

Headteachers International Placement
Ekaterinburg, Russia
November 2007

In November I was very lucky to be invited by the British Council to visit schools in Russia to explore leadership and management.

I was a member of a group of 11 Headteachers to visit Ekaterinburg, Russia, for one week in November 2007. We were representing the British Education System and the purpose of the visit organised by the British Council was to share ideas and experiences of leadership.

I visited 3 schools, a Military Cadet Training Centre and a Gifted and Talented Centre.

The Russian staff and teachers in the schools were very friendly and welcoming, and the students eager to learn. In one school we were the only British people they had ever met!

I hope the photographs give you a little flavour of the visit! It was a fantastic experience and I have learnt many things, hopefully these will benefit our school in the near future.

A short summary of some of the perceptions on leadership are:

The schools visited had a strong focus on developing leadership skills in their students and the participants were frequently asked to describe initiatives and programmes currently being developed in the UK. There seemed to be less drive to develop leadership skills in the school leaders themselves.

The leadership models observed in the senior leaders we met varied between individuals remarkably. The Russian system to be very hierarchical with charismatic 'hero leaders' accepted widely. In one case the Head was didactic, upfront and with a huge personal drive and high visibility in all events, the school council, strategic working parties etc. However, another Head, much older than we would find in the UK, inspired her team as a quiet, warm person who motivated her colleagues with a very different style of leadership; they clearly greatly admired her. Both styles seemed to work within their own context. However, distributed leadership to curriculum leaders and pastoral leaders was not very evident.

Leaders in Russian schools have no equivalent training to the NPQH/LPSH programmes. However, they are expected to undertake and publish their own educational research, in some cases as a route to a PhD qualification. Teachers likewise are required to undertake research every 5 years if they are to have their contract renewed.

The role of a Russian Headteacher did not seem to encapsulate the concept of 'leadership of learning', and Assessment for the Learning practice together with a lack of learning indicates a more progressive outlook in the UK schools. So also does the apparent lack of structure observation of classroom teaching by Heads. As two participants observed:

"The Heads we met were inspirational beings, well respected, loved even by their staff and had clearly had an impact on their schools, but there was so much more they could do to influence the learning process throughout their organisations."

"The leadership styles that I experienced in Ekaterinburg schools were very sharply focused, thereby aiding close analysis and prompting critical reflection of our models of leadership and my own styles."