

Report on Probation year

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I am currently teaching French and German at Braidfield High School, Clydebank. I completed the P.G.C.E. at St. Andrew's, Glasgow University in June 2004. The prospect of being guaranteed a job with a reduced timetable and a lot of support in place was very appealing.

The department at Braidfield High School is made up of the Principal Teacher, another teacher who has taught here for 28 years, and myself. The school has approximately 400 pupils, which means that fortunately my class sizes are all below 25. I am teaching first and fourth year German; and first, second and third year French.

The Initial Teacher Education at St. Andrew's allowed me to experience three placements in very different schools. Through the language methodology classes, I learned about the communicative approach and how to plan a unit of work and lessons within a unit, amongst other things. This gave me a sound basis on which to build during the school placements. I was extremely fortunate that I was placed in departments where staff were eager to support me and offer me advice. During school placements, I was able to put into practice what I had learned at university. I found it really beneficial to observe experienced teachers actually teach and I learned a lot about classroom management and discipline. This has helped to prepare me for my probation year.

When I started my probation year, I was most daunted by the fact that I am fully responsible for the safety, learning and progress of each child in each of my classes. I was not able to refer discipline problems or homework not completed to the class teacher - I *was* the class teacher. This has actually turned out to be one of the most positive and enjoyable aspects of the year so far. I have been able to build up a good rapport with the pupils I teach and I can monitor their progress over a longer period than six weeks.

With regards to discipline and classroom management, I was apprehensive in case the pupils refused to listen to me or do anything I asked them to do. The rules and routines of the class were set from day one and this has helped to create a good learning environment in the classroom. The pupils know the limits. This is not to say that I have not had discipline problems and days when I have wondered, "what am I doing here?" Thankfully, the school discipline policy is clear, well structured and easy to follow. I regularly ask advice from the PT or other colleagues about how to deal with certain pupils and I feel that I am constantly learning new strategies to deal with challenging situations.

The S1 classes are very motivated and willing to learn. It is very satisfying to see how much they have progressed since August. I have struggled, at times, to find new ways of motivating S3 and S4 and I am still trying to think of innovative ways of teaching new language, getting them to try, and getting them to do homework - not always an easy task! It is also a challenging task marking Standard Grade speaking tests and folio pieces, and although we marked examples in class last year, I do not feel totally confident doing this.

Differentiation has been another steep learning curve, particularly when I make up resources. I think it would be useful to have practical in-service about how to create differentiated

resources and assessments effectively. I also feel that it would be beneficial to have some training in activities that class teachers can do when a language assistant is available. Learning assistants in the classroom are also very useful, however I do not feel completely sure of what I can do to make the most of their assistance.

There are two other probationers in the school and we meet weekly with our mentor. We have had the opportunity to speak to guidance, learning support and pupil support in the school. These meetings have complimented the core CPD training organized for probationers by West Dunbartonshire Council. Courses like "parents' nights & report writing" and "dealing with challenging behaviour" have been practical and useful, although no courses have been specifically for modern language teachers. It has also been beneficial meeting other probationers and discussing issues that we come across in school.

I am aware that after just five months of teaching, I have learned a lot about planning, classroom management, discipline, and pupil interaction. I have also realized that languages can be very difficult to teach, particularly to pupils who are not motivated and those who struggle to read and write in English, never mind French or German. I have enjoyed the challenge of planning and preparing and then teaching lessons that I hope will motivate the pupils. Sometimes I succeed, and this makes me enjoy my job as a language teacher even more.