



## INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (IECE) PROJECT

### EXAMPLE OF IECE PROVISION: MALTA (2 OF 2)

#### 1. Abstract

The school is a state primary school located on the island of Gozo. Situated in the heart of Victoria, the capital town of the island, it hosts 370 pupils between the ages of 3 to 11, making it the largest primary school in Gozo. Children not only come from Victoria but from villages across Gozo. Non-native speakers also attend the school, coming from the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Japan and France, among others.

In addition to twenty-four classrooms, the school has administrative offices, a multi-purpose mini hall, a well-equipped library, two playgrounds and an art workshop. The school staff amounts to 50 people.

Children are so different, yet they are all gifted with imagination, creativity and enthusiasm. Children all have their own characters and history. Inclusion is therefore the order of the day, where each and every child is considered unique and where special attention is given to every child's particular needs. Inclusion is endorsed through differentiated teaching and learning by the class teachers, through the provision of complementary education, the sterling work done by the Learning Support Assistants and the setting up of the Nurture Group (Rainbow Class) and the after-school club Klabb 3–16.

The school's aim is to provide children with the best holistic education, which goes beyond the parameters of academic subjects and caters for the social, emotional, behavioural and spiritual needs of the children. Children are not numbers but human beings.

The school provides opportunities and organises activities which help children develop their personal and social skills, thereby increasing their self-esteem. Children are encouraged to actively engage in school life. They regularly do the morning assembly, play active roles in the Student School Council and the Eko Skola Committee. They organise activities themselves and are protagonists, not spectators.

The school is fully aware that close co-operation between the school and the wider community is a step in the right direction. Parents are informed on a daily basis of what goes on in school through the school blog. They are encouraged to participate in school activities and play an important role in the School Council. The School Council meets once a month to discuss, evaluate and propose. Parental meetings are held on a regular basis and although Parents' Day is held twice annually, parents are free to come to school and discuss issues with the Head of School and teachers



whenever the need arises. The school tries to keep close links with the local community. The school blog (<https://ourhappyschool.wordpress.com/>) is a strong bridge between home and school.

Currently there are seven kindergarten classes, four in Kindergarten 1 and three in Kindergarten 2. The total population is 94 children, with 47 children in Kinder 1 and 47 in Kinder 2. Seven kindergarten assistants are in charge of these classes. Two Learning Support Assistants help two children with statements of need. The earliest registration for primary school occurs when children are 2 years 9 months.

Learning through play is the golden rule. Work carried out in the early years is in line with the guidelines issued by the Department of Curriculum Management. More details can be found at <http://curriculum.gov.mt/en/resources/the-ncf/pages/default.aspx>

## **2. Inclusive features**

Gozo College Rabat primary school caters for 370 pupils coming from all over Gozo, including foreign students. The school is situated in Victoria, Gozo's main city, where many parents and carers work, and so it is convenient to send their children to the school. It is easier for them to accompany their children to school and pick them up again. The school has a good reputation and so many parents and carers are happy to send their children to the school. Children bring a variety of needs with them and each child is unique in their story and their particular needs. Family backgrounds vary and social problems are unfortunately common and these have an impact on children's lives. First and foremost, the school management team and all teaching staff do their very best to make children feel safe and secure in a caring environment, where each and every child is loved and cared for. Class teachers include everyone in classroom life, practicing differentiated teaching and learning techniques to enable all children to reach their goals. Learning support assistants are available to those learners who need extra help. The aim is not to segregate or label them, but to help them to be included in school life. In early years, early intervention teachers help children experiencing difficulties in engaging with the learning environment. A guidance teacher, social worker, clinical and educational psychologist and child safety specialist are always just a phone call away if their services are needed. In all cases parents and carers are always informed of services being offered to their child. Pupils who speak neither Maltese nor English attend complementary education in order to be able to communicate with their peers and teachers.

A lot of activities take place at a whole school level, where all children are given the chance to participate and where no one is left out. When given the chance, children



rise to the occasion and can and do surprise all! Examples include the Tree of Life Project, the school's celebration day, Eko Skola activities, Healthy Eating Project, Christmas Concert, fund raising activities and outings. Details of such activities can be found on the school blog.

In the school, the active engagement of learners in the teaching and learning process is the order of the day. Hands-on activities stimulate the children's imagination and help them to learn by doing while having fun. If a child fails to reach a desired goal, different methods are devised by the class teacher to help the child reach targets. If the need arises, the school provides extra help through the services mentioned earlier on.

The curriculum themes are devised for every level and related activities are done in class to enhance literacy, numeracy and science.

The use of the interactive white board is common practice and both teachers and learners enjoy using it as an effective and efficient teaching/learning tool.

Children with special needs are encouraged to develop their strengths through music and art, both of which can also serve as a means of therapy and communication.



### 3. Inclusive highlight

- Eating healthy ‘SOUP FOR ALL’: whole school approach

The school decided to make seasonal pumpkin soup, using pumpkins grown in Malta. Parents were also included in this pilot project. The children brought specific ingredients from home and it was a huge success. The kindergarten classes started the project in November. Learners who had never eaten pumpkin soup tried it, liked it and asked for more! Parents even requested the recipe to reproduce it at home.

- Getting Christmassy – Baking Gingerbread

A gingerbread baking activity was suggested by one of the kindergarten teachers for December. The children rolled and cut out the dough, decorated their gingerbread people and ate them. Some extra gingerbread people were sent home with the children to share with their families.

- Planting sunflowers for Mother’s Day

As a way to get the whole school involved in Eko Skola and to stress the importance of nurturing, the kindergarten classes all planted sunflower seeds in pots. Each child got to plant seeds in the soil and water the seedlings. They grew a sunflower to give to their mothers for Mother’s Day. There was a daily watering schedule and they grew beautifully. In May all the kindergarten classes made pots and then brought their pots to collect their sunflowers ready for Mother’s Day. They loved them!

### 4. Other evidence of quality IECE

The school has earned several awards from external bodies:

- EMBED Award

The EMBED award is a national educational IT competition. The school won for its school blog, which is an effective communication tool between school and stakeholders. Another award was granted to an early years teacher and the learning support teacher in class for participating in a project called People Around Us.

- NTM Green Flag Award

The school was awarded the Green Flag as part of Eko Skola. The project focuses on the three Rs relating to environmental issues. Learners in the school are encouraged to take good care of their environment in different ways. The school believes that teaching pupils from the tender age of 3 ingrains in them the importance of caring for their surroundings. A group of children forms part of a committee which meets



and works regularly throughout the year.

- LEAF Award (please refer to appendix)

This project aims to instil a love for trees, plants and the outdoors in the staff, learners and their families. Learners have the opportunity to learn about trees and plants, how to care for them, what they need and how we can enjoy them. The project is divided into four parts: Tree of Life project, Green Wall (which includes a visit to a public nursery), tree planting at Marsalforn valley and a visit to Chambrai woodland (including tree hugging and litter picking).

- The Tree of Life Project

This is a European Union (EU) funded project run by Kreattiv initiative which left a huge legacy at the Happy School. The tree itself transformed a cold and uninspiring space into a fun, bright and creative area, which keeps expanding with new projects that develop over time. The other major impact left by the project is the dedicated arts space which is now housed in an old cellar that was previously used for storage. Now it is a bright, fun and usable space.

The children are immensely proud of their work on the Tree of Life project and are often found looking for leaves and names on the tree. The project was well received by all learners and teachers and the children loved their lessons with Abi and Emma, the chance to get messy, explore colours, materials and experiment.

The project ran smoothly thanks to the huge support of the head teacher, who allowed complete freedom to timetable the project to suit teachers, artists and children. The project was self-sufficient and organised to fit in with the school routine as closely as possible.

- Lifelong Learning Community

Kindergarten assistants, teachers and learning support assistants who are in daily contact with pupils are all qualified. In-service training and after-school courses are provided on a regular basis in order for the professionals to remain in touch with current developments and outcomes in the educational field. Other professionals such as psychologists, speech therapists, early intervention teachers and the hearing impaired teachers all enhance the teaching and learning opportunities in the early years. The school management team supports and provides resources for all classrooms. The Education Officer for the Early Years is always ready to come and provide support where and when necessary.

The majority of the learners' parents give a helping hand whenever the need arises. They are invited to attend school and participate in lessons. An example is when parents are invited to speak about their occupations and share life/work



experiences. The school organises a Read With Me club where parents accompany their children in modern and innovative reading sessions which take place in the school library, where everyone sits down on cushions and enjoys listening to a story. Then they are involved in a hands-on activity related to the particular story. The school's open day is an open stage where all learners are encouraged to show their talents to the wider community, including parents.

Community agencies visit the school on a regular basis in order to inform the learners of their work in the community. An example is the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals which provides animal experiences for the children.

One of the teachers will be participating in a training seminar in London in November. Claire Eccleshall, who is the training officer for the Nurture Group Network, will be giving an overview of Nurture Groups, the Boxhall Profile and developing practical strategies when working with vulnerable children. On her return, the experience will be shared with the rest of the staff during a school-based Professional Development session as part of the School Development Plan, with a focus on inclusion.

- NSTF Award

The school won this national science award. Children were encouraged to complete a science-related project. All school children were allowed to participate. A high number of pupils participated, including from the early years.

- We Eat Responsibly Project

The school was among fourteen schools awarded with support funding to implement sustainable food projects within the community. Nature Trust Malta launched We Eat Responsibly in June 2015 after securing funding for the EU project which brings together nine EU countries including Malta.

Based on the needs of the school community, a school programme will be built that addresses the crucial issue of food purchasing and consumption. Through an action-orientated approach based on the tried and tested seven-stage Eco School methodology, learners will develop critical thinking, knowledge, skills and attitudes to become global citizens and challenge themselves to adopt new food behaviour patterns.

The latest World Health Organization report, which ranked Maltese people as the most obese in the EU, is definitely a cause for concern and a wake-up call. However the project's aim is to seek another perspective on the obvious links between health risks and a poor diet. It is geared to make participants re-visit the daily decisions they make related to food selection, provision and consumption and how these



affect the health of the planet and the quality of life of its inhabitants.

Animal welfare, water conservation and quality, global warming, labour and trade issues, genetic modification of crops and livestock, alternative agricultural practices and food miles will be among the themes tackled across the fourteen projects. The school projects will be completed by the end of this academic year.

– CARAVAN's Mediterranean Peace Donkey

As part of CARAVAN's Mediterranean Peace Donkey project at the upcoming Mdina Cathedral Art Biennale, the Happy School is going to paint a fibreglass 'peace donkey'. The whole school, 400 children aged from 3 to 11, will be involved, so it will be a truly inclusive project. The kindergarten classes and year 1 children will be hand-printing on the donkey. The year 2, 3 and 4 children will be working on designing small children holding hands, and the year 5 and 6 children will be focusing on words to do with peace and friendship that they will write on the donkey in their own handwriting and in their home language. The whole school will be talking about friendship and peace in the classroom and the project will run in conjunction with social studies classes.

For more information on the Mediterranean Peace Donkey project, visit

<http://www.oncaravan.org/malta-peace-donkey>