

## Report on the South Gloucestershire Schools

### Teachers' International Professional Development (T.I.P.D)

#### Visit to Perth, Western Australia

5th – 16th April

#### Focus

The use of Teaching Assistants in the classroom as part of the teaching and learning process to support children and young people



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**Learning School Effectiveness Service**

**Broadway Infants School**

**Broadway Infants School**

**Broadway Infants School**

**Courtney Primary School**

**Courtney Primary School**

**Holy Family Primary School**

**Holy Family Primary School**

**The Grange School and Sports College**

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**Wheatfield Primary School**

**Wheatfield Primary School**

**Wheatfield Primary School**

## Report

<b>Summary profile</b>	
Local Authority	South Gloucestershire LA
Full name of LA visit leader: E mail address	Sarah Jones Sarah.jones@southglos.gov.uk
Reference and Title of visit	The use of Teaching Assistants in the classroom as part of the teaching and learning process to support children and young people
Provider	The British Council
Country / Region visited:	Perth, Australia
Types of Schools Visited	Primary Secondary Educational Support Schools Community schools
Age of students observed	Ages 3 – 18
Languages / s used	English
Key educational purpose of the visit	To look at the use of support staff in the teaching and learning process

## Introduction

Perth is closer to Singapore and Jakarta than the nearest large Australian city, Adelaide and separated from Melbourne and Sydney by 4,000 km (2,500 miles) of outback, Perth is famously remote. What's more, it is the capital of the largest but least densely populated state, where a mere 2 million people inhabit the third of the continent. Population of Australia 19 million, UK 60 million and 80% of the Australian population live on the coast.



Founded some 60 years later than Sydney, the Swan River Colony, as Perth was first called, was relatively slow to develop, remaining for many years a community of embattled pioneers. With the gold rush in the 1890's that put the city on the map, attracting fortune-seekers from all over the world. When travelling one hour outside the city is described as 'stepping back in time'.

However business is booming in Perth and Western Australia is forging ever stronger links with Asia, especially China, where much of Australia's nickel, coal, zinc and aluminium are traded.

## Intended aims of the visit

- to consider how support staff are used in different school environments to enhance teaching and learning
- with an opportunity to look at the work on boys education, motivating and promoting occasions for engagement and achievement
- to build up international links

## Expected outcomes of the visit

- to reflect on practice in own schools
- to gain new ideas and knowledge for the use of support staff
- to build international relationships between Western Australia and South Gloucestershire

## How were these to be intended and recorded?

- through observations/photographs and discussions with teachers and Education Assistants.
- to make notes, exchange contact details
- to create a presentation to be shared with other bodies e.g. school level, Local Authority and TA cluster meetings

## Report of the experience

Over a ten day period, as a group of six teachers and seven teaching assistants led by an adviser from the Local Authority, we visited a wide variety of schools with differing socio – economic and demographic backgrounds. We gained an insight into the role of teaching assistants in the Western Australian education system and now feel equipped to draw comparisons with the role of teaching assistant within the UK system. On discussion with the chairperson of the ‘Western Australian Association of Teacher Assistants’, it was identified that recently they have adopted the title of ‘Education Assistants’. This title has emerged after a series of differing titles which have included ‘teacher aides’ ‘teaching assistants’ and finally ‘education assistants’ with the emphasis on “*education*”. How they work in schools varies, as it does in the UK and within each structure. The structure of the school system was explained as follows:

<b>Kindergarten</b>	aged 3 – 4 years (non compulsory)
<b>Pre Primary</b>	aged 4 – 5 (non compulsory)
<b>Primary</b>	
Year 1	5-6 years
Year 2	6-7 years
Year 3	7-8 years
Year 4	8-9 years
Year 5	9-10 years
Year 6	10-11 years
Year 7	11-12 years
<b>High school</b>	
Year 8	12-13 years
Year 9	13-14 years
Year 10	14-15 years
Year 11	15-16 years - some students participate in VET courses (vocational educational and training)
Year 12	16-17 years – graduating with TEE ‘Tertiary Entrance Examinations’ compulsory to gain entry to University WACE – certificate based on school based assessment.
<b>Post 17</b>	TAFE Technical and Further Education
	University

Although attendance at kindergarten and pre-primary is not compulsory, more than 90% of children in Western Australia attend and 95% attend a pre-primary programme. Kindergarten is 4.5 days per week, whereas pre-primary full time.

On visiting Western Australian schools, it became apparent that education assistants are mainly used to support the whole class and small groups in a Kindergarten and Pre Primary environment, which is similar to the system in the UK. However, in year’s three to seven, education assistants are primarily used to support a specific child with Special Education Needs – and in some cases, extra qualifications were needed for the assistant to do this, which, in turn, increases their salary. Also, in these cases, the teacher has the flexibility to direct the education assistant to assist other children or carry out other

classroom duties. In comparison, there are more incremental professional levels for the teaching assistants in the UK, with opportunities for career development.

Training for educational assistants was formalised within Western Australia as the only state in Australia that runs such a system. Level 3 Courses are often run at the weekend over a six month period, providing an opportunity for education assistants to enrol and achieve before securing a position in a school. Achievement of this which includes formalised assessment, internally assessed by the provider and four weeks work experience, to be arranged by the candidate and assessed.

Grades:

Grade 1

1.1 Unqualified

1.2. Qualified with certificate

1.3

Grade 2 – subject to annual increment and level of post as determined by the principal

2.1

2.2

2.3

Grade 3 – Principal discretion

3.1

3.2

3.3 – often awarded to EA's with SEN responsibility in mainstream classes

Whereas teaching assistants in the UK are allowed to take groups, individuals, and in some cases, whole classes, education assistants in Western Australia stated that they had no 'Duty of Care', and were not allowed out of the sight or hearing of the teacher – although this is changing depending on the school. In some cases, the Education Assistants sign to state they are comfortable having 'Duty of Care', although they sometimes feel reluctant to do this because of the extra pressure and responsibilities that come with it and for no remuneration. Based on our observation the education assistants in Western Australia being used to assist the students who have particularly have a physical or emotional need. It seems the education assistants in Western Australia support the teachers in administrative jobs like 'tidy up the cupboards' or 'photocopying'. In our short visit we didn't see any evidence of joint planning between the teachers and the teacher assistants. In contrast the teacher assistants in UK who are more involved in planning and the implementation of the lessons. They share the responsibility of academic support of low achievers. They also participate in tracking the students and identifying low achievers, often acting as the students' voice. In some UK schools the teacher assistants are discouraged to do any administrative jobs and concentrate on the education of the young person. We have found that teaching assistants in the UK have significantly more responsibility, in terms of taking groups of children of a specific ability out for planned intervention programmes.

## **Evaluation**

### **Summary of Key Outcomes**

#### **Headlines**

- Education Assistants are clearly emerging in Western Australia and the role is consequently developing, similarly to how the role emerged in the UK and is now more firmly in place.
- At this stage of emergence there are fewer professional development opportunities as we know them in UK, however developing
- There is little involvement in planning and implementation, with education assistants sometimes observing the teaching rather than working one to one.
- With development hopefully teachers in Western Australia will have confidence in their education assistants to work independently as can be found in many schools within South Gloucestershire.
- Planning with, sharing with and trusting in teaching assistants is vital for both teacher and teaching assistant, with many teachers in South Gloucestershire very reliant on the support a teaching assistant can provide.
- There are more opportunities for professional development in the UK, however no compulsory, as in Western Australia, and question whether this should be so in the UK?
- Teaching assistants / education assistants are respected across the globe however the roles vary and it is important to seek out expertise and utilize this to the benefit of the children and young people.
- The Western Australian Association of Teacher Assistants' is a very supportive body for teachers in schools.

#### **Applying findings to the UK context?**

Training is essential and there clearly numerous opportunities for Teaching assistants to become involved in a range of training and providing further opportunities e.g. Level 3 CACHE, HLTA, and Foundation Degree at UWE. There are also specialist training opportunities and essential to continue to offer these e.g. aspergers, display training, phonics, numeracy, child protection, behaviour management etc. Within the Local Authority teaching assistants are encouraged to generate a portfolio and it is essential this continues whether following courses or not, thus develop philosophy of the professional development what ever course they may be following e.g. Level 3 CACHE courses – promoting reflection in learning, targets, professional development including the creation of a CV etc.

#### **How will you apply them to your work?**

From many observations in classroom there were a number of ideas that will be implemented in our schools locally and include:

- The importance of reading and modelling reading as an adult, whilst children and young people are reading
- Relaxation and taking the opportunity to reflect, which such busy schedules this is often forgotten or rushed and it is important to be mindful
- The use of outside space for work and play, this was clearly an area that would be very difficult to implement, however there are compromises, at the moment several schools have covered areas by reception classes and have been completed quite cheaply, to be explored beyond reception
- Link "talking circle" to work in SEAL, established in a number of schools in South Gloucestershire.
- Boy's education raises many issues worldwide; however implementing some of the strategies could be a way forward.
- Peer support particularly in year 7 with the use of year 10 / 12 students, offering support, but also encouraging self esteem for those involved, this could include various subject areas e.g. maths as well as looking at the use of learning spaces and how they can be supported by peers e.g. school library

All of these ideas to be developed and encouraged by both teachers and teaching assistants.

## **Dissemination of the findings**

### **Local Authority Level:**

- Feedback to Learning and School Effectiveness Service e.g. professional development groups, primary and secondary team meetings, professional learning community working group.
- Through local authority meetings e.g. cluster, best practice, HLTA conference – 1<sup>st</sup> July 2008, which will have an international focus
- Shared experience within the 'International Framework'
- Fostering links, sharing ideas and practices with counterparts in Perth
- High Schools in Perth have agreed to be part of the Enjoy and Achieve international survey, coordinated by the local authority adviser

### **School Level:**

- Individual staff meetings in school, sharing the experience and considering ideas to move forward
- Sharing individual portfolio on the learning experience and the impact on participants practice, e.g. planning and preparation between teacher and teaching assistant
- Individual school projects e.g. aboriginal art
- Displays

### **Proposals for future development and links:**

- Networking between schools in South Gloucestershire and between South Gloucestershire Schools and Western Australian schools.

## **General advice for other visitors to Perth, Western Australia**

- Gifts to schools- pictures, photographs and artefacts of specific areas in the UK are appreciated.
- Taking pictures of schools in the UK is greatly appreciated and clearly puts the contrast into perspective for all involved in the study visit.
- Photographs can generally be taken in schools, but it is courtesy to ask first.
- A coastal ride is a must, as is a trip to Fremantle on the ferry, Kings Park is lovely to see the city and put areas into perspective.
- Beaches are beautiful and very busy on a Sunday.
- Driving is not too bad, the city operates a grid system, however be aware of the one way system, planning a route is essential.
- Free bus service throughout Perth city,
- On return it is a good idea to carry all school paper documents in your hand luggage as these are deceptively heavy.

