

METHODOLOGY AND OBSERVATIONS

At Bourne Community College



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At Bourne Community College, Southbourne

That was the school where I was attached for three weeks. The commentaries in this document are from my experience and from conversations with teachers and assistants there; I have also included interesting ideas that my colleagues from Spain shared at the end of the course.

General comment

This is a small mixed secondary state school located in Southbourne on the western edge of Chichester, between both the South Downs and English Channel. There are around 700 students between 11 and 16

years old. During my three weeks at the school I was attached to the Foreign Language Department, but I spent part of my time observing other subjects like Art, Drama, Music or English.

The way the school was organized was quite different from the schools I have been working in Spain. The relation between teachers and students is far more distant, and both are dressed in a very formal way, students wear uniform and teachers must wear suits. But on the other hand, it shocked me terribly to observe that sometimes students were talking or using mobile phones while they were supposed to be working and the teacher didn't say a word about it, as if they were afraid of correcting students' behaviour. Students were allowed to drink and eat in the classrooms.

The first day at school the Head of Foreign Languages Department, a Spanish teacher also from Spain, told us general things about British Education. Something that struck me was that the salary of the teachers depends in part on the outcomes of the students, and if you are Head of Department, the outcomes of the teachers in your department make also a part of it. Each teacher has **four targets a year**, two of them related to students outcomes.

Teachers have are observed by other members of school and by formal inspectors regularly and as I observed this has immediate consequences to the way they deliver their lessons. They devote a big amount of time to prepare external exams, and the teacher reminds regularly students what to answer if the any people come to class to control their progress. Each student has in the front page of his subject notebook a box with a **target mark** –mark they should achieve at the end of the school year- and notes for improvement, according to the teacher's feedback, prepared for OFSTED –inspection-. That Target mark depends on several items such as the family status, their capabilities, marks got last year... in that box the teacher record marks.

The school expects also **evidence** of the actions taken about disadvantaged students –with family problems or any other kind-. But some human aspects of Education are not easy to record with evidence and as that is what OFSTED is looking for it may be sometimes forgotten.

All teachers are dressed in a very formal way, men even have to wear suits, and all of them carry a visible identification card. There are lots of **assistants** in the school, and also some that are just in charge of covering absent teachers' classes.

There's a person working in the reprographics that is also in charge of **marketing**, newsletter... and taking care that there a corporate identity is maintained. The school runs like a business and consciously builds a positive public image.

Timetables

The school has **two different timetables**, because not every subject takes place on the same days each week. Year 9 students have during week A five periods of mathematics, while week B, just one. All students until Year 9 have Cooking classes, Drama, Music and Art and I think this is a great way to motivate younger students and to boost their creativity.

They have **five periods** in a school-day and two breaks. First they have 15 minutes of pastoral time with the form tutor –which is the same for their 6 years at school-; then two periods followed by 15 minutes break and another two periods. Then they have 25 minutes time for lunch and before starting the last period, they get **5 minutes time for reading**.

At the beginning of the day there is a **ten minutes briefing** in the staff room, so that if there is any issue all teachers know about it and may keep an eye on it.

They hold an **Assembly** every morning. One day the Year Leader presented some personal achievements, before becoming teachers, of some members of staff, to show students that they did important things in the real world as well. It is another way of “selling” the school. In the staff room they have a board to celebrate special achievements of both teachers and students.

Motivating elements

The **library** or the reading hub: it is a friendly room with sofas that encourages reading. In another Secondary School a colleague told us about warm and nice spaces with soft music for students to use if they are not feeling well, free spaces to get peace of mind. There had as well spaces for multiple purposes to encourage creativity.

At year 8, students can be **ambassador** for one day; they are at reception and do whatever is needed.

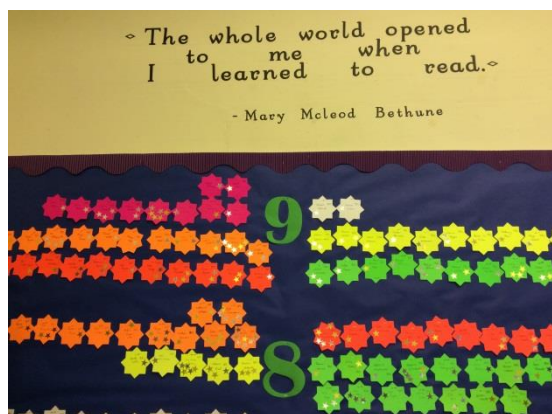
At year 10 all students must have a **work experience** to achieve a sense of responsibility and get in contact with labor life.

For students in Year 11 there is the figure of a **mentor**, a teacher chosen by a student suffering stress. This teacher is meant to help the student speaking to him/her in a once a week meeting.

The **library** is a special place, visually warm and full with inspiring messages that invite to get into reading. **DEAR time** in another school they had something different: “Drop Everything And Read”

They have plenty of **resources** all around the school: computers in many classrooms for students, tactile screen televisions, a laser cutter in Technology classroom; lots of specific materials in Art class...

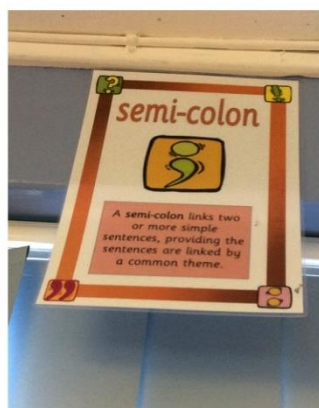
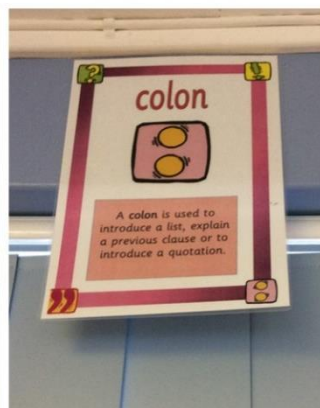
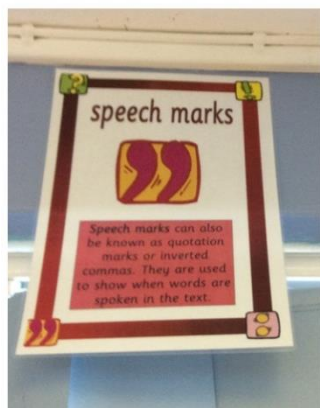
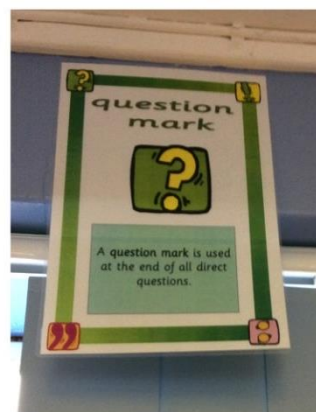


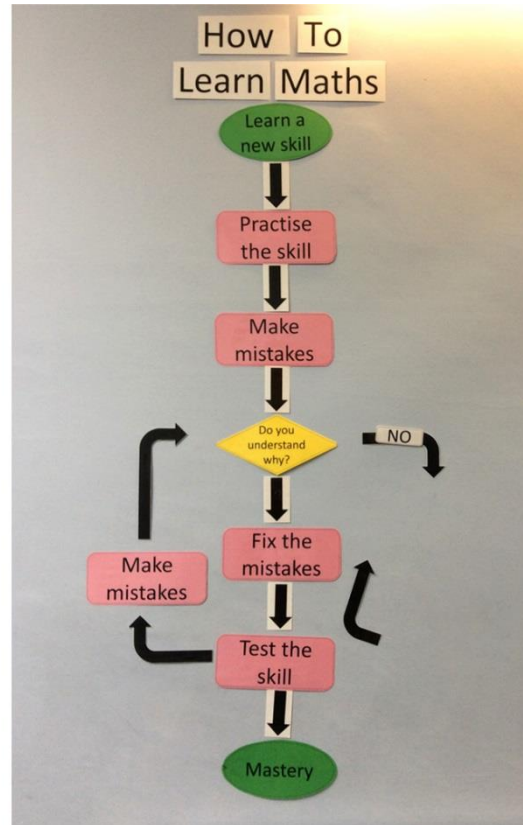
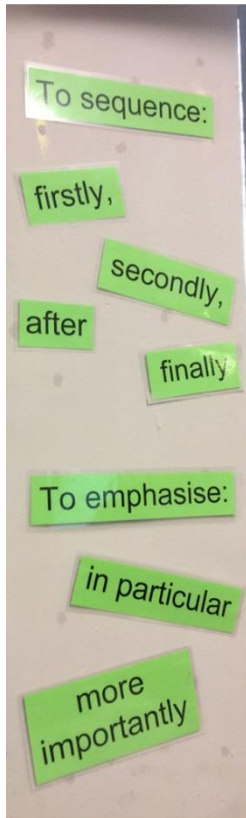


On one of the walls at the library there is a contest chart. A student told me the meaning of all those stars. Periodically, the school organizes a competition about a certain book; all students can answer certain questions and each star has the name of a student that got all the right answers; some students have more golden stars on the colour star, it means that that student achieved the goal more than once. The whole thing encourages competitiveness between students and groups, as shown in the picture. This is one of the points that I don't like so much about the school, even when I recognize that this external motivation works... but it does at the cost of other important values. I missed the human side.

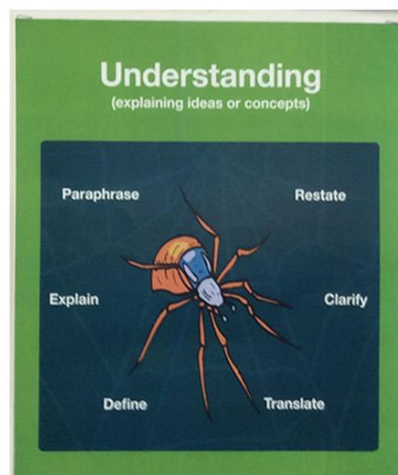
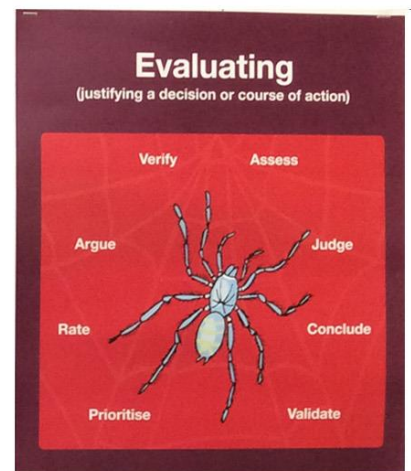
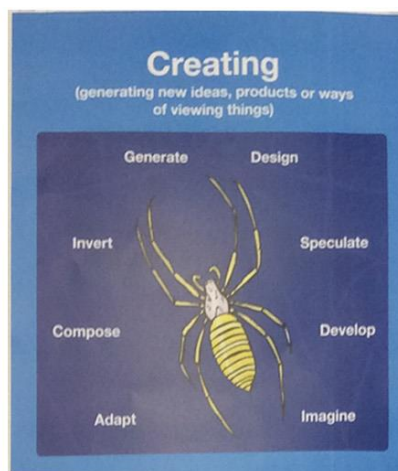
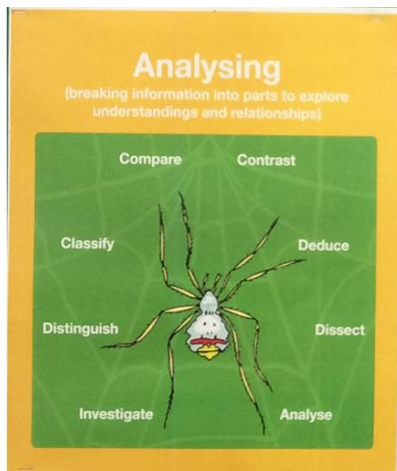
There is a strong sense of competitiveness and external motivation: merits of different kinds, contests... The walls are covered with **positive, encouraging messages**. Sometimes instead of using the walls they hang the posters using washing lines with pegs. But I personally think that though, to some extent, using the walls to convey messages is great, too many posters and displays could mean just too much "noise". In many Spanish schools walls are almost naked, and that is a bit sad as students don't see what others are doing during the classes and, on the other hand is a big contrast to the world outside –television, advertising, video games... as a student told me there, *without it, it would be just boring*.

I find especially interesting the use of posters related to **literacy** and **numeracy** around the school. "*Consistent persistence means we will get there in the end*" was another motto in there.

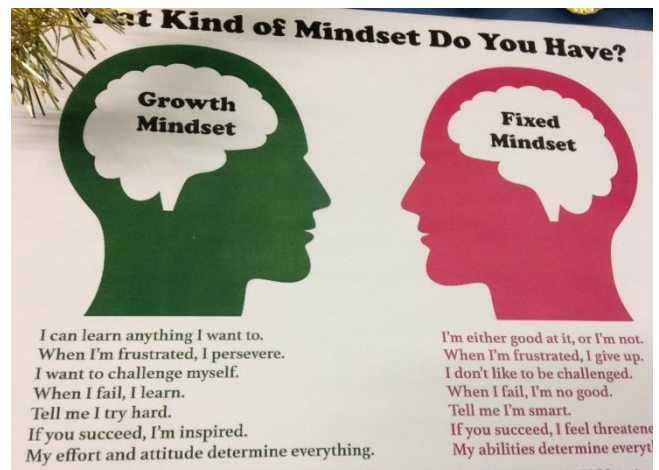
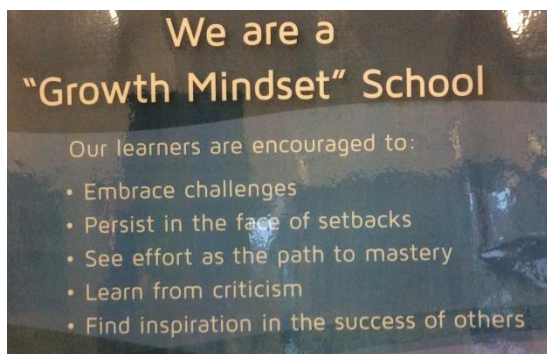




These are posters related to thinking skills displayed in many classes.



Mindfulness is a main policy at school – a culture of “I can do”. This is a strategy connected to the urge of permanently increase the standards of the school, according to OFSTED indicators. And I am in favour of having goals and try to improve things, but I am a little scared of the pressure it brings both to teachers and students. Progress, especially recordable progress, and outcomes are letting the process in a very secondary place. And that lead to not always good practices. That is at least what I witnessed there. I believe this continuous effort to get further could make students either quit or suffer with anxiety, as enjoying the process may not be so easy if you are obsessed with meeting the target. It also makes me think like that how frequently I found the message: *keep calm and carry on*. At such a short age it may not be healthy such encouragement of competitiveness.



Here are some messages related I found in school:

Winners never quit, quitters never win!

Mistakes are just proof that you are trying

Every accomplishment begins with the decision to try.

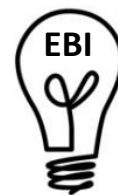
FAIL First Attempt in Learning

Failure – Improvement – Success.

*I may not be there YET,
but I'm CLOSER than I was yesterday.*



GROWTH TIME



Don't forget to Green Pen their written work too!
Check Capital Letters – Full Stops – Keywords

It has become a national policy to **mark** with **green pen**, what went well **WWW**; a **pink** one is used to mark what needs to be improved **EBI** –Even Better IF-, instead of read. It's a visual way for the teacher to remind weak points to review to the students. There are posters in every class with these symbols showing learning as a cycle and review, an important step to make improvements and grow.

Some teachers hang **personal family pictures on their class' walls**. It makes them get closer to the students, or it makes students see that the teacher has also a personal life.

Teachers don't talk more than 10-15 minutes in a row, students are the ones that work in tasks and reflecting... Teachers don't give all the answers, they ask questions to elicit the content... Students get engaged and the brain works!

Overall routines in the classroom

- Teacher don't let the students come to class immediately, they go to the door and welcome them but also tell them what is expected from them in terms of behaviour. I've noticed how important is to do so. If you let students come into your class in a bad behavior, it will take ages for them to settle down and be ready to learn.
- As students don't take **books** nor notebooks home, unless they need to do some homework which is not very common, the teacher prepares those materials before so each student pick up his/her things as they enter the classroom.
- At the beginning of the class teachers usually start showing interest for the students with questions like: *how was the weekend* or *how things are going...*
- The **learning objectives** are usually clearly expressed at the beginning of the class; sometimes they are even written on the board and the teacher makes a mark next to each one as soon as it is achieved.
- Many times teachers, instead of giving the answers and lecturing the students, they **ask questions**, and try to make them guess the answers. Then they sum up all what has been said. It is the same with instructions, for instances: there are two columns written on the board and the teacher asks what the difference between them is... or they could start the class by asking students what they think the sentence written on the board mean.
- The teacher **specifies** before giving instructions for an exercise how much **time** students have to complete it.
- The students have in their **planner three coloured pages**. They use them to show the teacher their level of understanding during the lesson; when asked, they chose the one that suits them better and they raise it up. Meaning: red- *not very well*, orange- so so and green- completely understood. Other teachers use laminated colour cards, for the same porpoise.
- They often use **mind maps** in certain subjects.
- The teachers use **mini whiteboards** with sponge and felt-tip-pen for the students to write their answers while doing a review or exercise in class. That's an easy way for the teacher to check the answers or the spelling. Also students can come up with words, if it is a dictation task.
- A special kind of stamp is used every time the teacher gives **verbal feedback**. Then the students have to write it down.

- Mathematics teacher said that she sacrificed **a day per week** to make **review**. She set 10 exercises and gives time to do them in class in pairs. At the end she corrects them and asks the students the target for each activity. She uses songs for as a way of memorizing rules.
- They **praise** the students oft during the class and they tend to finish the lesson by encouraging students to keep doing so well –even when sometimes it didn’t go so well...-

Interesting practices observed during the lessons

DRAMA

One of the **rules**: if I ask to freeze, you have to stop immediately. **Key words**: pace, pause, silence.

A nice **warm-up** activity: one of them is a very simple one, it requires concentration: a student starts counting from 1; then, on the spur of the moment, another says two, and then three... until two students say the same number at the same time... Then someone starts again from number one. The teacher said: *listen to each other, team work!*

Another **warm up** activity: Year 7 students in circle, each one gets the name of a fruit: banana, strawberry, apple and pear. When she calls out a certain fruit, those students with that name should switch places; if she says fruit salad, all of them have to find a new place in the circle. Later on she adds something: as they move they have to do it in a certain way, like a gorilla, or a butterfly... Students may also suggest ideas. And then back to the circle.

The drama teacher asks the students to read on their own some paragraphs of a **script** telling the real story of a disappeared boy –a touching topic to raise awareness-. Then the students have to choose the more representative part of it and act being characters, improvising on stage or using the real words of the script. They have to **justify** why they chose that part. She asks the students to give feedback to other groups acting, to make comments on what went well and on what could be even better next time.

Year 7- they have to act in pairs **like a hero** or superhero and a **villain**. First they have to **define** both characters. Hero: he dies and come back, a little bit stupid, brave, saves the day, a bit vain... And the villain: evil... They did together a 3 minutes performance using body language -how you stand and how you move-, dialogues...

At the end, she reviews what they were learning and how much they have improved. *Let’s keep the same for the next day!*

ENGLISH

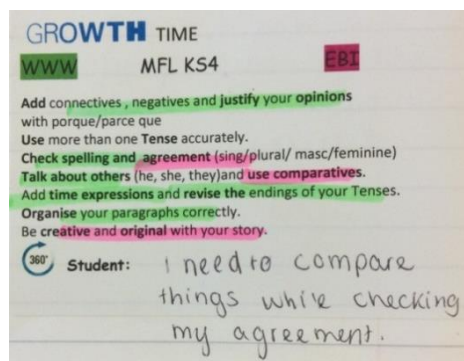
While she registers, she asks the students to copy a slide –from a PPT file- so they are in complete silence. Something that could be done at the very beginning of the class would be asking them to review something seen in previously lessons, just before asking them –nice and **quiet time to take attendance**-. First she asks them to create in pairs a mind map, with **what they think that makes a story interesting and effective**. They have around ten minutes; later she asks them **why** they think those elements work and **how** and **she asks** them to be **specific** in their **explanations**. Finally, she draws a mind map with the ideas from the whole class. She said she is a visual learner that’s why she uses mind maps.

Five minutes before the end she asks them how they think they met the learning objectives and how they know that. She asks them to use key words from the learning objectives as a guide. The answer is given by several students.

The teacher told me **that it is all about what, why and how**. She uses constantly these questions during the class to make them think about the content. She tries to **recall information** that students know beforehand and to **reflect** on things they may have not think before.

SPANISH

On the whiteboard the teacher draw **two faces, a smiling one and a sad one**, below them he writes the name of the student with good behavior and bad behavior –like a warning-, or just those who are working well. At the end of the class, at the door, he **stamps** on their planner those positives as a reward. But each teacher is allowed only to use the stamp ten times per class a day. When you get twenty, you get a **merit**, and if you get 50 you get something else. If you get a big amount of stamps, the head teacher congratulates you personally. If they get 500 stamps at the end of the course they can go to a school trip. But now as many students get that amount, just the 50% of them go to the trip. The form tutor tracks the positives weekly on the internet. They get also badges –pins- they wear on their blazer as merits. I think this could probably work at the beginning, but when the students get used to it many don't even bother.



ART

The students get **feedback** very often through the stickers on their notebooks. This makes it easier and faster for the teacher to check tasks and homework, as she just have to highlight with green *what went well* and with pink *what should be improved*. After WWW and EBI, there is a space for INNT –*I now need to*, where she expects the students to write, in first person, what the teacher wrote at EBI. In this way the teacher makes sure the students read her feedback and, in a certain way, they are

committed to do it.

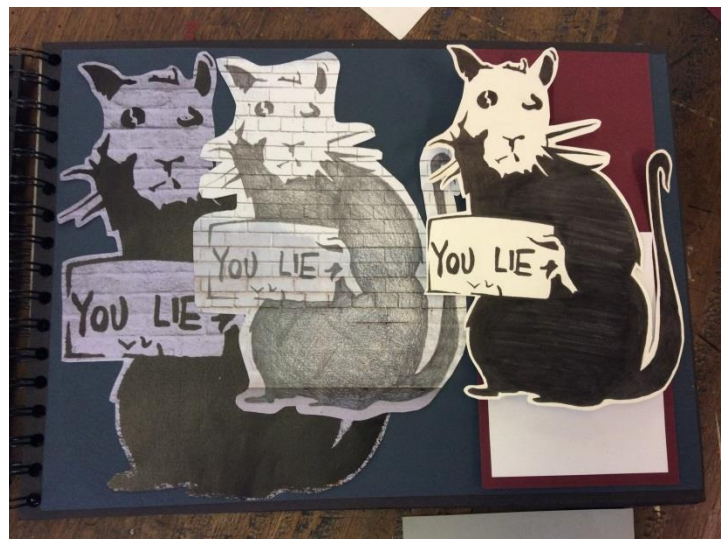
The Art teacher uses a stamp with the school logo for positive marks in the classroom and a different one when she corrects things at home.

Students' progress tracker: creativity, competence, cultural understanding, critical understanding.

She asked the students to create a **mind map** with this structure: name of the artist, information about him/her; style, technique, materials and content subject.

The student asks the teacher and she replays with another question: **I don't know, what do you think?** So that she makes them think about it instead of giving answers.

Though I don't like the continuous way of copying images, I have to admit that many students probably enjoy it, as the result is very effective. **Copying** has been a traditional way of learning to paint, but on the other hand, creativity is sensibly reduce and I found some students that wanted to do things in another way and were not allowed. As students work on books and all their works are seen together, there is a sense of evolution. The teacher thinks tasks with a clear





progression, as they just have Art and no geometry. One exercise is followed by another one and all are connected.

It seems to me that students follow their own pace, but in a too relaxing way, quite a lot of them don't work in the class and the teacher doesn't do anything about it. In the classroom there is often an Art Technician in charge of preparing pain, washing materials...

HISTORY

The teacher starts the lesson to wake students from a Year 11 group with a **quick quiz of multiple choices** about the subject they are going to study. In the first slide of the PPT is written: *Did you know?* It's just a question of guessing, while she registers. After, she checks the answers with them.

Then she starts talking about William Harvey, an English anatomist, and plays a short video for them. Just after the video she asks them what do they think where the main factors in his life, referring to medicine –they said among other things: an enquiry attitude -. They are studying the History of Health. Interesting approach I think, **studying History through a topic!**

After the video she asks them to performance the blood circulation around the body through lungs and heart, in my personal opinion, in a quite childish for their age way and besides that, it takes quite a lot of time as well. She said: “**by doing it** hopefully you'll remember it”. They were doing a **bio-doll**: writing key information -positive impact, factors that helped; negative impact, limitations and belief, achievements- and then, cutting and sticking papers on a silhouette of a man, where they also add the face of W. Harvey. At the end of the class she uses a small quiz to review, just raising hands.

In general, I find the **rhythm** of the class too **slow**, the level of achievement in a single lesson is quite low comparing to a History lesson in Spain for the same age, 15 years.

The week of the 11th of November they spent a lot of time working on the **V.E. day** –Victory in Europe in Second World War. They covered the class with posters about Hitler, the German censorship, how they brainwashed the people in Germany...

MUSIC

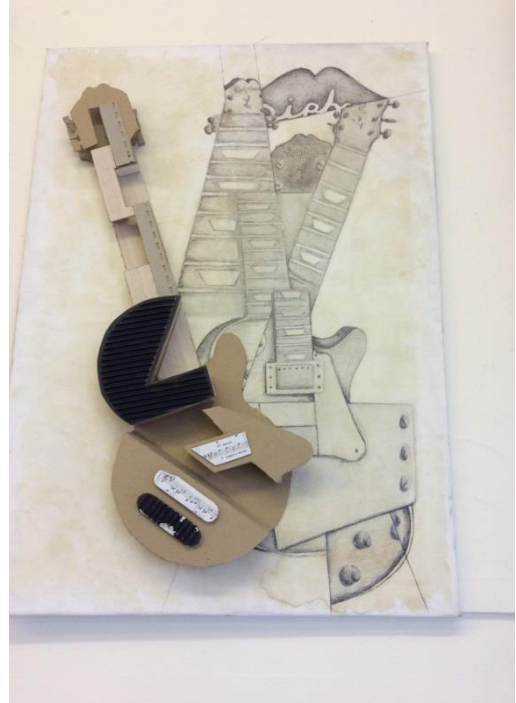
Mr. Lloyd has classical background music. He's enthusiastic and treats the students warmly, which is something not particularly often in the school. There are lots of electric pianos with headphones. The students are quiet and the teacher explains something short and asks them to repeat it with him. With Year 7 he uses **Class Dojo** for management, on digital screen so the students can add themselves a positive if they answer properly. The questions are partly asked by the teacher, but also the students decide what to ask and who. He practices also **spelling** with the new vocabulary.

The teacher **asks not only people raising hands** but also people who don't do it. He uses a program that chooses **names at random**. They love that.

With Year 9 the teacher asks who knows anything about Beethoven and keeps **eliciting the content** through questions.

There is another music teacher that takes one by one into another class to rehearse music. The teacher, before the task, asks them how well they think they will do it.

In Bishop Luffa, teachers use **subject-specific literacy mats** –with specific vocabulary and useful expressions- that students have on their tables to help them while working. This is a clear and easy way of using scaffolding in class.



They share twice a year their projects with parents and other people in the school in an **Assembly**. While I was visiting the school a **Careers fair** took place in one of the Gymnasium, a fair such as Aula in Spain.

Selecting names at random

- **On the corner of every table** the teacher has a **card** –it could be any type- . She uses it when she wants **to review** with a round of questions: everybody is paying attention and thinking because she just will pick one up after shuffling another **deck of the same cards**.
- Another way to choose who is next: use a nice cup or bottle with **sticks** decorated with the **students' names** and just pick one whenever is needed.
- Or use **the pegs of fate**. In a basket their names are in decorated pegs that the teacher uses in the same way than the sticks.

