

Shanghai stories

What can school leaders in England learn from their counterparts in other parts of the world? Despite different education systems and cultural norms, are there common leadership challenges – practical as well as strategic?

Terry Creissen, principal of the British International School in Pudong, Shanghai, shared his experience of leading a foreign school in a recent discussion in talk2learn.

It's an all-through school with a transient population and it was these two aspects of his work that school leaders were keen to hear about.

One school leader wanted to know how Terry's school managed pupil data, given that pupils frequently join and leave the school. It is a problem schools in England working in highly multicultural environments also face, she said.

"In some schools in England, 40 or more nationalities is not unknown and with that comes the inevitable transience in the overall school population."

At the international school, every child is required to present a report of their academic and social performance on arrival at the school, translated where necessary into English, Terry explained. "We provide annual reports and education transcripts for parents to use when they leave the school. These are becoming more individualised to different country needs."

But, given the range of nationalities, education systems and how the curriculum differs between countries, there can be no one-size-fits-all solution, he added.

Peter Howard, a year 5/6 teacher in a primary school in Norfolk, is looking to work abroad and wanted to know whether he could expect foreign schools to set as much store by parental links as his current one.

He said: *"We enjoy a good reputation with our local community and I wonder how parental and community influence or commitment is different*



abroad. I personally feel that those links make the whole school experience stronger and more meaningful for the pupils in our classes. Learning becomes 'fun' and more relaxed."

Terry agreed that getting to know parents socially could help to build positive relationships which have an impact in school. Key to doing that is to have a good command of the language, he said. *"Language barriers can be a big problem."*

Another contributor was interested in the implications of all-through schooling for teachers' career prospects – "What do others think about teacher career projections within all-age, all-through education? Does this help both the teachers and the children?"

Terry said primary teachers moving to secondary education had produced *"Some of the most creative teaching I have seen in my career."*

He added: "This year one of my primary staff will take that leap and I have every confidence that she will add significant value to the secondary curriculum by doing this – not just in her classes because her influence will spread to other secondary staff.

"I would encourage colleagues to think about this carefully and support such moves with a strong coaching programme."

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