**Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning Case Study: Longstone Special School case**

Longstone Special School is situated in Dundonald in the outskirts of East Belfast, catering for 220 pupils with Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) from Nursery level through to Key Stage 4 (KS4). Longstone holds a Rights Respecting Schools Award (gold level) and was previously involved in the Global Learning Programme (GLP) which ran from 2015-18. Global Learning has been the PRSD focus for all staff over the past two academic years, including the development and implementation of two lesson plans or practical action projects, which are observed by SLT. The school has just taken the next step on its global learning journey by establishing a new international partner school link with two schools in Kangundo in Kenya, located about 40 miles from Nairobi.

**Inspiration for the Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning International Partnership**

KS4 Co-ordinator Stephanie Plunkett and Primary 4 teacher Richard McCune first became involved in global learning when a Rights Respecting Schools Assessor visiting the school suggested that they take up global learning CPD training opportunities offered through the GLP as this would complement what they were already doing and help facilitate a whole-school approach. Their contacts with the GLP team led to them engaging in the follow-up Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning. As Longstone School cater for primary and post-primary pupils, Stephanie and Richard were matched with two Kenyan schools, one primary and one secondary. Although both Kenyan schools are mainstream, the primary school has a hearing impaired and special unit; and the fact that both schools are located close-by was important when it came to forming the cluster and arranging the visit.

**Practicalities**

The Cluster Lead School is the post-primary unit of Longstone with Stephanie as the coordinator. Having Richard from the primary unit on the same site is ideal as both teachers have been able to draft the grant application and plan the project activities together, and jointly organise the reciprocal visit. Stephanie keeps a folder containing all the necessary travel documentation such as staff contact details; photos for on-line visa applications (for both Longstone and Kangundo schools); immunisation requirements; flight and hotel details. She advises that it is important to be well organised, plan ahead and be aware of practicalities such as visa deadlines.

**Communication**

Good communication is of course essential to sustaining the partnership. At the beginning of the partnership communication consisted of emails being sent between the two primary school teachers and the two secondary school teachers. While this was useful for forming introductions and gathering information about each other’s schools it quickly became apparent that a more flexible method of communication was required, one where conversations and ideas could flow between all members of the partnership at the one time. A WhatsApp group was formed and this allowed for the exchange of at times daily messages, photographs and videos to be shared from the different Global Learning projects in each school. The WhatsApp group was particularly useful when it came to planning of reciprocal visits when copies of documents and travel information needed to be gathered. The WhatsApp group is an important aspect of the partnership and will hopefully be maintained for many years to come.

**The visit to Kenya**

The Longstone teachers visited Kenya for one week in September 2019. They were lucky that their school, valuing their commitment, was willing and able to pay for supply cover for both of them. During their visit, they spent time in their partner schools, observing lessons, and various school activities such as dance, drama and assemblies. The Kenyan pupils were keen to ask questions about life in Northern Ireland, for example, “Is there racism in NI?” “How is NI governed?” “What is the education system like?” “Are there any slums?” Stephanie and Richard also met with their counterparts to further plan the joint pupil project activities such as growing food in the school and electronic scrap books showing maps of the school and local area. The Sustainable Development Goals were addressed through agreeing to use the World’s Largest Lesson as a teaching resource; and to host joint assemblies on themes such as Anti-Bullying and United Nations Charter on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

**Joint projects**

Kangundo Schools are particularly interested in keeping their local community clean, so both partners organised litter picks and shared photos of this. The Kenyan children were amazed to see that NI pupils wear high-vis jackets when off-site, a good example of multiple perspectives. Going plastic-free is another spin-off from involvement in this International Partnership. Whereas there is little plastic in Kangundo schools, Longstone is getting rid of straws and is committed to reducing its plastic waste.

At Longstone, Stephanie consults with the pupil council to brainstorm their ideas. As a result, Longstone has improved its school grounds to make them more wildlife friendly, including building a community garden in the heart of the school. On World Children’s Day the pupils planted bulbs in Billy Neill Country Park. These are all examples of how pupils have taken direct action as result of their learning. These activities are a natural global learning opportunity for the pupils as they learn that the little things that we do here for the environment will help towards the sustainability of our shared planet.

**Impact on the teachers and pupils**

Involvement in this International Partnership has benefitted the Longstone pupils in other ways too. They have been learning songs in Swahili, and the African interest is even carrying through to their choice of school play, the Lion King, which all year groups are taking part in. The pupils all love doing the “Kenya clap” at assemblies, which Stephanie explains is “One big clap and a whoosh!” The Vision and Mission statements of both the NI and Kenyan schools have been drafted with global learning themes in mind, such as celebrating diversity and individuality. Longstone School’s teacher planners all reference the Sustainable Development Goals with lesson observation and feedback included.

To complement their project, Longstone has also received free whole-school CPD global learning training from freelance facilitators booked through the Centre for Global Education.

Stephanie and Richard are now looking forward to receiving their Kenyan visitors at the end of January, and are busy planning for that. Stephanie would highly recommend the cluster-based approach to an International Partnership and her advice to anybody considering their next steps is, “Just go for it!”

**Longstone Special School**

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