

Miss Grant and Miss Kerr's German Adventures – October 2010

We left rainy Oxford at 5.30am and after running to catch our plane (not an experience either of us wishes to repeat!) we arrived in Stuttgart just before 11. The sun was shining and it was unbelievably warm. Esslingen is a beautiful town, and full of character. It was never bombed in the war, so a lot of original buildings still exist and have been superbly kept.

It was great to see all the teachers from our partner schools, we have got to know each other well which makes meetings and planning so much easier and more enjoyable. The main focus for the trip was to plan the visit to Bordeaux in May; everyone has worked hard to ensure the experience is worthwhile, as well as fun, for the children involved. The German partners were great hosts, all the teachers joined us to sight-see (it was the first time for some of them too)! The food was fantastic, and the 'cultural experience' of the October Fest was a sheer joy!

For us, the visit to the school was perhaps the most interesting aspect of the trip. It is fascinating to be a part of the everyday lives of people in other countries, there are a great many similarities as well as differences. The school has about the same number of children as we do but the classes are smaller, and the building itself is much bigger. It is on a suburban street so does not have the grounds we do, but the learning resources are amazing, and so inventive. As we also found in Spain, music is an everyday occurrence with most teachers willing to pick up a guitar at the drop of a hat! The children sing English songs as part of their daily routine, which goes some way towards explaining why they speak it so well.

The school has a strong Montessori ethos. Each day they have an hour of free work in which they select the tasks they want to do from their own individual programme. The teacher will interact with the children 1:1 and can address issues or facilitate their learning. The Montessori system means that learning can be fully personalised for each child so that a range of ages can work at different levels in the same class. This part of the day is done in virtual silence, only whispering is allowed. It's incredibly calm. As teachers, we both felt that watching the children's learning and interaction with the Montessori resources was very inspiring and we have brought back some ideas to use at Brize Norton.

The Comenius Project provides an invaluable opportunity for both adults and children to experience life in other countries, although we are all part of the western world, and part of Europe, we are very different and it is fascinating. A big thank you to Mr. Smith for letting us go, and the children who are lucky enough to be chosen to go to Bordeaux in May are sure to have an amazing time if this trip is anything to go by!