

Being a School of Sanctuary: St Nicholas of Tolentine RC Primary School, Bristol

As an Expert Centre for the Global Learning Programme (GLP), St Nicholas of Tolentine have run a lot of inspiring twilight sessions, but one highlight for their Partner School network was a session focusing on their position as a School of Sanctuary,¹ in which they detailed their global learning work on the theme of refugees. The aims of the session were to encourage other schools in their network to learn more about **being a School of Sanctuary**, to inspire them to include **activities to shatter stereotypes around refugees**, and to encourage **critical thinking and reflection on identity and first impressions**.

The twilight session linked particularly well with the following GLP aims helping young people understand their role in a globally interdependent world, and explore strategies by which they can make it more just and sustainable; and familiarising pupils with the concepts of interdependence, development and globalisation.

The school led a cross-curricular project with a partner school in Uganda based on the global theme of 'conflict and peace', which involved learning about refugees,² as both St Nicholas and their partner school in Uganda have a high number of refugee families.

Children across the school started by learning about conflicts and, through role play, explored the global skill of conflict resolution – Year 5 and 6 pupils trained as peer mediators. From this, they looked at places in the world where there is conflict, and more particularly at one of the consequences of conflict: refugees – which was the main focus of the project.

This project was the opportunity for pupils to:

- understand what asylum seekers and refugees are
- learn about refugees through stories – e.g. *Refugee Boy* by Benjamin Zephaniah (Bloomsbury, 2011) in KS2
- watch video clips of refugees, including real refugee children talking about their experiences
- meet a refugee from Sudan and have the opportunity to ask questions (This was done through Bristol Refugee Rights.)
- talk to teachers from the Ugandan partner school during their partnership visit to the UK.

¹ <https://schools.cityofsanctuary.org/>

² <http://www.stnicholas.bristol.sch.uk/international-links/school-of-sanctuary/>

Teachers focused on developing the skill of empathy, and children explored how they could make asylum seekers and refugees welcome in the school. Activities included: children in KS1 making welcome posters in different languages (with the help of parents); and children in KS2 visiting Borderlands, a charity set up by the local church to support asylum seekers and refugees. Children learnt about peace when looking at peace makers in Black History week, and explored what they could do to act as peace makers in their own school and community. Children shared their learning,³ and the school choir performed the song 'Refuge' at the presentation event of the school of sanctuary certificate. The main curriculum areas that were covered included English, drama, art, music, geography, history and RE (learning about refugees in the Bible).



As the school's previous joint project with its partner school was on child rights, teachers linked this to the new project wherever possible, for example pointing out that *all* children (including refugee children) have the same rights. In the Reception class, the teacher engaged in a 'Paddington Bear visit' activity, exploring the topic of 'we all have the right to a home and to a family'. Paddington Bear arrived as a refugee from Peru. We introduce him as someone who doesn't have a home, and needs somewhere to stay. The pupils receive a letter and then write back, inviting him to stay. The children learnt about his journey to the UK and sought to make him welcome in their classroom. The children also take it in turns to take Paddington home, and this reinforces the link between school and home, as parents fill in a diary with their child, and many add photos from their home to it. This activity has been run very successfully for a number of years, and the pupils' work on the theme shows high levels of (and for some, improved) engagement. It has also had an impact on pupils' writing as it gave them a real purpose to write – to help someone in need – and helped with their empathy skills.

Impact of the school's global learning work

The many global learning initiatives involved in the School of Sanctuary work at Nicholas of Tolentine was shared with GLP Partner Schools during the twilight session. One teacher fed

³ Becoming a School of Sanctuary involved the process of LEARN, ACT, SHARE with parents in whole-school assemblies, and with parents and the wider community during a cultural evening for parents during the visit of teachers from the partner school in Uganda.

back that she had been ‘inspired’ by the work as ‘many of the issues were also very pertinent to [her] own school’.

The twilight session was also presented at the GLP National Expert Centre Conference in October 2016, where delegates from all over the country were given the opportunity to discover ways of bringing learning about refugees into the teaching of topics such as daily life, identity, geography and values education. They all identified with the need to challenge stereotypes about refugees, and saw plenty of opportunities for doing this in their own classroom contexts, making good use of exemplar texts within initial ideas planning.

The school’s work on refugees was developed further through an Annual General Meeting event organised by GLADE⁴ in October 2016, a GLP-approved CPD provider, where participants had the opportunity to reflect on what a ‘refugee’ is (as opposed to someone who seeks sanctuary) and how to take positive action to embed concepts of welcome, safety and inclusion within their schools.



The school in context

St Nicholas of Tolentine RC Primary School is an inner-city primary school in the heart of Bristol. It has a number of pupils whose parents have moved to Bristol from outside the UK. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is much higher



than average, as is the proportion of those who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is also well above average.

In the medium term, the school aims to develop an educational link with UK schools outside Bristol, to connect with values, daily-life themes and moving people.

More and more teachers within the school plan for global learning in their curriculum areas, and draw on and extend themes of interdependence, and our place in the local and wider world – including a focus for the GLP network on Eco-Schools and outdoor learning to connect children better with their locality and being outdoors. Pedagogically, the school intends to bring more P4C across key stages and local schools to encourage deeper and better questioning skills.

⁴ Global Learning And Development Education (GLADE) <https://glade.org/> is a provider that offers courses that are available through GLP e-credits. For all GLP-approved courses by GLADE and other providers, you can search and filter our [CPD Calendar](#).