

## COMENIUS: SPANISH EXCHANGE

### ACTON HIGH SCHOOL (LONDON) & JUAN DE MAREINA (MADRID)

Acton high school is a large comprehensive catering for students between the ages of eleven and sixteen years. Acton is a very multicultural school and it was the first time that the school took part in an educational exchange through "Comenius"

The school delivers a broad and balanced curriculum, and the various trips the MFL department runs and the exchange we are involved in at the moment have made learning more meaningful to the pupils.

It is Acton High School's first partnership. The project involved a similar school to ours in Madrid and since Spanish has been recently introduced in our school, the aim of the project was to promote and introduce Spanish culture to our pupils as well as share our values and diverse culture with our Spanish partners.

Comenius funded international activities within the school and visits by teachers, support staff and pupils to our partner country. Staff shared experiences and gained expertise. The project started in October 2010 and will run over two years.

Parents and guardians have been involved and informed about all aspects of the exchange through regular after school meetings and letters home.

#### Part 1:

Teachers from our partner school in Madrid (Juan de Mareina) came over to London in October 2010 to visit our school and to meet with some of our pupils. They observed classes and met with various members of staff at Acton High School including our website manager. The aim of the visit was to discuss mutual expectations for the project. During the visit, it was decided that since Juan de Mareina had more experience than us with these kinds of projects they can host first. We also agreed on the number of pupils and staff to be involved in the exchange. Minimum 24 pupils and 3 staff. We also decided on provisional dates for the pupils' exchange to Madrid.

During part 1 and part 2 of the project, both sides advertised the project in their respective schools. The project was opened for KS3 pupils since we only offer Spanish at this level so far in our school.

#### Part 2:

In January 2011, two members of the MFL team from our school visited Juan de Mareina in Madrid to start the matching of the pupils. Pupils were matched according to gender in most cases and of course interests. 27 pupils from Acton High School from various ethnic backgrounds were matched to 27 pupils from Juan de Mareina. During our visit to Madrid we had the opportunity to discuss the itinerary for the first leg of the exchange. We also met the pupils involved in the projects.

After matching the pupils together, we encouraged them to start communicating with each other before we travelled to Madrid. In order to make school/pupil communication safer and faster, we created a link on respective websites to FRONTER. Our website manager also travelled to

Madrid to meet with the ICT department to create FRONTER accounts to all Spanish pupils and teachers involved in the projects. On the FRONTER page, we put photos of pupils, videos, etc as well as encouraged pupils to take part in forums in English and Spanish.

We also had t-shirts with the project's logo on created to give to all pupils and teachers involved. We also created a mini vocabulary leaflet for all involved. Furthermore, started a lunchtime club was created on Wednesdays for pupils to practise their Spanish.

### Part 3: (the exchange)

We travelled to Spain on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> April, all pupils and parents met us promptly at Heathrow and our journey to Spain was very successful. Pupils were wonderfully behaved and so excited. We were met by Spanish teachers at the airport and then taken to school where pupils and parents were waiting for us. We were warmly welcomed by pupils and parents; they sang and made us feel very welcome.

Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> April: pupils had lessons in the morning and then we took them to the town hall to meet the mayor of "San Sebastian de los Reyes". We had a tour of the town hall and took photos with the mayor. Juan de Mareina organised for a local paper to also take photos of us and publish a little article about the exchange in their newspaper. We offered a small presents to the mayor from England and from Acton High School. During the day, we also visited the Museum of Ethnography.

Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> April: we went on a long trip to Segovia. Segovia was beautiful; we had a tour of a glass factory which pupils found fascinating. We also had a visit of the summer Royal Palace and gardens. We also visited the famous Roman Aqueduct. During the trip, pupils from both schools bonded and started forming friendship groups. The most interesting thing from our pupils' side was that they also mingled with each other. One of year 8 boys on the exchange even said that he would never have spoken to someone from another year group at school because he would have been scared.

Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> April: after attending lessons in the morning, we all went to the interactive Science museum. The experience was phenomenal because pupils had the opportunity to watch a video on planets at the planetarium. So far the experience proved to be both social and intellectual. Pupils on both sides were continuously encouraged to practise their linguistic skills in English or Spanish.

Friday 8<sup>th</sup> April: we spent a day visiting Madrid accompanied by a guide. The guide took us around Madrid from the Royal Palace to the Puerta del Sol. Pupils enjoyed the historical aspects of the tour but of course loved the shopping more. Acton pupils were encouraged to ask for things in Spanish. Even though we were exhausted, we all enjoyed ourselves. Teachers from both schools had the opportunity to share experiences and we (Acton teachers) enjoyed practising our Spanish as well. A very successful day.

Saturday and Sunday: pupils spent those days with their host families, however all pupils had our number for emergency. Luckily we didn't receive any phone calls which shows how much pupils were enjoying themselves and how looked after they were.

Monday 11<sup>th</sup> April: after attending classes in the morning, pupils were taken to the "real Madrid" football stadium. Boys had a blast of course, but for the rest of us it was a new experience and a successful and sunny day. We didn't see any footballers though.

Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> April: the highlight of the trip - a day in Toledo. We visited this beautiful city accompanied by 2 humanities teachers who everything there is to know about Toledo. We visited a lovely church and went around the old city.

Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> April: departure day - it was a sad day for all pupils, we saw a lot pupils from both sides crying because they will miss their new friends. Pupils signed each others' t-shirts and hugged - it was sad but lovely to watch. During the day we went to a local theatre to watch a short play and then the school arranged a buffet for all of us. It was really the best experience we've ever had. Our journey home was long because our flight was delayed but we all arrived to London in one piece with lots of beautiful memories.

The aftermath:

Parents have expressed their satisfaction with the experience as a whole; pupils of course have kept in touch with their partners. All photos taken on the trip will be placed on our website. We are also inviting parents to share memories of the trip with them as well as to discuss what is going to happen next. We are also expecting teachers from our partner school to come in October to discuss our itinerary for their pupils.

"Through the Comenius school partnerships we have become a family of schools working together to enhance the lives of all the children. Friendships between teachers and pupils from both countries have been consolidated by the use of ICT. We are now planning our itinerary for when our Spanish pupils come over."