regard as an extreme climate. Infants dress themselves eagerly to go out for a break and are able to play on slides and climbing frames which disappeared from our playgrounds years ago. At the end of the break there is no lateness to lessons, despite the fact that extensive outdoor clothing is removed. Clothes are not fashion items and it

was extremely refreshing to be with groups of young people who paid no attention to designer trainers or the latest football shirt.

My advice to other visitors would be to ensure that you pack plenty of outdoor warm clothes in the winter months and to be prepared to change footwear a number of times on arrival and departure from the school buildings. Indoor footwear is left in the school by students and teachers alike and some students wear socks only in classes. The school buildings are heated particularly effectively so the many outer layers can be discarded on arrival in class. The meals at lunch times in all Finnish schools are free and are of a very high quality. The menu is the same in each school each day within a region. The menus are published weekly in the local paper to allow for family meal planning.

The language is extremely difficult to master but some attempts to speak a few words are appreciated. The Finns all speak excellent English, although they are very modest about their ability to communicate. A dictionary is a very useful resource to have with you and it is true that most Finns do not expect foreigners to learn their language.

**Meeting with Heikki Turunen-Director of Upper Secondary Education**  
**Monday February 11<sup>th</sup> 2008**

- There are 2,500 students in Kuopio in Upper Secondary education. Of these 2,500 students only 30 of them originate from a country other than Finland.
- 180 teachers teach in the Upper Secondary schools
- There are six Upper Secondary schools in Kuopio
- There are 35 Lower Secondary schools in Kuopio
- 2013 New Curriculum changes will be implemented throughout Finland

**Language learning**

90% of students, if not more, learn English as their second language. The others may learn either German or French. Learning of the English language is considered to be vital to ensure that students are well equipped for future employability. Students are well motivated to learn English and they speak it very well. They have a very positive attitude towards learning generally and this extends specifically to the learning of English.

Specialist English teaching programmes occur in the city in certain schools. This is English immersion which occurs in some Kindergartens, one Primary school, Rajala and one Lower Secondary School, Hatsala. The students in these specialist programmes learn English through many subjects in Primary school from class 1-6 and in the Lower Secondary school from grades 7-9. Three quarters of their lessons are delivered in English. There is an identified problem that there is a lack of continuity and progression

for students when they get to the Upper Secondary as the specialist English programme does not continue. There is also an IB school in Kuopio where there is a specialist English immersion programme; although even in this school there is only one native English speaker.

Specialist English terminology is predominantly learnt in University for employment or within the vocational/technical school in Kuopio.

There is a developing programme for English over the next five years within the Kuopio region. It is recognised that although this is a strength of the Personal Development Curriculum it is an area for further development to aid employability skills.

All students must learn Swedish for eight years of their school lives. Until 2004 the matriculation examination included Swedish as a compulsory element. This is now an optional part of the matriculation exam.

### **Cultural identity**

Cultural identity is one of the seven themes that run through the curriculum as a competence and the schools are required to integrate these themes into the delivery of all subjects

- Environment
- Entrepreneurship/Active Citizenship
- Technology/society
- Media
- Cultural identity
- Sustainable development
- Safety and Well being

The Upper Secondary students learn a huge amount about other cultures as part of their curriculum. The understanding of the European Union is gained predominantly through a Society course which covers many elements of Citizenship and covers many of the eight Global Concepts within the English system. Traditionally many aspects of Finnish identity were taught within History and was an obligatory element of the matriculation examination. Now aspects such as the European Union, legal and civil rights, legislation and sustainable future developments are predominantly delivered through the Society course as well as through the themes in all subject areas.

The cultural identify aspect of the Society course allows students and opportunity to learn about Finnish traditions and history and celebrates cultural identity as well as considering difference within cultures and understanding the impact of different cultures upon the Finnish identity. There is a specific module within this course on the European Union and the place of Finnish people within it.

### **Sustainable Futures**

In Finland there is a legal requirement for people to re-cycle within their homes. Culturally there is an expectation that the nation will re-use and re-cycle and this is taught and encouraged in schools. It is one of the seven themes that run through all subject areas but it is also a focus area that is developed during key times of the year such as special days or weeks based on this topic. The Eco School programme is one of the compulsory themes which has to be covered in each curriculum area. It appears to be covered more successfully in some subjects than in others, having a more natural place in Geography and Biology.

Within the kitchens all of the waste food is composted. All of the school computers shut down at 18.00 as an energy saving method. Students routinely re-cycle paper in all classes and the temperature of the building is lower when there are no students there.

### **International collaboration**

In 2007 there were 45 international project visits to the 41 schools in Kuopio. The Lower Secondary school, Hatsala, had 5 visits and some schools had no international visitors. Many schools are funded by the Finnish national agency to take part in Comenius projects or other international work which will impact on the development of learning and teaching and enhance CPD opportunities for Teachers.

At Klassika, the Secondary High School, the technological innovations allow for Video Conferencing to occur in every class room. Lessons are already routinely shared with out lying community schools where they have less specialist teachers. Some lessons have also already been shared with students in different countries and there are plans for this to be further developed.

Members of the Senior Management Team from Klassika High School travelled to Rohtak in India last October with two members of the Senior Management team from The Grange School and Sports College to set up a new project which will make a very effective use of technologies once these are further developed in the school in India.

Whilst at Klassika High School there were also a group of students and teachers from Germany and Sweden on an exchange programme.

### **Preferred Futures**

Last year 20% of the students from the Upper Secondary schools in Kuopio went on to University; this reflects exactly the figures for Finland in 2007. A further 13% of students in Kuopio went on to further studies at Polytechnic which is slighter lower than the figure of 18 % across the whole of Finland.

The students are able to make many choices at Upper Secondary level and they are guided to take the correct routes by Study Councillors. These individuals also have some teaching commitment but they are highly trained in career planning and have an excellent understanding of the requirements for employment. At Klassika High school there are three Study Councillors for 500 students. There is no comparable pastoral

structure to England at all in the secondary schools in Kuopio. However in the Lower Secondary school, Hatsala, the students well being and attainment is monitored by their form teacher in a similar although less structured way. Fortnightly meetings are held with all of the staff present to discuss the behaviour, attitude, progress and attainment of all students.

### **Hatsalan Klassillinen Koulu** **Lower Secondary school**

This secondary school has a special bilingual English programme that is unique to Kuopio. Students who have studied English in the immersion programme at Rajala primary school are set in special groups on arrival at Hatsala School and they follow a more intensively developed bilingual programme. There is a huge emphasis on the bilingual programme within the school. The students generally all speak very good English and can access most curriculum areas in English.

The curriculum is made up of thirty learning hours per week and students are given an opportunity to pick elective courses. Some students are involved in Gifted and Talented groupings for sport, art and music and this will affect their choices within the curriculum.

In the 7<sup>th</sup> grade the students undertake 2 hours of actual English teaching and in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade this rises to 3 hours with additional teaching of some subjects in English. All students learn Finnish as the mother tongue and then all students learn English. In addition to this students can elect to learn Russian, German, French, Latin or Italian.

The cultural identity of the students is considered mainly in history lessons and also in Social Science. The importance of the European Union is covered in Social Science and its impact on the Finnish Citizen. In grade 9 the students have 3 hours of Social Science per week and also a greater period of time is allocated to each student per week with the study councillor. In the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade the students spend half an hour alone each week with the Study Councillor but in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade this rises to one hour per week per student. This increase in time supports the decision making process for the students to ensure that they select the correct pathway to a Secondary High school. Career planning is covered predominantly in grade 9.

All students at Hatsala Lower Secondary school will go onto an Upper Secondary school. Not all of them will get the required average point score required to go to Klassika Upper Secondary. The staff at Hatsala have a duty of care to ensure that the transition process occurs successfully and a record is kept of where all of the students progress on to.

### **Conclusion**

I have observed many similarities in the subject matter delivered within the curriculum, but the approach to the delivery of the content is very different. Finland is a progressive

country that fully understands that they are part of a global market within Europe. For students to be successful in this country, they seem to understand that they must do well in school and to gain the knowledge, understanding and experience to compete with other larger European countries. One of the major differences I noticed was the independence shown by students of all ages. The Finnish young people display a healthy respect for their peers and teachers and also for the environment in which they learn.

In the schools visited, no rigid hierarchical structure was observed and in trying to explain performance management it is clear there is very little peer observation – colleagues did share and discuss practice, but since there are no identified faculties within the Upper Secondary School, there was little need for meetings, handbooks etc which so stifle the English system. Above all I saw students who wanted to learn and to succeed – failure was never mentioned and motivation was high. In asking staff and students about differences in achievement between the genders, I was met with a few blank looks as the system in Finland is not data driven and I did not hear one teacher mention the word 'target', simply because there seems to be no need to give targets. I firmly believe that Finnish education is driven by success and knowledge that education is essential.

It became almost impossible to stick rigidly to the original aims of the research period as it became more apparent that there was more to learn from the Finnish system by being more flexible rather than sticking rigidly to the questions that I had identified prior to the visit. The comparisons between curriculum times were almost impossible to consider due to the selective nature of courses from the Ninth grade.

On a personal level, this visit has impacted deeply on me. I am extremely grateful to the ILRC for the bursary to allow me to spend time in Kuopio and also to my hosts for showing me the sights – world class sporting facilities such as the terrifying ski jump at Pujio; introducing aspects of the culture – leaving a sauna to dip in a hole in an ice-covered lake within the town, tasting tar ice-cream; watching ice-hockey, cross country skiing, seeing an Arctic halo and just experiencing a tiny fraction of the silence and beauty of which the Finns are so rightly proud of. I have every intention of visiting again to see the area in another season, but also to continue to develop the links with the schools in Kuopio.