

GREAT PRACTICE SHARED

WHAT AN AWARD-WINNING INITIATIVE LOOKS LIKE

BRITISH SCHOOL MUSCAT WON THE OVERALL INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF THE YEAR AWARD THIS YEAR, FOR TWO OUTSTANDING INITIATIVES. HERE, PRINCIPAL KAI VACHER SHARES THE DETAILS.

BY KAI VACHER

A BRITISH TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR OMAN

British School Muscat (BSM) relies on high-quality teaching assistants to provide learning support both inside and outside the classroom. Combining our vision to become a training school and our experience of teacher development programmes, we felt that we had the capacity to support and develop aspiring professionals from our local community within our school.

The aim of our Internship Programme is to give high-quality training opportunities to talented Omani nationals who have an interest in a career in education. The interns experience what it means to be a teaching assistant at BSM, are introduced to our BSM learning

ethos, and gain a better understanding of what a career at an international school might offer. At the end of the programme there are opportunities for permanent employment at BSM for those interns who have shown particular aptitude and capability for the role of teaching assistant.

The first step of this initiative was to identify the right candidates, encourage them to be part of our early programme and to promote BSM as an attractive employment option. In response to our advertisement on social media channels, we received more than 120 applications for the first intake of interns in September 2018. Candidates were interviewed to ensure they understood what was involved; BSM is very different from local schools and the training scheme was unlike any other in Oman.

Once the right candidates were selected, an induction scheme was set up for them. Our first eight recruits joined BSM's month-long training programme in September 2018. With guidance from a BSM teacher as their mentor, they attended learning sessions, were buddied with our experienced teaching assistants, and they took an active and involved part in the classroom.

SUCCESS AND GROWTH

Our first intake proved very successful. We held a modest graduation ceremony where the interns proudly displayed some of their work including a plan of their ideal classroom. They also shared presentations of how they thought a teaching assistant could most effectively embrace the dimensions of the BSM learning ethos. Upon graduating, one of the interns said: "I thought that the BSM internship programme was inspiring. I have decided on my aim in life now. I am determined to become a teacher."

All eight interns successfully completed the first four-week training programme and had the opportunity to apply for permanent positions within the school. We were delighted to offer positions to three interns from that first intake. We hope that they will stay with the school to become qualified classroom assistants and follow our training programme to become Higher Level Teaching Assistants. We also expect some of our interns to join the ranks of BSM colleagues who start their career at our school as teaching assistants,





then progress through a programme of training to Higher Level Teaching Assistants and eventually to Qualified Teacher Status.

Over the past three years, with the support of TES Institute as our accredited provider, we have trained ten colleagues to Qualified Teacher Status (Department of Education, England), helping BSM to meet the shortage of teachers by training our own professionals locally. As the teacher recruitment crisis becomes more acute over the next few years with the rapid growth of international education, we expect to expand our intern programme to produce more teachers from our local talent base.

This academic year we will welcome 24 Omanis to our Classroom Assistant Internship Programme. We are proud to be actively involved in developing the skills of our local workforce, for the benefit of both BSM and our Omani community. Applications are now flooding in for the second intake starting in March 2019.

DEVELOPING LEARNING DISCOVERY IN KEY STAGES 1 AND 2

BSM was also shortlisted this year for the International School Awards Creativity in Learning Initiative for our Discovery Learning

programme. This is a child-centred, flexible, enquiry-based approach to teaching and learning for our children in Key Stages 1 and 2.

As students moved through their primary years, from Foundation Stage to Year 6, the active learning that characterised success in Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) was lost in the more formal National Curriculum of England Key Stages 1 and 2. We wanted our children to make more connections between their subjects, develop their curiosity and enhance higher-order thinking skills.

We believed that their growth and learning would accelerate if the principles underpinning effective learning in EYFS were applied to the design of the curriculum. We called this Discovery Learning.

Discovery Learning allows children to direct their learning according to their own interests and curiosities. It is designed to promote critical thinking skills, high levels of engagement, and collaboration. Through a range of cross-curricular activities, pupils cover the learning objectives outlined in the National Curriculum of England, but with flexibility to explore some aspects more deeply. Core subjects, such as English, mathematics and PE, are still taught as discreet lessons.

This has allowed learning to become more relevant and meaningful in Key Stages 1 and 2.

MAKING DISCOVERY LEARNING RELEVANT

Discovery Learning looks different in each year group. Years 1 and 2 have a Discovery Learning session daily where they can move around the different areas within the year groups known as workshops. Discovery Learning days occur in Years 3 and 4, and Discovery Learning projects in Years 5 and 6. In each of these, the children have the opportunity to select what they want to learn in different topics and can navigate their learning according to their own interests and curiosities. Throughout each of these sessions, teachers ensure that there is progression of skills and that there is opportunity for the curriculum to be embedded and explored more deeply.

The implementation of Discovery Learning has been well received by staff and parents, and it's clear that it has had a positive impact on the children. One Year 3 child described it

succinctly: "Discovery Learning helps all the pieces of the jigsaw fit together". From Year 1 to Year 6, active engagement is now higher across all lessons. There has been a significant increase in the percentage of children working above age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. The drive for flexible learning styles and opportunities for all children to access the curriculum, coupled with awareness of active engagement, has resulted in less children 'working below' or 'towards' age-related expectations in all core subjects.

Discovery Learning is allowing children to develop their intellectual confidence and linking skills, and it is giving them the possibility to apply learning to a wider context leading to endless creative opportunities. The scope for progress is huge. Children have developed attitudes that will help them to succeed throughout their lives, creating lifelong learners.



THE AUTHOR

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