

## Initial Report - LA co-ordinated Study Visit Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia

<b>Summary profile</b>	
Local Education Authority :	Torbay
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Reference and Title of Visit :	Inclusion
Provider :	The League for the Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers (LECT)
Country / Region visited :	Australia: Darwin, Northern Territory
Types of schools visited :	Primary, secondary, special
Age of students observed :	5 - 16
Language/s used:	English
Key Educational Purpose of the Visit:	To explore approaches to inclusion

### **Introduction**

#### **Intended aims of the visit:**

To gain further knowledge and understanding of inclusion strategies through a series of visits to schools in Darwin and the surrounding area and the opportunity to gain an overview of the education system in Northern Territory.

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

- To investigate approaches to inclusion which enable children to become engaged and effective learners
- To develop collaborative working both together and across agencies, that addresses inclusion, SEN, pupil tracking, and targeting vulnerable children.

- To identify clear and purposeful strategies of social/educational inclusion that are based on evaluations of good practice.
- To compare approaches to inclusion with those followed in Torbay

### **How were these to be identified and recorded?**

- Presentations by the Department of Employment, Education & Training, Northern Territory
- Four days of visits to schools
- Group meetings and discussions with Department of Employment, Education & Training staff
- Records made in the form of notes and photographs at each school

### **Report of the experience**

The visit was very successful and highly enjoyable. Australian colleagues were very welcoming and a detailed programme had been designed to provide a range of opportunities to gain insight into the education system in Northern Territory (NT). We are very grateful to Jan Johnston of International Services Branch of the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) who made all the arrangements for the visit and accompanied us on most of the visits.

Northern Territory comprises a land area of 1,346,200 km<sup>2</sup> - almost six times the size of the UK. It is the third largest of the states and territories after Western Australia and Queensland, yet has the smallest population and lowest population density. There are 33,000 students in 151 schools, with 3,700 teachers and support staff. 40% of students are from the indigenous population and this proportion is rising. Many Aboriginal pupils live in remote parts of the Territory in isolated communities. Schools are grouped into five clusters - most cover a massive geographical area. Attainment is measured in Australia in national tests in Years 3, 5 and 7. These show NT to be in line with national figures in Year 7 but a little below these in Years 3 and 5. Students in remote areas do less well than others.

Presentations by staff from the Student Services Branch introduced us to aspects of the support available in NT for those with mild or moderate disabilities. It is estimated that 17 - 20% of students are in this group. This support is provided at various levels: 1:1 support; advisory teachers working with individual staff or groups; support for whole-school approaches; cluster support; whole system level support helping to shape NT policy. Professional development is provided for school staff at various locations. Student Services staff face particular

challenges in visiting schools due to the huge distances often involved. Flying is involved on occasion as well as long car journeys and overnight stops.

Four main challenges for the service were identified:

- Petrol sniffing
- Foetal alcohol syndrome
- Extreme behaviour
- Autistic Spectrum Disorder

The main services provided by the Branch included:

- Counselling services
- The Health Promoting Schools initiative
- Services for those with vision impairment
- Early Childhood Intervention
- Special Education Advisory Teachers
- Services for those with hearing impairment
- Behaviour Management services
- Transition from School for students with a disability
- Gifted students

All staff were enthusiastic, articulate and keen to talk about their part of the service. There was a clear focus on promoting positive learning relationships through effective pedagogy. Various materials were provided to enable us to find out more later, including the Building Relationships and School Well-being Project booklet which included helpful material for schools to engage in self-evaluation.

A similar briefing session had been arranged with the Curriculum Branch but unfortunately this was overtaken by events to which the Branch had to respond at short notice. We were however able to sketch in some of the background with assistance from staff in schools and the use of the Internet. This indicated that the curriculum is determined by individual states and territories, though the Federal Government in Canberra seems to have a strong influence as it provides the bulk of the funding, particularly in NT. NT's curriculum is outcome-based and the various subjects are vehicles for developing the inner learner, the creative learner, the collaborative learner and the constructive learner. It is interesting to note that there are some similarities between this approach and that currently being developed by a working party of the QCA.

There are two special schools in Darwin - one for primary pupils and the other for the secondary age range. The primary special school was a key focus for our visits

as it has integration classes in five primary schools; the secondary special school was not part of our itinerary. Each class has about six pupils and they spend 3 or 4 days each week in the primary school, returning to the special school at the end of the week. We were able to visit most of these classes while they were in the primary schools. Pupils had their lessons with a teacher and assistant from the special school but were able to join with other pupils during breaks. They also joined some mainstream classes where the activities were appropriate. We visited some mainstream classes to see the pupils in this different context and found that they were accepted by other pupils and well supported. Sometimes pupils from mainstream classes join the integration classes and then special school pupils can join a class knowing an individual pupil quite well. Sometimes the special school teachers offer advice to mainstream colleagues. This system of integration classes is well established and we were told that it has been in operation for over 10 years. The commitment to doing everything possible to include pupils in the integration classes seemed impressive, both from the special school staff and from those in mainstream. Also impressive at all ages seen was the strong emphasis on providing every opportunity for pupils to develop their own independence, taking responsibility for organising their own learning.

We visited a large high school and were able to explore provision for special needs. Support can only be provided in Years 8, 9 and 10 and after that pupils are advised to go to another secondary school where support is available - many stay. Special needs pupils follow the same curriculum except in Years 8 and 9 where they are withdrawn for English and maths. We visited one of these withdrawal classes where the teacher had a good relationship with the group and was working hard to support pupils in developing their writing. The school has two counsellors. We also discovered that NT has a system whereby teachers can become "teachers of exemplary practice" at one of three different levels. This sounded similar to the AST system though there was no work outside one's own school.

We also went to a large primary school at some distance from Darwin where we visited the annex where special needs pupils were withdrawn from mainstream classes, though most were supported in class. A small group was withdrawn in the mornings for English, maths, speech therapy, physiotherapy etc and rejoined classes in the afternoon. Admission to this group was determined in part by an IQ of less than 70 but also by broader considerations. High levels of care and support were apparent. A lot of energy was put into transition arrangements to secondary school for these pupils with, initially, half or a whole day in secondary school increasingly gradually to a whole week if possible.

## **Incidental outcomes**

The group was impressed by the warm welcome which we received and by the ethos of each of the schools visited. The schools we visited occupied large sites with plenty of space between the various accommodation blocks. There was an emphasis on classrooms based around quadrangles which were very pleasant with grass and planting. We were assured by school staff that NT was fortunate in this respect and much of the south of the country had its share of older, cramped schools with little outside space. Unsurprisingly, air conditioning was the norm and there was considerable emphasis on being sun-safe. Assembly areas were generally outside but with a roof to protect from the sun or heavy rain in the Wet.

We were able to find out about the Accelerated Literacy programme in one primary school. This draws on the work of Brian Gray from the University of Canberra and involves using three "lenses" on text - experiential, interpersonal and textual. Questioning techniques focus on preformulation and reconceptualisation. Texts were cut up into strips so that the teacher and pupils could explore the effect of different choices. Modelling of texts is a key feature. This has some strong similarities with the National Literacy Strategy in England - not surprising as this draws heavily on Australian thinking.

Some members of our group were able to visit some older pupils engaged on work experience. These pupils had the support of a work trainer who spent time with them in the placement which seemed to offer greater support than what often happens in England. They also visited a teacher working with Aboriginal pupils to provide extra support with literacy.

Exclusion in NT is something that is only sanctioned by the Minister of Education and involves being entirely excluded from the whole education system. Schools therefore have to work out other ways of tackling unacceptable behaviour. The secondary school visited had a "Focus Room" where pupils had the opportunity to think about the reasons why they were there, meet their teacher and return to lessons. An option for more significant problems was job placements with support from colleagues in Student Services.

There was a clear emphasis on training teachers from the indigenous population. We met one assistant teacher shortly to attend the special training institution for Aborigines at Batchelor. There were clearly particular problems in engaging aboriginal pupils and their families. Reading is not the traditional way of telling stories and the emphasis on education is slight. Different values apply and the need for sensitivity in working with indigenous people was clear.

DEET has a special International Services Branch from which our kind hosts came. As well as providing for visiting teachers from abroad, their main work is focused on teacher and student exchanges, particularly with nearby Indonesia. Recently however, following the Bali bombings, Australians have not been going to Indonesia - the traffic has all been one way. The Branch also deals with foreign pupils and students coming to NT, mainly from Asian countries. It would seem that this generates considerable income for all states and territories.

There is a values education programme throughout Australia known as TRIBES. This focuses on developing values such as mutual respect, participation, listening to others and appreciation of others' points of view. We were fortunate to visit a lesson where this programme was under way in one school. We also saw clear evidence of it in most schools visited. There is strong commitment to its importance.

There was an opportunity to visit the HQ of DEET and talk to one of the senior officers about systems for supporting schools facing particular challenges and accountability. NT has a Capability Development Unit whose role is to support schools deemed to be at risk. An audit is run using a framework developed in NT and a senior officer works with the principal to plan improvement. Distance and limited numbers of central staff mean that principals identifying problems for themselves plays a key role. Data held centrally, for example on attendance, staff absence, finance, might also help. There is no system of inspection for accountability to parents. Reliance is placed on exam results and schools' own promotional activities. Parents form views based on these and on conversations with others. Victoria, we were told, has a system of externally validated school self-evaluation.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) plays a significant part in the provision for pupils in their last two years at school. There is a wide range of programmes and these provide credit towards the Northern Territory Certificate of Education which is the school leaving qualification at the end of Year 12.

## Evaluation

The visit was very successful and incidental outcomes were valued alongside the intended aims of the visit:

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

- Inclusion is a concept to which there is strong commitment among teaching and support staff that we met
- This is promoted through the integration classes which allow those who might otherwise be educated entirely in special schools to mix with mainstream pupils and sometimes join classes
- Positive attitudes were generally apparent among pupils encountered from special and mainstream settings
- Student Services Branch is a coherent unit which works closely with schools for the benefit of all pupils

### *How can the findings be applied to the UK context?*

Findings will be applied through a range of activities and strategies:

- Contribute to the understanding of inclusion in the local authority both in schools and in Children's Services
- Promote ways of working within Children's Services that enhance coherence and mutual support
- Raise expectations of the extent to which independence can be fostered among pupils
- Review curriculum delivery to focus more on desired outcomes for pupils as learners
- Improve links between schools and further develop networks of support
- Increase pupils' understanding of how they can become more independent learners
- Explore ways of bringing together students from many cultures who come to Torbay to learn English with school pupils
- Emphasising/promoting the value of TIPD to schools who have not yet engaged with this dimension!

### *How can they be applied in our work?*

- Explore new approaches to ensuring close working relationships with special schools
- Help to develop programmes to include pupils more in the mainstream curriculum
- Consider the NT curriculum alongside new proposals from QCA for a "World Class Curriculum"
- Consider the new SEAL materials alongside the TRIBES materials from Australia
- Identify more individual learning pathways for pupils with moderate learning difficulties
- Seek further opportunities to allow pupils to take charge of and organise their learning

### *How do you now intend to disseminate the findings of your visit?*

- PowerPoint presentations of findings to staff, senior leadership teams, governing bodies in participating schools to include photographs and materials gathered on the visit
- Parent and children assemblies in the schools participating
- Group report to be published on the LECT website and on the Torbay Grid for Learning <http://tgfl.torbay.gov.uk>
- Meeting for colleagues in other schools and the LA to disseminate findings
- Incorporation of ideas into school practice where appropriate following discussion with colleagues
- Appropriate ideas to be fed into INSET courses for staff within schools and in the LA

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

- Building further links with NT schools via e-mail - for both staff and children. All schools visited in NT have been paired with schools in Torbay.
- Local Authority to maintain e-mail contact with hosts
- Engage more teachers in similar TIPD learning experiences
- Invite return visits from NT teachers/hosts
- Explore possible return visits to NT

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

- Use travel books (The *Lonely Planet Guide* is good) and the internet (e.g. [www.australia.com](http://www.australia.com) and/or [www.abc.net.au/darwin](http://www.abc.net.au/darwin)) to get information about the area before leaving home
- If you go in the Wet Season, take some waterproofs but it will be very warm!
- Take materials about your home area to give to schools visited and include some small gifts to thank people for their hospitality. Include items like your school brochure, magazine etc. None of these will be in your baggage for the journey home!
- Involve pupils in your school in preparations for the visit - help them to generate questions for you to answer during the visit
- Make detailed notes as your visit proceeds and make full use of a camera!
- Plan opportunities for your group to meet and exchange views and experiences at key points during the visit
- Be flexible and take unexpected opportunities for learning. Your hosts will do their best to accommodate you and allow you to explore aspects of special interest
- Visit national parks and other attractions if you get the chance to contribute to your broader picture of the region. There are plenty of tours available at reasonable cost, even in the Wet Season when you will find sites have few tourists.