



CLASSICS FOR ALL: “OLD” SUBJECTS AND THEIR *NEW* PLACE IN SCHOOL LEARNING

Four years ago, a meeting with Leicester University outreach staff from the Archaeology and Ancient History department started off a chain of ideas and events which, pandemic notwithstanding, has resulted in the successful embedding of Classics and Latin in our Academy Trust in Leicester and Leicestershire. Despite a rich Roman history, Leicester’s Classics teaching in state schools had, to the best of my knowledge, shrunk to a handful of scattered after-school or lunch time clubs. My goal as an English teacher with a Classics background was to be an ambassador for Classics: to revive the teaching of Latin and introduce Classical Civilisation to the curriculum. This was to start in our biggest school in Leicestershire and spread out to other schools in the city.

For many years, the only access to Classics across our schools was an after-school extra-curricular AS in Classical Civilisation, run by a single staff member and with varying numbers. The key to sustained interest, which we soon discovered, was to ‘start them early’: after schools Classics and Latin clubs in Year 7 and 8, boosted by a ‘Myths and Epic’ term in English lessons, means that we now have our first GCSE Classical Civilisation class at KS4, and we expect these numbers to continue to grow. Staff from other schools accompanied their students to clubs so that they could bring professional knowledge back to their schools and start their own up. Class time is supplemented by healthy extra-curricular opportunities, with trips to the British Museum, and archaeological sites excavated by Leicester University, as well as the EMACT Latin Speaking Competition, and we often bring pupils from three or more schools together. Students may not always remember the uses of the dative, but they will always remember the time they built Greek temples, or got on a coach to London to see thousand-year-

old objects, or that, as the only state school students in a host of private school candidates, they still won a prize.

Some teachers experience resistance to Classics in state schools due to preconceived notions often based on class snobbery. We are lucky in Leicester that our students rarely come biased with these notions; with a high EAL population, Latin is only as foreign as anything else, and to students who speak Gujarati, Arabic or Yoruba, it is not the hardest language that they will master in their lives. Their parents are often aspirational and keen for students to achieve an extra qualification after school. However, it has also been key to acknowledge that different schools have different needs. With our eleven different schools, it is impossible to have a one-size-fits-all approach, and some schools prefer Latin to Classics, or vice versa. We also have the ubiquitous trouble with staffing, as people inevitably retire or move on from posts, so part of our development has been to link up staff for valuable CPD opportunities, greatly supported by the Leicester University Archaeology and Ancient History Department. Without their help, we would have been individual teachers doing individual projects; we are now a hub which can provide support and training for other schools and teachers who want to achieve similar goals. It’s been a pleasure to watch my non-specialist colleagues develop their own interests in Classical teaching.

Our biggest achievement this year has been developing Latin teaching in our four Primary Schools. Having already taught Year 3 across three schools using the excellent ‘Hands Up’ Latin



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website, I was keen to move ahead with Minimus for older KS2 students. I therefore handed over the Year 3 teaching to current staff, and I now teach Minimus to Years 4 – 6 depending on the needs of each school (their books have kindly been funded by the Primary Latin Project). Despite Latin having to stop early last year due to the pandemic, it’s been a joy to see how much students have remembered, and to hear little cries of ‘Salve, Magistra!’ across the playground as I move from school to school.

I hope it’s not too fanciful to imagine that one day our students might be able to have a complete Classics journey across our Trust, from Years 3 to Year 13. We have come a long way from that one after school class.

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