

Linking to schools in South Africa



Linking to a school in Africa

GUIDANCE FOR YOUR LINK

Planning

We cannot stress enough the importance of planning for your link to ensure that you make the most out of it and that both schools are aware and have time to carry out activities. Planning and communicating can take more time than you think but is well worth it in the long run. Here are some questions you may wish to consider:

Who?

- Who should be involved with this Link?
- It often works best if a 'Linking Committee' is set up. This can include members of the school management, teachers, parents & governors and, if appropriate, pupils
- Could you use sub-committees for those areas of planning that need different expertise? For example curriculum elements, planning for a school event, planning correspondence?

What?

- What do you want to achieve with this partnership? Clarity about your aims might also help you find a suitable partner school. E.g. if you really want to do video conferencing, a school in rural Africa might not be the ideal partner and you might want to consider a European link instead.
- What areas of the curriculum can benefit from the link? Which subject areas do you want to focus on initially?
- A partnership has the most impact if it is embedded in the school across subjects and year groups.

When?

- Be realistic about how long it may take to get a link started. The main aim for the first year may simply be to establish a good working relationship between partner schools and embedding the link within the School Development Plan.
- Plan to review your partnership regularly. If the linking plans are embedded in the SDP then the review process will already be up and running and will not require extra work.

Your partner?

- Take time to find out about your partner school. What are their priorities and expectations for this link?
- Consider your partner school's circumstances and context. E.g. their different term times might impact on joint projects or when you can expect to hear from them.

Correspondence We advise you to begin with the exchange of letters and other information. You could begin with teachers corresponding with teachers, and pupils with pupils, describing each others lives and asking questions. Class to class writing can work better than between individual students to avoid disappointment. Remember to be prepared for a long turnaround period, as post can be unreliable and your link school will be less used to letter writing.

School partnerships are not just about exchanging information; they are about enriching the learning experience so why not plan information exchanges and curriculum projects that allow you to do just that?

- By planning your correspondence, you can help to **create realistic expectations** for your school and your partner school.
- Bear in mind logistical constraints, including the time, money and resources needed to correspond – both for your school and your partner school.
- If possible, maintain regular communication by telephone. If your partner school does not have a phone connection, find out if the head teacher has a mobile phone that you can phone or text. This can be a good idea as post often takes time to be exchanged between partner schools.
- Consider with your students the **level of language at your partner school** and try to pitch correspondence at the right level. Bear in mind that most teachers and students from the South will be communicating with you in their second or third language! This may also be a reason for your partner school to involve mainly older pupils.

Consider a Partnership Agreement with your Link School. It is advisable that you set out formally with your partner school what you both hope to achieve from linking. This can be done on an annual or bi-yearly basis. Having a partnership agreement is good practice and ensures that the link is mutually beneficial, commitment to the link is secured and that progress can be measured. The process of discussing both schools' expectations in order to draw up the formal agreement can be helpful in itself to clarify aims and help to make them realistic. You should aim to agree and sign the agreement within the first six months of your link.

Information Exchange for Joint Curriculum Work The possibilities are endless for joint curriculum projects – pieces of work based around a curriculum theme. It is important that the work is beneficial to both schools – this should be agreed at the outset in your partnership agreement. With each receipt of information the project could be carried on to enrich the next stage of learning.

- Be specific about the kind of information you want so that direct comparisons are possible;
- Design a questionnaire to collect information and keep writing to a minimum;
- Exchange stories to help with literacy and international understanding;
- Work on exploring different topics by keeping and exchanging recordings e.g. climate to be compared and contrasted;
- Always look at existing schemes of work and use the link to enhance these rather than adding extra work, this will help to ensure your link becomes embedded in your school – always check with your partner that the project will benefit them too!

School Events Having a couple of high profile days where the school partnership is celebrated is a good way to involve lots of people in the school link, to motivate young people and help bring the partner school and it's community alive. Try to include as many people as possible (students, staff, parents, governors, community groups, your local MP and local press), try to give the event a theme and communicate this to your partner school. Some partner schools have held similar events on the same day therefore bringing the two communities together.

A school partnership can be an excellent vehicle for **involving the wider community** and can therefore contribute to community cohesion in your school. A greater buy-in and participation across the school community can also help to make partnership more sustainable. Again, it is best to start small and build over time. Bring in community groups where you already have links (e.g. a feeder school, sports club or a faith group). Plan for how you want the wider community to become involved in the link and consult with interested groups. Involving the wider community has been particularly beneficial when organising fundraising events and organising reciprocal visits.

Maintaining the link

- Once the link is established, keep in touch. If you do not hear from your partner within a couple of month or so try again.
- Use the phone to make contact with your school. This is often a very effective way of maintaining communication and sorting out any difficulties.
- Be honest with your partner school about problems or misunderstandings.
- Try to hold an annual event when you focus on your linked school. This may be an African day/week.
- Encourage pupils and teachers to keep abreast of events concerning your linked school's country.
- Keep governors and parents informed about the project.

It can be difficult to start and maintain a school partnership and many schools find it useful to join a scheme that facilitates their link. LCD's Link Schools Programme facilitates links with primary and secondary schools in Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, South Africa and Uganda. We have dedicated staff both in Africa and in the UK and can therefore provide hands-on support for both partner schools, themed learning activities, facilitate correspondence exchange through a courier service and much more. For more details visit www.lcdinternational.org.

Other linking guidance available from

UKOWLA Toolkit <http://www.ukowla.org.uk/toolkitmain/toolkit.asp>

Oxfam guide: Building Successful School Partnerships
<http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/teachersupport/cpd/partnerships/>

QCDA curriculum planning guide: The global dimension in action
<http://www.qcda.gov.uk/15333.aspx>