

U.K. Learning Support Specialist arrives at the Multinational School

After the endless waiting and that heart stopping ephiny when the medical results are delivered. After the constant questioning, "Am I doing the right thing coming to The Kingdom?" , I arrived in Riyadh - open minded but expectant and excited about-yes! a teaching post-coordinating Learning Support and Special Needs at The Multinational School.

So what have I learnt, in what is barely a month, since I arrived? I have learnt that the Multinational School is not only the youngest, smallest of the International schools but is also the most intimate and friendliest of all schools I have ever taught in. A school with committed teachers who are precise but inspirational - a school guided by the Australian curriculum but adapted in a Renaissance sense to the knowledge of its multinational intake. It is a school where all pupils: American, Jordanian Australian, Saudi Arabian, British, Thai, Korean.... can excel.

I have also experienced first hand, what I have heard most about the school from the business and diplomatic sectors, that it has excellent SEN, Learning Support and ESL departments. In the case of Special Needs – it is the only mainstream school in the Gulf that has a unit that teaches social communication and development, that teaches art, literacy, numeracy and with the joint skills of the school staff also teaches PE, music and IT to children with severe specific learning difficulties. For those uninitiated, SPLD encompasses children with Downs, autism, Williams syndrome and many other physical neurological and genetic maladies, that not only deny children an education in many parts of the world but also can exclude them from contributing to society.

Special Needs pupils are not just educated in the unit but are integrated into the mainstream curriculum, with the care and expertise of special need, learning support staff and last but not least, class teachers. It is this co-operation that I seek to build upon, not just between teachers, support staff and the much appreciated assistants but from the parents, medical, psychiatric, business and diplomatic communities in Riyadh. Inside the school this has meant pupils from the unit immediately entering mainstream classes but also having access to the very special educational and social skills of the units staff. It never fails to impress how loving and caring the children of mainstream classes can be when children with special needs are correctly inducted. This single educational strategy in itself delivers positive social results for society.

We also seek to build up a diverse and well-trained staff that is supplemented by the advice and input of external professionals and services-be it in person or by other means. This and the development of parent/teacher communication (open evenings with talks by

professionals and social events that bring parents together to share their knowledge and experiences with each other and staff) we hope to dispel the notion that SEN and in particular learning support carries a negative kudos. Let me make it clear there is no class in the world that naturally contains one level of pupil intelligence, of communicative ability- of pupil receptivity and attention. Children develop their personal cognitive, study and social skills along with their personalities at different speeds, at different times and are therefore receptive to differentiated methods of teaching. Pupils with Dyslexia and Dyspraxia can be and are high achievers once their reading and writing difficulties are addressed by careful organization of lesson presentation and information as well as patience and understanding of the individuals needs.

In Learning Support we strive to help pupils with their organization, concentration, spelling, writing, comprehension, reading, study skills as well as those with medical, emotional and behavioral difficulties. These needs we seek to meet not just by withdrawing pupils from the classroom but by also collaborating with teachers in the classroom-team teaching and organizing pupils to also work collaboratively in small groups. In class Support can be a distraction to a junior pupil's concentration. In the senior school, where in class support is complimented by withdrawal lessons, it is absolutely necessary that pupil and support teacher are studying the work taught in mainstream classroom. It takes day to day liaison between support and class teacher. It involves the production of support materials but it ensures that course work and class tasks are understood. It ensures that the support teacher understands the work being taught for internal and the all-important external exam.

Learning Support teaching at its best seeks to educate pupils not by teaching down to them, but by inspiring them to seek out knowledge- not to be afraid of communicating ideas and producing through fear of making mistakes but always seeking to better themselves by taking risks. This is achieved by making the curriculum accessible by a variety of communicative methods: the use of multi-media and technology, mind mapping, writing frames, diagrams and not sole reliance on the written word. Teachers also achieve a commitment when they take responsibility for the content and communication of knowledge and experience and are not blind purveyors of the result of a particular government's study into education and the national curriculum. At the Multinational School we take the best educational strategies from the US, England and Australia, shaping them into an effective multicultural education for our pupils.



Roger Ely is British and has been teaching and lecturing since the end of the 1970's. The past nine years he has taught and managed Special Needs in Secondary, Comprehensive Schools and at EBD/ Referral Centres in Inner and Outer London . In his previous school he was awarded an "Excellent" Government OFSTED review. He is a performance artist and poet, who has published and presented the work of international artists/ writers and musicians.