

Joint staff training mobility in Rush, Ireland

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Intermediate report

1. *Please compare the Irish system in general and the St Joseph's Secondary School organization in particular to the situation in your country and your school.*

Comparison of school systems:

St Joseph's Secondary School differ a great deal from our school. Some of the differences are:

St Joseph's Secondary School is a Catholic School while our school is a non-denominational public school, even though our students can receive religious education (Catholic) at school if they want to. These schools are quite common in Ireland, while in Spain, schools are usually public, semi-private (subsidized schools with private management) and private. Only those that are semi-private or private have a religious denomination.

School organization: Students have: year 1 to 3 the junior certificate, year 4 is a transition year, which is optional, and year 5 and 6 is the leaving certificate that allows students to go to university.

Community work: In the transition year, students do subjects connected with work experience, such as specific English for different professions. Other groups help with that.

Staff members: their school is a bit smaller. It has less teachers, 55, and 700 students. They only work in the morning and afternoon.

Timetable: 8:45-3:35. Every class is 60 minutes long. They have 6 periods, except for Friday that they have 4 periods, so they have a shorter day.

Classrooms: students don't have a room, teachers do. Students move from one classroom to the other. Students are mixed, boys and girls in the same classrooms, even though there are still some schools that are girls or boys only.

Bell: lessons are announced by bell as in our classrooms.

Lessons & Breaks: 15 minutes at 10:45 and 35 minutes at 13:00. They don't have breaks

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between lessons. They don't have double lessons.

Assemblies: once a week, every year group a different day and time. Every form class meets with their mentor teacher once a week, as we do. They have a semi-informal class SPHE, which is about social personal and health education.

Uniforms: Students must wear uniforms at school. Girls must wear skirts, but that can change from one school to the other in Ireland.

Teachers: Teachers have 22 teaching hours a week, 4 hours supervision the students whose teachers are sick. They also supervise lunches and breaks.

Staff meetings: They are not having many because of this year strike. Teachers have 33 hours a year for meetings.

Parent-teacher meetings: Teachers have parent-teacher meetings once a year. They meet with them individually. They can be at any time in the year. For the 6th graders, they have an exam at the beginning of the year after their exam in October.

Attendance: Teachers call the roll of those lessons they teach. They use a website, VSWare, for that and also for grades.

Schoology: Like us, teachers use this platform for their lessons.

Technology: Students use i-pads until 4th grade. 5th and 6th graders use books. It is a bit shocking that students who are used to work on their i-pads change them to use books only. All Classrooms have a projector and a computer used by the teachers for both attendance and classwork. There are a few classrooms that have an interactive whiteboard.

JCSB (Junior Certificate School Program) for students with special needs.

Awareness Programs: They usually have programs to help the community and raise awareness among students, such as the "Cycle Against Suicide". They are also trying to raise awareness regarding their own language, Irish. One way they are doing this is by making announcements through the intercom telling everybody to use Irish in their daily life.

Truancy: Teachers told us that truancy is a big issue for them, as many students are late for their lessons.

Intercom: Teachers and students are given announcement along the day and in the middle of their lessons, so they have to stop to listen to them. Students sometimes are told to continue with their work, as the announcement is given. Irish teachers told us that those announcements were usually given at the beginning of their lessons, but as that was a busy time for them, they were more spread along the day.

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2. Please describe what your staff training mobility consisted of. Which activities did you do?

Your activities:

Monday 6 March: Arrival in Ireland.

Tuesday 7 March: Introductions. Welcome breakfast. The Irish school had a really busy day with inspection and a German exchange. Students told us about their school life and *Strip to Identity* project. They explained to us the difficulties they had had to create their comic, as they could not use computers on a daily basis. They also told us about their program JCSP, a program for SEN students, and some other interesting initiatives that they are putting into practice. The Norwegian delegation also introduced their school and told us things about them. Teachers from St Joseph explained to us how they work with SEN students and how they encourage them to improve and become more confident. In the afternoon, we travel to the city centre in Dublin to visit the Collins Barracks Museum.

Wednesday 8 March: We visited the Croke stadium and the Glasnevin Cemetery. These visits were especially interesting because of the really interesting explanations of the tour guides, who did an excellent job introducing us to the Irish history and heritage. Through these visits to Ireland we learned and experienced how important heritage and history is for the Irish, and how they care about it. I think we could learn a lot about that in Spain.

Thursday 9 March: We visited the National Museum of Ireland and the National Gallery. During these days, we also experienced some other aspects of the Irish Culture, such as their pubs. We shared a lot of aspects of our different lifestyles, culture and history with the rest of the colleagues from the different countries, Norway, Germany and Belgium.

Friday 10 March: Students told us about the Students Voice. In small groups, each of the teachers from the different delegations met with a group of Irish students, who through a series of tasks, explained to us how they work in the Students Voice and how this program helps them improve as individuals, help them also improve their education, as well as to become better people. I could see how good this program can be for shy students. Later, we had a series of activities within the Visual Literacy Skills program that the Irish carry out. These activities are very interesting to encourage students and I'll use some in my Literature class. We had a great time and we could see how students can engage with these kinds of activities. We had lunch together and said goodbye to Pieter, our Belgian colleague.

Saturday, Sunday 11-12 March: Free days. Experience Irish life, their music and dancing. On Sunday, we say goodbye to the Norwegian delegation.

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Monday 13 March: Jobshadowing: English class for young students, “what a magic moment is” and a lesson about poetry for older students, analysing a poem by an Irish poet “Road to Famine”. Some weeks during the year students have a special lesson devoted to a social issue. That week they had the *Ability Awareness Week* and students were given information and discussed about dyslexia.

Tuesday 14 March: Jobshadowing: Art lesson in which students had to draw live figures in a limited time. Then I attended a literature class, which was the continuation of the lesson I had attended the day before, which was very interesting because I could see the teacher’s work on a poem for a longer time. Finally, I attended a Spanish lesson with young students, which was quite fun. The first part of the Spanish lesson was a continuation of the *Ability Awareness Week* program and students were given information about dyspraxia.

Wednesday 15 March: Jobshadowing: Art lesson in which students had to design letters according to the meaning of the word given, such as *vintage*. Their design should represent its meaning. Spanish lesson about their timetable and also filling in forms with personal information.

Thursday 16 March: Jobshadowing: Art lesson in which students were working on a project. This was an informal day for the Irish. We saw also a play in which students with different abilities participated as a grand finale for their *Ability Awareness Week*. We also went to a lesson in which collage students taught school students some photo techniques. Collage students do this kind of work for credits at the university.

Friday 17 March: St Patrick’s Day. Departure.

3. Which activities did you find most useful and why?

Most useful activities:

I enjoyed myself very much with the activities the Irish teachers organized. I think all of them were interesting in one way or another. I think that the “free time” gave me the chance to know more about the Irish lifestyle, culture, traditions and history, which made me understand more how things work in Ireland. Informal talks with the other teachers were very instructive because I learned about many different aspects of their education, work as teachers and their lives at first hand. I also had a lot of fun participating and getting involved in the school lessons and school life as a whole. Jobshadowing is a great experience for teachers, as you can see the different approaches to teaching and different techniques that teachers from other countries use in their daily work. Attending the poetry lessons was especially interesting, as I think I might be able to apply some of the techniques the teacher used in her lessons. Working side to side with the Irish

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teachers has been a really enriching and rewarding experience. You can see how much you can always learn from other colleagues.

4. Which activities did you find least useful and why?

Least useful activities:

I don't think there have been any pointless activities. The activities at school complement with the activities we did in our "free time". I don't think you can understand how an educational system works without knowing about their people, their culture, lifestyle and history. I have enjoyed and learned from every aspect of this experience.

5. Which recommendations would you make to improve your school's infrastructure and organization?

Recommendations:

Some of the aspects I would recommend are:

-I have found specially interesting how important is for the Irish to get their students involved in the community through different programs. Even though we have some initiatives in that direction, I think we should do some more community work, as they do.

-We could also apply some of the techniques they use with SEN students, as for instance, take these students on more trips and make a greater effort to get them engaged in their education.

-Using more technology in the classroom, as young Irish students use i-pads. We should also have the possibility of using mobiles phones when the teachers decide so. For that, we would need to have wifi in the classrooms.

-For literature, I think it's better to analyse more thoroughly some poems or fragments of novels, instead of studying so many authors and their works, which makes it very difficult to analyse in depth. This is even more true for the literature class in English.

-For Spanish, students are allowed to have different exams, a low and an advanced test, so as to encourage weak students who are not as good at languages. Maybe we could do the same in English with those students who experience more difficulties with the subject.

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6. *What obstacles have you met during your mobility and how have they been solved?*

Obstacles and solutions:

I haven't found any obstacles during my stay in Ireland. I think it would have been very helpful to have some more information to help organize my trip to Ireland though, mostly some suggestions about the accommodation and to have at least a draft of the programme in advance.

7. *To what extent did the training mobility correspond with your expectations? Have you been able to take initiative, which contributed to reach the aims of the mobility?*

Expectations:

This training mobility completely fulfilled my expectations, I could not expect for more. I wanted to see how other teachers worked in their lessons so I could get some inspiration for my own lessons, and I sure found some here. I would love to apply some of the things I observed in them. I would use more often homework for students to prepare their lessons, instead of using it so much to practice what they have been taught in the classroom. I could use more discussion between my students in my daily lessons, as some teachers do in Ireland. I don't think we can implement the use of i-pads and mobiles in my lessons at the moment, but we should work in that direction (I'm already using them in my small groups though). I had an active role in suggesting the lessons I wanted to observe.

8. *Did you get a good look at the different project levels (comic book creation - use of SharePoint - learning and teaching mobilities - special educational needs teaching)? How will you inform your colleagues at your school about these levels?*

Link with different project levels:

Irish students told us about their work on the comic and the difficulties they met as they didn't have computers for their project, so they had to work at home. Teachers were using SharePoint for their emails, and Schoology for schoolwork, as well as for homework assignments. Irish teachers told us of the different techniques they use with SEN students and their JCSP. We will

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meet as soon as I get back so as to inform my colleagues about the main aspects of the Irish educational system.

9. *How would you assess your training mobility? Think of the combination pedagogical / social activities - communication - information - work load - timing etc.*

Personal assessment:

My training mobility was really enriching and rewarding. I think I can apply some of the things that I observed and share them with my other colleagues. I enjoyed every minute of this experience and I think that every aspect of it was an important part of it. I wouldn't change anything, maybe except as I said before, for the arrangements before travelling to Ireland.

10. *Do you have any other comments or suggestions for improvement of future staff training mobilities?*

Comments and suggestions:

I think we should always know about the training mobilities way ahead so we can plan them carefully, which was not possible in my training mobility to Ireland, since they had those strikes. Knowing a long time in advance helps the visiting schools a lot financially, as our budgets are limited. We may also be able to make arrangements with other countries, so as to be able to share as much as possible, as this is also an important part of this experience. As for example, if all the teachers coming to the training mobility are lodged nearby, we are able to be together more easily and then we can share more about educational systems and other aspects of our countries' life.