

“ School is a place to prepare students to meet the world!”

(but not necessarily a safe place) - Sampo Lokki, Assistant Principal, SYK.

Helsingin Suomalainen Yhteiskoulu (SYK) is an independent co-educational day school founded in 1886. The school prepares its students either for the national matriculation exam or the International Baccalaureate Diploma, both of which give student general university entry qualification. All staff are experienced and qualified teachers with university degrees and/or teaching certificates.

Founded in 1886, SYK is the oldest co educational school in Finland. Proud of its traditions yet always seeking to be at the forefront of educational development the school offers its students a broad range of activities in which parents play an important part.

Modern facilities include art and music rooms, computer rooms, rooms for textile work, science laboratories, a library, a language laboratory, a gymnasium and a swimming pool. The language of instruction is Finnish in SYK comprehensive school (grades 3-9) and the national side on upper secondary school. The upper secondary school also includes an IB section (grades 10-12), which is taught in English.

SYK is a school preparing students for their future jobs and intentions. It is a large school with clearly able students. Relationships between staff and students are warm and friendly, students call teachers by their first names, they seem to know each other well.

SYK is conscious of the need to change in an ever changing world, encouraging it's students to ask:

- What is happening around us?
- Why is it happening?
- How do we react to it?

Time:

In the lessons, we saw both teachers and students making good use of time, with students able to learn in a calm environment. At the beginning of lessons, students had time to absorb what they were going to learn, to prepare themselves fully for the lesson, whether it be removing shoes and finding the right seating (cushions in some rooms mixed with desks and chairs), reading a book or text, linking up technology or talking with their teachers. The impact of this was evident as it enabled the rest of the lesson to flow and for their to be a supportive learning environment.

Time has been given to training staff at SYK - the leadership place importance on the quality of professional development, in particular with the change in pedagogy since introducing ipads. They considered how best to change the way of working for staff, giving time for three areas:

- Collaborative planning
- ICT to support change
- Learning environments

The impact of the training is evident in the classroom. Teachers and students are confident in delivery and use of technology and little to no time is wasted in enabling this. Students, as a consequence, demonstrate good independent learning in lessons and are also seen using their ipads around the school between lessons.

Talent:

The Assistant Principal, Sampo Lokki, spoke passionately about the need to prepare the students for the jobs that they will have, for supporting Finnish future industry, for making them global citizens.

There is no standardised testing. There is a culture of trust which allows staff to be trusted in their judgements of student's attainment and achievement. The accountability is based on the teacher's integrity.

Students have the opportunity to learn multiple languages. This is again preparing them for being global citizens and their confidence in English is impressive, as it also was in an observed German lesson. For students, the goal is to be able to explain and express themselves verbally and digitally and they seem well prepared to do that. We saw students who were calm, independent, engaged, resourceful and proud. There is mutual trust between teachers and students which encourages an ethos of risk taking and boldness - students understand and demonstrate the joy of learning.

Professional development for staff supports the needs of the individual - there is personalised training to address needs yet also this culture of trust - classroom doors are often closed - there is not an open door culture and perhaps the best training staff could benefit from would be to observe each other.

Technology:

Leadership have worked with teachers to consider the best approach to making changes and also to using current technology every day in and around school. Significant changes have been made to the training programme for staff to help to embed the new ICT demands on teacher's knowledge - this has been carefully mapped out and has had 3 teacher training days allocated to enable staff to gain confidence in their new skills. The teacher's job is to learn the pedagogy of using ICT, not just to work the computers. The technology has to be purposeful and to enable the students to work in the style they need to be prepared to work with when they leave school.

Ipads are used throughout the school and there was a Finnish lesson where they were used particularly effectively, using a virtual classroom and airdropping work to share with the class. This seemed to be embedded practice for the teacher and class and felt like it was their normal way of working. The class were making their own book on ipads and were producing their own writing. The level of writing was high - there was a real emphasis on grammatical accuracy and the work was crafted to the standard we would expect our students to write.

The school appeared to thrive on a culture built on trust of staff and students and a desire to have them ready for this ever changing world, preparing them exceptionally well for their futures.