

# Report on visit to Germany in the EU-Mail project

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This report has three areas of focus

- Pupils
- Teachers
- Lesson Structure
- Physical Environment and resources

There is also a set of suggestion for the video

## • Pupils

The pupils were clearly very happy with their schools and had great confidence, especially in their teachers. They were very supportive of each other; they were eager to participate in all activities e.g. in group work in English, project work and science lessons. In all lessons we saw pupils enthusiastically wishing to answer questions. They seemed confident that a wrong answer would not lead to criticism.

They liked the schools because of friendships, opportunities to learn.

Motivation sometimes seemed to be more to conform to school norms and to be a "nice pupil" than because of the intrinsic interest of the subject. Teachers did not often offer reasons for the work to be worth doing. However, the relationship of work to everyday life was used in several lessons

Mutual support was an excellent feature. Pupils were almost without exception kind and helpful to each other. One science class used structured sheets to share ideas on planning a practical activity. At the end of the activity they circulated their books within the group to allow peer evaluation and assessment for learning. This was evidence of excellent training in "learning to learn". The pupils spoke enthusiastically about their opportunities to work independently in Freiarbeit and in the supervised homework time in school. Another group made good use of an Arbeitsplan to direct their work.

The high level of socialisation shown by the pupils had been created by committed work from their class teachers. One class had no fewer than eight pieces of socialisation posters on the walls! This effort facilitated teaching of these heterogeneous groups.

Good manners were universal.

A question arises of whether the teaching of religion in separate groups does not threaten to de-stabilise the excellent results of the socialisation teaching.

## • Teachers

Teachers were clearly very knowledgeable in their subjects and showed good training, but in a limited area of methodology. Class teachers, but not all subject specialists, were very knowledgeable about the children.

There was little knowledge of prior attainment by pupils so neither the pupils or the teachers knew what the pupils should

do to progress. There may be a problem with identification of pupil potential, especially in members of minority groups, which could be overcome by the provision to the teachers of more data about the pupils. Some teachers identified conformity with ability.

It was very interesting that, despite their knowing the subject of the study, only one teacher started describing the heterogeneity of the group by referring to their pupils' intellectual ability. Some teachers never referred to ability despite prompting. They were also very doubtful about the value of testing or other forms of evaluation of learning or of progress. They felt that observation was a sufficient method.

They treated the children with courtesy, but had high expectations of behaviour. There was a clear gap between the teachers and the pupils, reinforced by the architecture of some of the buildings. Staff areas were very separate from pupil areas. There was a high level of dependence on locked doors.

### • **Lesson Structure**

There seemed to be a standard lesson structure which appeared with variations in all the lessons we observed.

The topic would be introduced by the teacher (but in only one case with the learning aims being described). There would then be questioning around the room with excellent attention by pupils and some differentiation by questioning. Some pupils did not take part. Time to think through problems was not always given. Open ended thinking and prediction of outcomes were not observed.

A pupil activity in groups followed. Groups were mostly defined by the teacher, but were sometimes friendship groups. They were mixed sex except for a science lesson in which single sex groups were used to avoid role determination.

Teachers circulated, coaching and trying to encourage the pupils to stick to the task as defined by the teacher. Many examples of good peer work and pupil-pupil teaching were seen during this phase. Pupils were clearly well trained in this type of work and enjoyed it.

Teachers relied on this to overcome heterogeneity. We did not see alternative or explicitly differentiated work in this phase. It would be valuable for teachers to see how other teachers solve the problems of differentiation despite the difficulties of class size and heterogeneity.

Opportunities for creative work and for problem solving were sometimes missed.

- **Physical Environment and Resources**

Some rooms were very small for the activities planned and in one case had to spill out into the corridor.

Arrangement of tables often worked against the best group work, when pupils were sitting in "L" or linear arrangements.

Differentiated materials were not seen, even when a published book available in differentiated forms was used.

There were almost no books available as resources.

Teachers referred to the variability of resources and support at home as a problem when setting homework.