

Mrs Byng and I had the most fantastic time in Spain last week! This was largely due to the people, they were so warm and friendly, and genuinely enthusiastic about the Comenius Project. They were so interested in finding out about English schools, the politics and our culture. We thoroughly enjoyed meeting the other teachers from France, Poland and Germany too, also lovely people. The weather helped enhance the experience, the sun shone most of the time and, although it wasn't always warm, it was most pleasant!

We found the differences fascinating. The culture is really quite traditional; everybody seemed to follow the same kind of routine. Everything shuts up from about 2pm, people disappear for their main meal of the day, and then everything springs to life at 5. Dinner at 9pm is considered early, one evening we were treated to Tapas at 10.30, the taverna was full, no wonder a siesta is a necessary part of the day!

Visiting the Princess Sofia School was so interesting. There are around 600 pupils, and 39 teachers. The children are 3 when they start school; all children do a full day from 9 until 2, stopping for half an hour at 11.30 for a snack and a play outside. The children carry all of their books in rucksacks, like our children do when they go to secondary school, but the rucksacks have wheels and they trolley them home! Apart from the very young children, all are taught quite formally, even 6 year olds were sat in rows working from text books for most of the day. It made us realise why we teach the way we do, and why those formal methods don't promote independence, the handwriting was impressive though! We observed some music lessons, which also involved dancing. It was nice to see the children released from their desks; we were amazed to see the older boys dancing as well, as they are always so reluctant in our school. We were told that singing and dancing is so much a part of the culture that they don't even think about it.

We are all really looking forward to the return visit in May; it will be wonderful to be able to reciprocate the hospitality we were shown, and to see everybody again. The Comenius Project is a fantastic initiative for Mr. Smith to involve the school in, and we would like to thank him for giving us the opportunity to see a country in a way that would be impossible to do if we were simply tourists, we will remember it for a long time to come!