

# INTRODUCING INTEGRATION IN OUR SCHOOL: 2012-2013

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## **1. Introduction**

Our school is a European one, and, like the European Union itself, it aims to foster unity in diversity. The school is open to a wide variety of people, ideals, backgrounds, and beliefs, but at the same time it has a common purpose: the pursuit of knowledge, personal development, and educational enrichment. In the multi-cultural spirit of today's Europe, it welcomes a diverse range of cultures and perspectives, but aims to integrate them into a richer, more powerful, and mutually supportive community.

This is evident in our school on a daily basis. Morning assembly, for example, includes a brief traditional prayer in Greek and a secular morning song in English. Although we have only two sections, Greek and English, we have a varied mixture of cultural and linguistic backgrounds in our school, among both students and staff, and individuals are encouraged to share and celebrate their different experiences and perspectives.

Examples of cultural exchange and integration can be found throughout the school day, during both study and play. There are also numerous structured activities, both curricular and extra-curricular, designed to help integrate the different traditions and communities represented within the school.

## **2. Integration within the curriculum**

The SEE belongs to European School network, and, as such, its curriculum includes activities specifically designed to promote cross-cultural understanding and integration. The most important of these are European Hours, in which 3rd to 5th graders of both sections meet up three times a week to work jointly on Europe-themed projects (for example, national festivals, geography, languages, music, cuisine, etc.) Students use both Greek and English in their communications.

As well as *horizontal* integration between peers of different backgrounds, the school also encourages *vertical* integration between students of different grades and abilities.

Secondary school students (year 1) are encouraged to join primary school 5th grade classes, and vice versa, in order to exchange experiences. A similar exchange occurs between nursery and 1st grade students.

There is parallel support within classes, designed to integrate students of varied ability. Students with additional needs (owing, for example, to dyslexia, autism, or language differences), have access to extra teaching support during their lessons. (This happens mostly in Greek classes, as these are heavily populated.)

In the English section, where classes are under-populated, some classes are merged, allowing students of different abilities and ages to co-exist in a mutually supportive learning environment. Older children refresh previously gained knowledge, and younger children are stimulated through group work with more advanced students. There is also mixed-ability group work within single classes.

### **3. Integration outside the curriculum**

The school also supports various extra-curricular activities designed to promote integration and foster a sense of community.

In the English (primary) section there are daily sessions of *Interactive Greek* for children of the English section, designed to boost their skill and confidence in understanding and speaking Greek. All the students taking the sessions can now read and write basic Greek (and some are highly fluent), enabling them to engage in simple conversations with their peers in the Greek section.

The school takes part in a yearly European online mathematics competition, in which students from all primary schools classes compete as a team against other schools in Europe, thus fostering a sense of community, team spirit, and healthy competition.

School celebrations are also seen as opportunities for cultural and linguistic sharing. At recent Greek national celebrations the Interactive Greek students learned Greek songs and successfully performed them to the whole school community. These performances were warmly received, and staff commented on the atmosphere of unity created. During their performance, the songs' lyrics were displayed in various European languages spoken by school students, including Dutch, Finish, Moldavian, Portuguese, Swedish, and Welsh, as well as in the languages taught in the school (English, French, German, Greek, and Italian).

The recent Christmas celebration offered similar opportunities. It included songs in German and French (sung by children of both Greek and English sections), a dramatization of a popular Greek fairytale, and a PowerPoint presentation by English section students on "Christmas in English-speaking countries".

A planned project on gardening will also offer opportunities for students across the whole primary school to come together to learn and share practical skills in creating and maintaining a school garden.

### **4. Integrating school and community**

The SEE is also committed to reaching out to wider communities, including parents and local people.

The school has a strong and active Parents Association, which, as well as assisting with the running of school, also organizes cultural events, concerts, parties, and bazaars, designed strengthen bonds between staff, parents, and pupils and to raise to the profile of the school within the community.

At Christmas and Easter, school students collect food and other items for needy local families and deliver it in person.

The school also fosters connections with the various artistic communities in Heraklion. For example, school parents recently organized an art project called "Unseen City", in which students, parents, staff and neighbours worked together to create an art event in the street outside the school.

## 5. Integration projects

During the year the SEE also organized and ran various projects specifically designed to promote integration within the school and between the school and other stakeholders. These projects included:

- Penelope Gandhi Project. A very successful school project (in partnership with the University of Oreon) coordinated by Ms Amalia Filippaki (primary school deputy head). This project included co-teaching within the school and beyond. Primary school teachers and students worked alongside students and teachers from other schools in other municipalities (e.g., Rethymnon) learning about the history of weaving and its political and anthropological importance, especially in the light of the current crisis. The project culminated with a school celebration at a local Venetian theatre.
- Interactive Greek (as described in section 3 above).
- Europe Day celebrations. These involved two separate events -- one at the school itself and another at the Venetian Loggia in the centre of Heraklion. The whole school worked on the project for eight weeks, and on the two days of events, students, parents, teachers, and local people celebrated all aspects of European culture, including music, dance, art, food, poetry, games, and photography.
- Teachers for Europe. This project was run by the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade Greek section teacher (Miss Dora Psychogiou) and involved a mixture of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students from both sections. The students worked together and created various board games and races. The common theme was “Water within Europe”.
- The Identity Project. This project was run by the 4<sup>th</sup> graders (Greek section, teacher Evi Kassotaki). Students from both sections of the primary school created identities for themselves based on their names. The whole project was conducted in Greek.

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