

Meeting held at Department for Education with Minister for Schools Nick Gibb MP

Monday 12 September 2011-09-24

Present

Claire Perry MP Chair of APPG Connecting Communities

Chris Jones Parliamentary assistant

George Anang'a Plan UK

Dominic Bond Sabre Trust

Libby Burkeman Tzedek

Catherine Clark Royal Commonwealth Society

Sharon Edwards VSO

Max Hogg Think Global

David Knox British Council

Nick Maurice BUILD

Alex Wright Link Community Development

BUILD members introduced their work stressing the importance of global education throughout the curriculum for young people and the role that school partnerships can play in supporting that education

The Minister made it clear that any international content delivered in UK schools should be firmly grounded in “scholarship” (academic excellence) rather than politicising issues of international development and poverty. The scholarship theme was one that he returned to frequently in the meeting.

It became clear that the language we all routinely use to talk about school linking and the benefits that it can bring to southern schools, plus the advantages of opening the eyes of UK youth to the reality of life in the developing world, was seen by the Minister's as political and proselytising a particular point of view.

Reference to the potential role of school partnerships in teacher training and the benefits of teacher

visits, drew positive support from the Minister on the scope for CPD and UK teacher professional development. He seemed impressed by the account of LCD's work with teachers and indicated that he felt the benefits for UK teachers visiting the developing world went both ways – e.g. that in his opinion many UK maths teachers could learn from the way maths is taught in Ghana/Kenya/Uganda.

The Minister was clear that school partnerships should be demand led and not imposed “from on high”. The Minister pointed out that one of the department's key goals was to reduce the amount of communication that it issues down to schools, so would not entertain the prospect of sending out documentation on the benefits of partnerships. He suggested that more imagination was needed than just posting it on the DfE website and indicated we should be looking for forums and networking opportunities to engage with school leaders and teachers to talk about partnerships and encourage their participation.

In this context, the Minister identified the academies system as the future for UK schools, so aligning an approach with some of the leading academy organisations (ARK & Oasis) would be a good idea in his view.

Examples were given by Plan & Sabre who mentioned ICT connectivity and history projects focussed on slavery and the potential for bringing a global dimension into the curriculum.

Simon Smith (DfE International Education Division) confirmed the exchange of communications between DfE and DFID and the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and that the two departments were working closely together to develop a new international linking support mechanism.

Claire Perry MP agreed that it would be helpful to convene a meeting between DfE i.e. Simon Smith and DFID i.e. Mark Poston (civil servants engaged in UK/South partnership work) with members of the APPG and members of BUILD involved in the educational aspects of partnership linking.

BUILD is following this up.