



Young Gifted and Talented: Journeys through Australia, China, South Africa and the United States of America

Edited by Anna Riggall



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1. Introduction

Between March and May 2009, 40 teachers visited four countries: Australia, China, South Africa and the United States of America. The purpose of their visits was to explore the provision of education for gifted and talented students.

The teachers who visited China, South Africa and the United States were all winners of the Young Gifted and Talented prize draw for leading teachers, managed by the League for the Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers (LECT), part of CfBT Education Trust.

The teachers who visited Australia were participants on a Teachers' International Professional Development (TIPD) trip, also organised by LECT.

Young Gifted and Talented (YG&T) was the name given to the National Programme for Gifted and Talented Education (2007–2010). It was a wide-reaching, inclusive programme, benefiting learners, teachers and other providers, parents/carers and the wider Gifted and Talented (G&T) education community. The programme's values included 'inclusion, accessibility, innovation, challenge, inspiration, collaboration and celebration' (DfE, 2009).

1. Introduction



The YG&T trips were intense programmes of school visits, meetings and discussions with educationalists and policy makers.

1.1 'Experience, reflect, discuss, analyse and learn'

The YG&T trips were intense programmes of school visits, meetings and discussions with educationalists and policy makers. The aim was to provide an opportunity for leading G&T teachers to 'experience, reflect, discuss, analyse and learn' (DfE, 2009).

Ten of the prizewinners visited Australia, eleven went to South Africa, ten to Los Angeles in the United States, and nine to China. They were united in that they shared some level of responsibility for G&T provision in their schools but represented a range of subject areas, levels of schooling, levels of seniority, ages, years of experience, rural and city schools, secular and non-secular schools, areas of expertise (for example the group included heads of year, subject coordinators, class teachers and Local Authority consultants and advisers). Each country group was led by a facilitator.

'The level of excitement was palpable as the group met for the first time for a pre-visit briefing in March. As is always the case on such trips, the diversity of experience [amongst the group] proved to be a rich source of discussion and learning in itself.'

(USA)

1.2 What follows

The group facilitators were asked to write a report based on their group's experiences during their visit. In this they gave a summary of the experiences, reflections, lessons and learning of their group. This booklet draws together these stories to give a flavour of what it is like to go on such a trip, what impact it had on those who went and what can be learned from the experiences of these teachers.

2. Hopes and expectations

Prior to the visit, the teachers had expectations of what their visit might be like, what they would see and what the schools would be like.

All had high hopes, some were nervous, others excited. Some had learned a great deal about the education system and G&T provision in the country they were to visit, whilst others knew very little. Most held some preconceived ideas about what they would see, based on images from the media, films, internet or the political ideologies and histories of the country.

Below are some of the comments made about the teachers' hopes and expectations:

'A trip like this is a big deal for the teachers involved. All are very excited and very grateful for the opportunity to see another country's education system. For some this is their first professional trip and the experience is daunting; as one participant put it – "I get nervous using the London underground, travelling all the way to Australia is petrifying!"'

(Australia)

'There were hopes that this visit could lead to forging international links for the future.'

(South Africa)

'Only one member of the group had previously visited a U.S. school and the rest of us had formulated our impressions both of the school and the city largely from the movies.'

(USA)

'We hoped to come back with examples to tell students about the options Chinese students had, which we expected to be limited. We wanted children in the UK to feel lucky for their circumstances.'

(China)



2.1 The way in which groups chose to focus their visits

For most groups, the main interest was finding out how the schools they were to visit identified gifted students and delivered G&T provision. Some were more specific in their interests; these included:

- finding out about staff training
- exploring infrastructure support for schools
- seeing what resources and technology were available
- identifying good practice which could be shared
- finding better ways to challenge G&T students
- seeing alternative teaching environments
- seeing evidence of developed personalised learning intervention
- having an opportunity for reflection
- finding a source of inspiration.

The group that travelled to Australia were all teachers from schools that are part of the G&T National Rural Network. They had a particular interest in how schools in rural locations approached YG&T education. Their trip was tailored, taking them to an area in and around Adelaide in the territory of South Australia where there are very rural schools practising some unique methods of G&T provision.

The main interest was finding out how the schools they were to visit identified gifted students and delivered G&T provision

3. A snapshot of the education system in...

3.1 Australia (Karen Whitby)

Australia has a federal system of government where States and Territories have constitutional responsibility for school education, enrolment policies, curriculum content, course accreditation and certification procedures, and methods of assessment. Despite this, most use nationally developed Statements and Profiles which provide a common basis for curriculum development. These are used in conjunction with school and system policies and serve as a reference point for the design of resource materials for schools, including materials for professional development.

The school visits took place in South Australia, which is in the southern central part of the country. It covers some of the most arid parts of the continent, with a total land area of nearly one million square kilometres. The majority of the state's population, nearly three quarters, live within Adelaide's metropolitan area resulting in schools outside the city serving small and remote rural populations. These schools have on average around 50 pupils but can have as

few as seven. The education department have staff tenure policies to encourage teachers to work in these remote schools, as well as offering a range of personal and professional benefits.

G&T education in South Australia differs from that in England in two fundamental ways: firstly, there is no formal requirement for schools to provide specifically for gifted or talented pupils, and secondly, there is no universal definition of giftedness or talent. Despite this, the South Australian Department for Education and Children's Services (DECS) considers that children and students with exceptional abilities require challenges that match their abilities. Their policy states that whilst gifted young people have often been perceived as being capable of high achievement without assistance, they are in fact at risk of not fulfilling their potential if they are not identified and if their talents and skills are not nurtured. DECS is committed to the following outcomes:

Rural schools have on average around 50 pupils but can have as few as seven

- providing gifted individuals with opportunities to realise their potential
- identifying gifted individuals as early as possible
- providing gifted individuals with equality of educational opportunity
- providing gifted individuals with appropriate and ongoing educational opportunities
- providing gifted individuals with a differentiated educational curriculum
- ensuring gifted individuals interact with an appropriate peer group
- ensuring accelerative measures and flexible entry into all levels of education are available to gifted individuals
- ensuring gifted individuals are properly supported; learning outcomes improve when teachers and other personnel have appropriate training in gifted education
- ensuring parents and other appropriate community members have opportunities to be involved in the education of gifted individuals
- ensuring gifted individuals have access to counselling and vocational services.

3. A snapshot of the education system in...

3.2 The United States of America (Vivien Molinari)

In the USA there is very little centralisation; most education legislation is developed at the state level rather than the federal level, and there is considerable local autonomy even at school district level. In contrast, teachers in the UK work within the context of a national curriculum, national strategies, a national system of examinations and assessment and a national framework for inspection and accountability. Most funding is from central government, and in spite of initiatives since 1988 to decentralise aspects of the system, there is relatively little local autonomy within the state system.

In California, where the school visits took place, districts must apply to receive funding for Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) and then demonstrate that they are meeting the standards specified in their application. The primary focus of GATE is differentiation. Cluster groupings within the classroom are generally used, as is the series of 'Depth and Complexity' icons developed by Sandra Kaplan, President of the National Association for Gifted Students and a Clinical Professor of Education at the University of Southern California. These are intended to challenge students to dig deeper into the area of study and broaden their understanding by making links across subject areas and disciplines. The use of 'Depth and Complexity' revolves around a series of 'iconic prompts' or 'iconic learning tools', each with its own simple pictorial symbol.

The primary focus of GATE
is differentiation



3. A snapshot of the education system in...

3.3 South Africa (Graham MacKenzie)

The South African Constitution guarantees the right of every child to access education. Schooling is compulsory from age six until age fifteen. The Government began phasing in the 'reception year' or Grade R for children aged five to six in 2002. It is intended that provision will be available for all children by 2010.

The national Department of Education is responsible for education across the country as a whole, while each of the nine provinces has its own education department. The central government provides a national framework for school policy, but administrative responsibility lies with the provinces. Power is further devolved to grassroots level via elected school-governing bodies, which have a significant say in the running of their schools.

One of the key elements of the South African National Curriculum is outcomes-based education (OBE). Outcomes are the results that learners are expected to achieve at the end of the learning process and these outcomes shape the learning process. The National Curriculum outcomes include core life skills for learners, such as communication skills, critical thinking skills, activity and information management, group and community work and evaluation skills.

Due to the challenges faced by the system in South Africa, G&T education is not always top of the agenda. However, during their time in schools in the Durban area, the visiting teachers saw how educators were aware of individual pupils' ability and did their best to differentiate and challenge their gifted students.

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3. A snapshot of the education system in...

3.4 China (Bill Lyttle)

Education in China is recognised by the Government as being a high priority in the development of the country. With a population of just over 1.3 billion, this is an enormous task. The 'Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China', introduced in 1986, implemented nine years of compulsory education.

Efforts are being made to integrate the development of education, improvements in the quality of the labour force, developments in the local economy, advancement of culture and ethics and living standards. As a result, the development of rural education is particularly important and central government provides a special fund for the improvement of schooling conditions in poverty-affected areas.

The central government also attaches great importance to the universalisation of compulsory education in rural, poor and minority areas. At present, basic education is provided by the Government at the county, township and administrative village levels,

with the administrative power assumed by county and township government and with major decisions made at county level.

Basic education includes pre-school education, primary education and regular secondary education. Pre-school, or kindergarten, can last up to three years with children entering as early as age three and continuing until age six, at which point they typically enter elementary school. Secondary education is divided into academic and specialised/vocational/technical secondary education.

The first is delivered by academic lower middle and upper middle schools. Lower middle school graduates wishing to continue their education take a locally administered entrance exam on the basis of which they will have the option either of continuing in an academic upper middle school or of entering a vocational or technical secondary school. Vocational schools offer programmes ranging from two to four years in length and train medium-level skilled



Education in China is recognised by the Government as being a high priority in the development of the country

workers, farmers, and managerial and technical personnel. Technical schools typically offer four-year programmes to train intermediate technical personnel. 'Schools for Skilled Workers' typically train lower middle school graduates for positions requiring production and operation skills. The length of training is three years.

4. Gifted & Talented landscapes: the school visits

The teachers on the LECT programme of visits across all four countries saw a huge range of educational settings.

Collectively they observed examples of G&T provision for primary, junior and secondary age groups in a range of different school types, for example all-through schools, grammar schools, vocational schools and specialist colleges. They visited extremely remote schools, urban schools, small schools, large schools, schools in deprived areas, schools in privileged areas, schools dedicated to teaching the most able and schools that face challenges so huge that teachers are rarely able to put provision for gifted and talented pupils at the top of the agenda.

The following extracts seek to highlight the range of settings they visited, the vast differences between these settings, and the range of G&T provision they saw.

4.1 Australia: Acceleration in an all-through school

The Heights is a large school in a relatively affluent area on the northern edge of Adelaide. It is an all-through school catering from pre-school right through to age 18. G&T pupils are not formally identified until they are 13

and programmes for them only run for the middle years (age 13 to 16). The school's commitment to G&T is demonstrated through a whole staff training and development programme designed to share information about gifted students, along with termly parent evenings.

Together with two other South Australian schools, The Heights runs a G&T programme called '**Ignite**' which offers gifted students the opportunity to either vertically accelerate through middle school, completing years 8, 9 and 10 in two years, or opt for a companion programme that emphasises subject acceleration and lateral extension, rather than grade skipping.

The programme is very much focused on giftedness, particularly in maths and science.



'Ben, a gifted 12-year-old mathematician who had skipped two academic years, showed us around the school. He travels around two hours each day in order to study at The Heights. He was a great guide, ably communicating with adults, and with a clear passion for academia. He will clearly have the qualifications he needs to enter university by the time he is 15.'

4.2 Australia: Enrichment through 'GLOSS'

Seaford is an impressively resourced school to the south of Adelaide catering for students aged 11 to 18. The visit coincided with the launch of the **GLOSS** (Gifted Learning Options in South Australia) programme. GLOSS is a curriculum enrichment programme that Seaford runs together with eight feeder primaries for students in the middle years (aged 13 to 16). The programme offers students the opportunity to work off-timetable for 18 hours a term on a range of specialised courses such as silk painting, rocketry and web development. The courses provide opportunity for both creativity as well as academic advancement and all are designed to support and challenge students to develop higher order thinking skills.

4.3 Australia: G&T provision on a university campus

The Australian Science and Maths School (ASMAS) is a specially built school for 15 to 18 year olds on the Flinders University campus. The school aims to improve science and maths education and lead practice through professional outreach. It focuses on deep learning which it develops through a dedicated learning environment (open-plan classrooms rich in technology and communication equipment), specifically tailored learning programmes (the whole curriculum is delivered through science and maths education), a focus on meta-cognitive learning styles and dedicated time for professional learning (including interaction with university and industry scientists and educators).

This is a unique school. It takes students away from the state-wide curriculum and utilises its specialist location to research and develop both pedagogy and practice. Students set their own learning targets, placing differentiated learning within the control of the student rather than the teacher.

4. Gifted & Talented landscapes: the school visits

4.4 USA: An independent 'laboratory' school

The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Laboratory School is set in the leafy campus of the university. Its purpose is fourfold: to train teachers, to conduct research, to be at the cutting edge of educational innovation and to provide outreach to teachers in the public and private systems. At any given time there are 14-15 research projects in the areas of education, psychology or medicine taking place in the school. Students are taught in multi-age groups which span vertically two year groups, with the teachers moving with the children in two-year 'loops'.

Because of the strong ties the school has with research, the school tries to replicate the population of the state of California in order to create a representative 'sample'.

'We had an extensive tour of the school and saw groups of students working quietly and purposefully in a beautiful setting. As well as the stunning external environment of wooded hillsides and bubbling streams onto which many of the classrooms opened out, the classrooms themselves were brightly and comfortably decorated in keeping with the Italian Reggio school, which emphasised the importance of bridging the gap between home and school. The staffing ratio seemed incredibly generous to our English eyes – typically three teachers and two teaching assistants across two classrooms – enabling teachers to conduct mini-lessons with small groups of children tailored to their particular level. In many classrooms there were adults with clipboards, unobtrusively undertaking research for the various projects conducted by the on-site research centre.'



4.5 USA: A programme of metacognition

The Long Beach District serves approximately 100,000 students and has won many awards for its **GATE** programmes. A large proportion of the students served by this school district are deprived, and some have never been to the beach after which the area is named.

The group visited two schools: Burnett Elementary school and Bancroft Middle School. The former served a relatively deprived population, three quarters of whom were Hispanic or Latino. There were on average 145 students and one GATE class at each grade level.

'The only classes we visited were the GATE classes, and the work we saw was truly impressive.'

The latter, Bancroft Middle School, was in a more leafy area. Here, the group were particularly struck by the way in which GATE practice was informed by Sandra Kaplan's ideas, and more generally by the evidence that they were operating in essence 'a programme of metacognition'. For example:

- Kaplan's concepts of scholarliness and 'scholarly habits' were displayed around the classrooms and referred to by students.
- There were displays in many classrooms, challenging students to think about the skills, language, concepts and connections of the subject area.
- Depth and Complexity icons were apparent in displays around the school and were also used in marking students' work and setting assignments.
- Specific objectives on the board were aimed at moving students to a higher level of 'Bloom's Taxonomy'.

4. Gifted & Talented landscapes: the school visits

4.6 USA: 'Cluster' and 'fluid' groupings in action

Oak Park Unified School District is a pleasant and prosperous community set in the hills to the north of Los Angeles. The vision for GATE is highly inclusive and provides for students with 'dual exceptionality' (students who are gifted but have another special educational need such as autism). The vision encompasses differentiation, curriculum compacting, acceleration, cluster and fluid groupings, multiple learning styles and, at High School level, a selection of Honors and Advanced Placement courses.

'Our first school visit at Oak Park was to Oak Hills Elementary School. Here we saw GATE 'cluster grouping' and 'fluid grouping' in action: clusters range in size from five to eight students, and are the usual way of organising the mixed-ability classroom.'

Timetable blocking for reading and mathematics creates a structure which allows for fluid grouping of students within and between classrooms at all grade levels. Like cluster groups, fluid groups allow for students to be grouped according to need or ability, and fluid groups are formed and re-formed to meet varied instructional purposes. These 'cluster' and 'fluid' groupings allow for effective curriculum differentiation, interaction with intellectual peers and continuity of learning within and across grade levels.



4. Gifted & Talented landscapes: the school visits

4.7 South Africa: An oasis in a township and the scourge of HIV/AIDS

The group visited two schools in Inanda, a township on the outskirts of Durban. The first school was Inanda Seminary, an independent secondary school first set up by missionaries in 1869 for the education of black African girls. The second school was Hilda Makhanya, a primary school first opened in 1988.

All the students at Inanda Seminary board. The fees are the equivalent of about £2000 per year, putting it out of the range of most South Africans.

‘The school has a wonderful, peaceful atmosphere and felt like an oasis amid the township that has grown up around it in the last 30 years.’

In contrast Hilda Makhanya is a state primary school. It grew to its present size because children in their area could not cross the river at the bottom of the valley in the rainy season to travel to other schools. The school buildings are of basic block construction, holding classes of up to 63 pupils. The school has a well used library and small computer suite (although not all the monitors had computers attached).

HIV/AIDS is a very real problem here: in one class of 44 half had lost one parent to HIV/AIDS and nine pupils had lost both parents. The fees for this school are about the equivalent of £7.50 per year.

‘In both schools we saw many examples of the students being used as leaders. The schools give large amounts of responsibility to their older students, in doing so developing their leadership skills. The teaching staff at Hilda Makhanya are passionate about what they do. They are very aware of the role models they represent and the importance of the work they do to provide life opportunities for the children in their charge. Despite all the problems and constraints they are universally optimistic and upbeat. They realise that education is the best route out of the problems of the township, where crime and violence are commonplace.’

4.8 South Africa: The challenge of multilingualism

Rockford Primary School, a former Indian primary school, has 370 learners and 15 educators, of whom 12 are funded by the state. The school fees are about £36 for the year and the school recovers about 60 per cent of these. South Africa operates a complicated



system of state funding for schools designed to counter the economic and social advantage or disadvantage experienced by schools in the days of apartheid. Schools like Rockford Primary suffer because they fall almost into a no-mans-land when it comes to funding – they get little state funding but cannot charge large fees because the community they serve cannot afford to pay them.

'We visited Grades 1, 2 and 3 and were welcomed warmly by the educators. The school teaches in English and the educators told us that one of the biggest problems they face is the number of children who know little English before they begin school. The majority of the children do not speak English at home and they do not speak English amongst themselves at playtime. This means that they have difficulty accessing the lessons in school and there is little provision to support these children. The Grade 3 teacher we spoke to thought that the language difficulties faced by the students had contributed to standards falling at the school. The Grade 2 educator talked to us about the problems she had with some parents not

supporting their children's learning at home. The children were given reading and homework to do at home and some parents valued this while others did not help their children to complete it. We talked to the educators about their provision for gifted and talented learners. They told us how they use a system of peer support and seat more able students next to less able students. The school was looking at the resources available to have an extension programme for gifted and talented learners.'

4. Gifted & Talented landscapes: the school visits

4.9 South Africa: A privileged school

Glenashley School is a junior primary school for children aged six to nine that serves the affluent North Durban area of KwaZulu Natal. In addition, it also has its own independent pre-primary unit for ages three to six. In terms of its teaching ethos, modes of delivery, facilities, resources and staffing, it could just as easily be situated anywhere in Western Europe or the US. Dedicated, knowledgeable, well trained teachers and support staff provide an atmosphere fully conducive to learning in a modern well equipped environment with a high ratio of computers per head, good levels of per capita funding and a pupil-teacher ratio that would be the envy of many teachers in the UK.

'Polite, friendly students from all backgrounds work on interesting materials, often targeted towards individual learning, gathered around group tables. Colourful displays are to be found everywhere and are changed frequently – and individual learning support is also available. The pre-primary school has adopted what might loosely be described as a Vygotsky-based approach to the curriculum, with learning delivered through immersive environments such as a Cognitive Room, a Fantasy Room and a Sensory Garden.'

The primary school covers the full National Curriculum requirement, including Afrikaans and Zulu – both for native and non-native speakers – and interestingly Entrepreneurial Skills. For the gifted and talented, extension is provided through an Extension club which provides creative activities and not just academic extension such as extra maths. Enrichment is provided through a wide range of extra-curricular clubs including Art, Chess, Rugby, Ballet and so on. Parents are supportive and actively involved in the running of the school, from helping to manage the Tuck Shop, to taking part in Mothers Day assemblies, Fun Days, through their legislative position on the Governing body and a number of other informal activities.

More than most, the School illustrates both the strengths and weaknesses of the co-funding approach taken by South Africa in the period since 1994. Faced at that time with the dilemma of wanting to transfer more funding in favour of the township and rural schools, but at the same time not wanting to undermine the existing quality of what had formerly been 'white' schools, the Government has continued to allow schools to charge fees to supplement the government grant.



4.10 South Africa: Positivity despite many challenges

Arriving at Isnembe Secondary School after driving through rural SA was a delight. Urban areas gave way to rolling hills and fields of sugar cane. The school is in a very poor area. There are no school fees charged and homework is not given, as many students go home to houses without running water or electricity. The school exists on government funding, which is low, and it runs out of water by noon each day because of a poor water system. The classrooms and sports area were opened with a fantastic ceremony that had a long list of interesting speakers and entertainment provided by the students. These facilities were a result of hard work by the school and governors, donations from the Sugar Foundation and the enterprise of Project Build. The students, staff and parents fully understood what a difference these rooms would make to a school struggling with dilapidated and crumbling classrooms. The sports area had a dual purpose in that it is designed to seat spectators but more importantly to support the hillside.

The staff filled the students with an enthusiasm to learn. They were a delight and an inspiration to be around. The lessons we learned from this school were as follows:

- How positive the staff, parents and students were in their attitude towards to education – it is seen as the route out of poverty.
- Students are given responsibility to look after younger students and do school chores. It is expected and accepted, and the students rise to the challenge. It makes them extremely proud of their school.
- Language issues cause huge problems and even more so here due to the lack of funding because of the lack of school fees.
- The school makes the most of what it has. They deliver bare-bones education by stripping it down to the core values and basics which enables them to deliver a solid foundation to the students.
- Community involvement in this school and indeed in SA education is massive. A country is only as good as its citizens and the community will need to invest heavily in education to bring all schools up to standard.
- We must value what we have and learn to make the most of our situation and facilities.

4. Gifted & Talented landscapes: the school visits

4.11 China: ‘...an experience so striking it made us question and appreciate what we have in the UK’

On their first school visit the China group went to a primary school catering for 3,800 pupils, which is considered average in size for Beijing. Whilst there the group had a tour of the school, observed a PE lessons and met with the head to be briefed on the school overall as well as G&T provision. They were overwhelmed by the size of school and facilities they saw. These included:

- several large outdoor areas housing playgrounds or sports facilities
- an outside teaching space with large stone spheres for pupils to sit on
- a gallery displaying framed pictures of all pupils
- a hospital with qualified doctors
- a maths area with large soft shapes and maths vocabulary on the walls
- an indoor area housing a replica forest and pond, complete with stuffed birds, life-size model trees, and sound-activated forest recordings
- a trophy room
- a meeting room with an enormous figure-of-eight meeting table.

During their meeting with the head-teacher, the group discovered the high level of parental support enjoyed and required by the school.

‘There is a whole-school committee consisting of five parents. Below this are committees for each grade and finally sub-committees for each class. Parents in every class meet once a week to discuss their child’s education. If they feel it necessary they will refer issues to the grade committees who in turn will refer to the whole-school committee if appropriate.’

Each local area uses standardised text books, with individual schools choosing how to supplement them. Teachers may prepare additional materials for the more able students. During some sessions the children can opt to study a subject that interests them. This may be a subject already on the timetable, or it could be something totally different such as Peking Opera. This enables students to pursue their interests further. In addition to this, Gifted and Talented pupils may have the opportunity to apply for a scholarship which could be used to pay for extra tuition outside the school. Famous people were also invited in to work with the pupils to inspire and motivate them and in some cases, support talented pupils.



The trophy room was used to celebrate achievement and suggested competition and success was an important part of school life.

The group were so struck by the differences they saw compared with their own schools and classrooms – the size, the scale, the facilities, the discipline and respect demonstrated by the pupils, the uniformity of the pupils' behaviour and the teaching styles they saw in the lesson they observed. The experience made them question their own teaching worlds and also appreciate their own settings and teaching philosophy.

4.12 China: An experimental school

The experimental school serves 3000 high school students in Beijing. It has links with 15 other schools worldwide and runs two international courses: a computer course and a financial management course sponsored by an American bank. The school wants to develop a more personalised approach to education by creating more tailored courses allowing greater opportunities to learn from the world.

The school recognises talented pupils through examination results and competitions. Their focus is on ensuring that talented pupils have talented

teachers. The teachers' primary roles are to promote self-motivation and provide challenging resources and a platform to achieve. If the school feels it is unable to provide the best resources for a talented pupil they will make a link with a university to allow the pupil to extend his or her learning. Special classes are provided for G&T pupils in maths, physics, chemistry and IT.

4.13 China: Observations in a university affiliated school

The high school affiliated to Renmin University of China (RDFZ) is among a group of beacon high schools accredited by the Beijing Municipal Government. The visiting teachers made the following observations during their visit:

- They have an interesting system of rewards – these were made visible to the whole school to celebrate success.
- The use of a computer facility reflected pupil attitudes – 200 students working together with minimal supervision suggests a culture of respect and trust.
- The performance arts block was impressive – every aspect of performance is catered for, and talents other than academic ones are highly valued.

4. Gifted & Talented landscapes: the school visits

- A huge financial commitment was evident – government clearly supports and promotes excellence.
- Teachers are highly respected by parents and pupils, their well-being is a priority and sports and recreational facilities are onsite for teachers' use; teachers are given considerable planning time.
- Students are allowed to use facilities unsupervised which they do with respect for property and with a desire to excel. There did not appear to be a culture of 'health and safety' or threat of litigation.
- The lessons observed showed a very static approach to teaching, with the teacher speaking for 15 minutes and the students working. Lessons were not broken down into sections and pupils seemed able to concentrate for longer periods of time and were much more focused.
- The length of the school day was much longer than in the UK, and then two to three hours of homework were expected daily.
- There was a total absence of disabled students (with SEN students educated elsewhere and no inclusion policy).





5. Overview/Summary

The visiting teachers felt that the study visits had been a resounding success.

A member of the Australian team reported that the opportunity to observe innovative practice was a *'privilege... that will inspire the agenda for improving learning and teaching' in their own school. All agreed that the visit had provided a 'momentous opportunity both in terms of professional development and personal growth'*.

In all the facilitators' reports, the excellent organisation was commended, as was the contribution of the hosts in explaining, contextualising and translating.

5.1 Impact on G&T education: What teachers brought back with them

On their different journeys, the visiting teachers found many examples of practice that inspired them and that they wanted to bring back to their own settings. These included:

- the explicit, active and motivating teaching of thinking skills (Australia)
- specialist training for school staff in gifted education (Australia)
- the involvement of parents in gifted pupils' education (Australia and China)
- greater focus on getting the best teachers, and supporting them to continue to be their best (China).

5.2 Action for change

In addition to making some changes in their schools and classrooms, some of the groups and visiting teachers were so inspired by what they saw that they plan to take action one step further. For example:

- The group that travelled to South Africa were so professionally moved and inspired by their experiences on the visit that they have formed a strong network and have continued to support each other through this upon their return to the UK. The group facilitator wrote: *'We are very confident that the contacts made and the continuing arrangements for communication will benefit not only the pupils in South Africa but also those pupils here, in the UK. The visit highlighted the huge advantages of such trips for British teachers and it is to be hoped that many such ventures will take place in the future.'*
- Some of the teachers who travelled to Australia are considering longer-term international exchanges so that they can explore further how G&T education is managed and put into practice.

5.3 Final word

The YG&T visits provided this group of teachers with the opportunity to spend time away from their everyday jobs, immersed in a group and an environment dedicated to exploring G&T provision. All were inspired and reinvigorated in some way, be it by a change they can make to their own practice, the formation of a network that can continue to support them or simply by being given the time and space to *'experience, reflect, discuss, analyse and learn'*.



References

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) *Guidelines for YG&T Study Visits*. Reading: League for the Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers (unpublished)

Further reading

For information on YG&T and LECT study visits refer to:

- DfE LECT website <http://www.lect.org.uk>
- DfE YG&T website <http://ygt.dcsf.gov.uk/>
- Gifted and Talented Rural Network <http://www.ruralgandt.org.uk/>
- TIPD initial visit report http://eduwight.iow.gov.uk/curriculum/gifted_and_talented/images/InitialReport.pdf
- G&T Classroom Quality Standards <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/152187>

For more information on the education systems in the schools and examples given in this report, refer to:

- South Australia Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) <http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/>
- DECS Policy Statement (Australia) <http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/docs/documents/1/GiftedChildrenandStudents.pdf>
- Department for Basic Education, Republic of South Africa <http://www.education.gov.za>
- Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China <http://www.moe.edu.cn/english>
- US Department of Education <http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml>
- Sandra Kaplan <http://www-rcf.usc.edu/~skaplan/index.html>
- Eurydice http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php
- The Heights, Australia <http://www.theheightsschool.com.au/>
- Ignite <http://www.igniteprogram.com/>
- Seaford 6–12 School, Australia <http://www.seafordhs.sa.edu.au/>
- Australian Science and Maths School, Australia <http://www.asms.sa.edu.au/>
- Bridgewater Primary School, Australia <http://www.bridgeps.sa.edu.au/>
- UCLA Laboratory School, California <http://www.labschool.ucla.edu/home>
- Bancroft Middle School, California <http://www2.lbusd.k12.ca.us/bancroft/index.htm>
- Montecito Union School, California <http://www.montecitou.org/>
- Oak Hills Elementary School, California <http://www.fcps.edu/OakHillES/>
- Medea Creek Middle School, California <http://www.oakparkusd.org/mcms/site/default.asp>
- Inanda Seminary School, South Africa <http://www.inanda.org/>
- Glenashley School, South Africa <http://www.glenashleyschool.co.za/>
- High School Affiliated to Renmin University, Beijing <http://www.rdfz.cn/English/Home/default.htm>



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