

**Visit Manchester: September 19 – 24th 2004-09-24 Report:**  
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**General Impression of the school culture:**

Well situated oversubscribed (900 pupils instead of 650) school specialised for language learning. Pupils in school uniform, very polite and apparently highly disciplined.

Highly qualified staff in language learning – some of them are native speakers.

School's principal gives support to learning in mixed ability groups not only in subjects like history but also in languages. He is very aware of his school development work and gives his staff strong support e.g. in offering a lot of in-service training to get better teaching and learning. The Motto of the school:

**“We are all here to learn”.**

In school there is a common understanding of what are good lessons (**see:written Expectations for A Good Lesson**. May be we should refer to this paper as a starting point for our discussions during the conference in February)). There are self-evaluation sheets and visits to the lessons in order to develop the teaching culture in school.

The school strives to provide “excellence in all areas”. The school works hard to communicate with parents, inform them and bring them to work together with the school.

The school is situated in an open countryside just outside Manchester. The environment seems to be very positive.

What is the first impression to the visitor of the school? Inside you will find a friendly, enthusiastic and helpful staff. The pupils you meet are uniformed, well behaved and it seems, that they know, what the school expects from them.

**Observation in lessons:**

We saw a lesson in year 9 and a lesson in year 8 with 27 and 21 pupils. In both lessons pupils are sitting in rows. The teacher has a clear structured lesson plan. The objectives of the lesson and also the structure of the lesson is marked on a white board. Pupils know exactly what they are learning. We saw good resources (film) for the subject but very little activity of the pupils. Teacher guides them through all the lesson with questions and a sort of “mind map” of the results at the blackboard. She gives individual help to some pupils to write down the results. In a second lesson we see a very well structured lesson with clear objectives, very well prepared materials and high pupil activity in plenary and in groups, strong discipline and often very short time limits for pupils working activities.

Two lessons have been observed. This seems to be the main impression of both lessons:

- A lot of tasks introduced by the teacher
- Too short a time for the pupils to handle and reflect upon the tasks
- Teachers have good knowledge in their subjects
- Teachers have a repertoire of techniques and methods of teaching.

The main conclusion from the observations will be that there is a visible structure in activities from teachers and pupils but that the time for pupils reflection and possibilities for learning

from all activities might be a question to discuss. It will also raise the question of who really feels responsible for the moment of learning, not only the responsibility for the structure.

### **Example for possibilities of individualized learning in the mixed ability group in a lesson:**

Task: Find out what sentence goes together with which image! Group work to find out what has to be put together and then they try play “memory” in groups of 2 – 4 pupils.

This seems to us to be a good possibility of individualized learning but we do not really know what is was for different pupils.

### **Teachers view on I.L.:**

When teachers are asked about the heterogeneity in their learning group they think about social background, gender, behaviour and abilities. They know exactly how their pupils should perform, there seems to be a lot of diagnosis for each pupil and action, if they do not achieve as they should.

Very often teachers think about 3 levels in their learning group: very gifted – middle – pupils with learning problems.

They think that it is very important for the learning process how the pupils are seated. Gender and ability are in view. (“girls keep boys on task”!!!); girl – boy – seating plan helps the discipline. Girls and boys have different learning styles.

They think that it is helpful to have national targets for the subjects but they are aware of the fact that often pupils achieve in a different and maybe better way, when they have oral work to do: communicate in language learning and debate in history. These skills are not assessed in the national examination. There is some teaching to the test especially in year 10 and 11. Teachers estimate peers’ help in learning to be extremely important. They think that it is very important to “learn out of mistakes”, to use mistakes for the learning process and to encourage pupils as much as possible.

They also think different question techniques can be helpful for the learning process.

Differentiation of the questions in dependence of the ability of pupils. Visual aids and differentiated homework as well as special check of the books of less abled pupils seem to be good help for individualisation.

They also think that discipline in the classroom is of high importance and sometimes there has to be punishment f.ex. detention.

There seems to be intensive cooperation within subject departments in order to exchange best practise.

The teachers often refer to both internal and external assessments when they are talking about their work. Cooperation with colleagues seems to be good.

They have close contact with department colleagues and there are several occasions when they could exchange ideas with colleagues from other departments.

There are special strategies for learning support and teachers in school agree not to use the learning support centre just to bring “nasty” pupils out of the classroom. There will be strategies or individual plans for pupils with special needs.

It’s an impression that teachers often use the word “ability” synonymous to general ability which varies from individual to individual and which is very crucial for pupils success.

Both teachers and pupils know the code of rules and politeness.

### **Pupils view on their learning:**

Pupils liked very much the teaching style of some of their teacher: she makes it funny, there are games, she works with pictures, there is repetition and help. They like it especially to work in projects and choose interesting contents when they have to write but they hate it just to copy texts. They think that they need teachers' full and good explanation but sometimes feel ashamed to ask questions because of their peers laughing on them if you ask "silly" questions.

They like the help of peers because they explain in different ways as the teacher: "pupils explain it in your language – not in so difficult words." Pupils like to help others especially when teacher asks them to do so (f.ex. correcting other pupils written work): "you feel more important – you feel better – you feel like a teacher".

They think it is very important to learn something new in every lesson. The following description tells us something about a real good lesson from the pupils view:

"You learn something new and can go home and tell it to your mum"

They feel good if they think they do well: "We know so much, all the basics." Good teachers help every child and explain in a good way. They can deal with the class.

They would like to have the possibility to relax during the day, feel tired at the end of the day and would like to have a broader variety of food in school.

The impression is that pupils are proud of their school and that they have a good relationship to most of their teachers.

They expect the teacher to have competence in the subjects they are teaching, that they are fair and keep order/discipline in the classroom and can explain things when pupils don't understand. They do not like a climate when pupils are ashamed to ask questions during the lessons, when they don't understand. They don't like when a group or a class will be punished because of one pupil is not behaving well. They like the objectives on the white board and find it helpful to have the possibility to ask friends, when they don't understand during the lesson.

Sometimes it is easier to ask a friend, who explains something in a more simple way. They are well aware of the importance of their homework.

In an uncritical way they refer to all assessment and testings to their own ability and learningstyle.