

Racial Equality in Britain: Educational Psychologist invites Education Secretary to Exemplary School

In response to the "ignorance and bigotry" shown in the Big Brother reality television programme, Education Secretary Alan Johnson has said that schools must take the lead in teaching core British values, "We want the world to be talking about the respect and understanding we show to all cultures, not the ignorance and bigotry shown on our TV screens". However, Educational Psychologist Alan Davies, author of the internationally acclaimed synthetic phonics programme THRASS, believes that British schools are already doing much to teach that respect and understanding and has written to Johnson to invite him to visit Oxley Park Primary School in Milton Keynes, which he believes provides an excellent example for other schools to follow.

Davies supports the view of the Association of School and College Leaders, as stated by its General Secretary John Dunford, that "Schools can hardly be blamed for one person's bigotry when the 82% who voted to eject Jade Goody are testament to the work already being done by schools to develop respect, understanding and tolerance".

Davies believes that a key factor in the excellence of Oxley Park Primary School is a strong governing body that is prepared to support and release high calibre senior staff so that they can develop positive international relations. During this last year, the school has hosted visits from lecturers and teachers from as far afield as South Africa and the West Indies to share their experience of using THRASS and in June, the headteacher and deputy worked with teachers at farm schools in the Kwena Basin, Mpumalanga province, South Africa. The farm schools have no electricity, running water or toilets and the Oxley Park children and parents raised money for clothes, books and pencils for the children there. During the visit, the Oxley Park staff met with senior members of the South African Education Department, including Mandla Maseko, Chief Education Specialist: Children and Youth Literacy. In addition, nine student teachers from the Wits School of Education, Johannesburg, worked in Oxley Park in July and they were each welcomed into the community by the separate family with whom they stayed.

The most recent visitor to the school, for a two-week stay, has been Lucinda Meyer, a lecturer from the Wits School of Education. Headteacher Cathy Higgins said, "When our children saw the videos of the visit, and we discussed the content, including Lucinda, they wanted her to come to our school. So they decided to raise the money to make it possible for her to do so".

And what of the controversy concerning racism in Big Brother? It is extremely encouraging to hear Lucinda Meyer's observations, "It is amazing to see just how many mixed couples you have and different race groups. People seem to be far more accepting, strangely enough, of this sort of relationship, than they are in South Africa. We call ourselves a democracy and say that we are pro mixed couples and that sort of thing, but it is not always the case. Here I find that acceptance is far more common".

The interview with Lucinda Meyer entitled "Equality through Education" that took place on 19 January and includes contributions from the staff and children of Oxley Park, can be viewed as a videostream or downloaded from www.thrass.co.uk/racialequality.htm

And what did the children think of Lucinda? "There are so many nice things. It is hard to remember them all", said one of them.

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