



AN EXCHANGE OF CULTURES AT THE MARCHES SCHOOL AND TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE

The Marches School and Technology College have maintained their link with three schools in the Soshanguve Township in South Africa (Thakalange JS, Ruabohlele JS and Echibini) through numerous reciprocal visits and community involvement. The Marches is a secondary school located in the rural town of Oswestry on the border of England and Wales. Their successful fundraising to support their initial link, in which more than the required amount was raised, led The Marches School to link with three South African schools.



During the past ten years of their links, The Marches have sent teachers and students to visit the schools, hosted teachers and students from South Africa and collected books, electronic science equipment and carpentry tools for their African partners. With the initial aim of helping others, highlighting the similar needs of students across the globe and exchanging teaching ideas and skills, The Marches School links have blossomed into friendships and an exchange of cultures.



The links are not only supported by the students, who contribute financially on non-uniform days, but are also sustained by the local community, as local businesses have donated materials for raffles. Beyond fundraising, the students are invited to write letters to make new friends, assemblies are organized to keep the teachers and students updated on their links, and photographs are on display around the school. As Maralyn Parry, link coordinator, states: "to have contact by letter is, for all involved, an exciting insight to a new country and culture."

Exchange visits between the schools have been a valuable experience and have helped maintain the links and build friendships. In 2003 and 2004, teachers and students from the South African schools visited the UK. These visits gave the teachers and students insight into British culture as they visited the seaside, an ice rink, and a bowling arcade, in addition to spending time in the



LINK SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

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classroom and experiencing life as a student in the UK. The visits were reciprocated by The Marches School in 2004 and 2009. During these exchanges, The Marches School teachers and students experienced South African music, dance and food. Reciprocal visits have given the students the opportunity to exchange traditional games and understand the value of education in both South Africa and the UK.



Teachers witnessed other teaching methods and experienced the differences in equipment levels and classroom conditions. “The teachers have been able to share their skills with other educators and have learned from them.” After a visit to the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg with the three head teachers, The Marches teachers have been able to share the real-life experiences of the South African teachers in their lessons on apartheid and African history.

“The link has opened up a channel to another country’s culture that can be accessed by all in school and anyone in the local community. It has developed long standing friendships that will overcome the difficulties in communication that we face regularly.”

- Maralyn Parry, link coordinator

Another major activity taken up by The Marches School has been donating books and equipment. Despite having libraries, the South African schools do not have many books. The Marches set up a book collection and over six months accumulated 33 boxes of books, donated by students, parents and community

members. Art supplies, spare electronic science equipment, and carpentry tools, donated by a parent who is a retired carpenter, have also all been given to the schools.

One of the aims for the near future is to link teachers from as many curriculum areas as possible with their South African teaching counterparts, as a method of exchanging help and support.



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