

CHINESE SISTER SCHOOL VISIT

Experimental School of Beijing

27 May to 1 June 2013 by Ms Debbie Mierisch

On my visit I spent a week in Beijing, China, visiting our sister schools – the Kindergarten and Experimental Primary School of Beijing Normal University. I spent time at both the Kindergarten and the Primary school. In China, children attend Kindergarten from ages 3-6 and then start school from age 6 and are at Primary school from Years 1-6. The equivalent of our Prep year is their last year at Kindergarten.

Primary School

I was welcomed on my first day in China to the Primary school by Mr Wu, the Principal of the Primary School and Ms Huang, Principal of the Kindergarten, and then attended the Monday morning outdoor whole school assembly where students speak and there is a flag raising ceremony – the Chinese flag and the school flag. Usually the school band plays at the assembly but as there was light rain, they didn't play on that morning. The assembly occurs each Monday. I then visited the classrooms of the Year 3 and 4 students who are corresponding with our Year 3 and 4 students at Milgate. They did various performances in Mandarin and English – singing, dancing, playing musical instruments, performing magic tricks and a calligraphy / paper cutting demonstration. I played a game of charades with the students as well. I also observed lessons in: Maths, English, Music, Art, Science, Calligraphy, etc.

The students begin school at 8am and finish at 3:30pm. From 3pm – 3:30pm they all go outside and are involved in physical activities such as: basketball, diablos, running, games and playing on equipment. On some days there are after school activities / clubs that parents pay for and students can attend such as: dance, taekwondo, craft, calligraphy, roller blading. Each class has 40 students in it and they have a different teacher for each subject but they do have a class master (Home group teacher). The students sit in rows in individual desks and the teacher uses a data TV for their lesson and there is some involvement from students. For each subject the students have text books. Lunch is provided for students each day by the school. The Primary school has 1700 students, 42 classes and 116 teachers.

Kindergarten

The Kindergarten has 5 branches with 82 classes, 500 teachers and 2500 children. I visited the main branch of the kindergarten which was close to the Primary School. I was greeted by Ms Huang, the Principal of the whole kindergarten. At each branch there is also a Principal for the specific branch and Ms Huang meets with them all once a fortnight. I went for a tour of the kindergarten and the displays and facilities were very impressive. The children are in classes of 30 with one teacher and an assistant. The kindergarten day starts at 7:30am and finishes at 5:30pm. In the middle of the day, all students have a sleep for 2 1/2 hours. A few children stay overnight at the kindergarten on some nights. The children and staff are provided with 3 meals and 2 snacks each day as there is a large kitchen with 16 staff at the kindergarten. There are also 8 nurses at the kindergarten. I observed a Music, Library and PE lesson. I also went into a classroom where the students were engaged in a variety of activities similar to our kindergartens. The kindergarten provides child - centred education, themes based learning and aims to develop children's creativity.

Both the kindergarten and the Primary school have a training program for teachers from other areas of China and they send teachers to West China for several months at a time to assist them with training and modelling in teaching and learning. This is part of their community service / social justice work as Western China is a disadvantaged area of China and the schools are not as fortunate as those in Beijing. So they want to support these schools to improve. The students in both the Kindergarten and the Primary School raise money for various charities in China (eg Earthquake victims) so there is a strong philosophy of giving to, and caring for, others and working together for the greater good.