

### 3.3.4 Parents' Day at Pablo Picasso Saint Etienne du Rouvray

#### Background information

In France education is compulsory and parents do not choose the school their children go to. The children must go the school in their area. This has meant that head teachers and class teachers have not felt it necessary to involve parents directly in the life of the school. Parents are invited to specific Parents' Meetings. Most of the time the parents are not invited to take part in activities in school or work with the However some head teachers see a need for more parental involvement. This is especially evident in schools with students from a migrant background. Some of these students have family problems and are not ready to learn when they come to school. These head teachers are trying new approaches to involve parents.

This is an individual experience in The « Academie of Rouen » of encouraging parental involvement in school.

The school has students from a migrant background. Some of whom have difficulties to integrate into the school system. The school decided to involve the parents in the life of the school.

This example was chosen as a new initiative in France.



Collège Pablo Picasso – Saint Etienne du Rouvray

#### The School Context

The Pablo Picasso secondary school for pupils aged 11-15 is situated within the greater Rouen conurbation. It is a school which is classified as "challenging" owing to its pupil intake originating from a variety of foreign countries.

At Pablo Picasso School in St Etienne de Rouvray, 60% of pupils are of foreign extraction (30% Portuguese and 30% from the Maghreb in North Africa).

The significant Portuguese school population is linked to the history of this town and that of its neighbour, Sotteville-les-Rouen. In fact, during the Second World War the neighbouring town of Sotteville was completely destroyed and Portuguese immigrants were sought for its reconstruction. These Portuguese families were accommodated in Saint Etienne de Rouvray in the few houses that were left standing. After reconstruction, the families remained in the town. The second wave of immigration, which occurred later, consisted of people from the North African Maghreb, who, like in the whole of France, were looking for work and a more hospitable social context.



## The Issues

Transition to secondary school is nothing less than a trauma for pupils and families who leave the protected system of the primary school with just one single teacher and privileged direct contact with this teacher in order to enter into the unknown and more anonymous system of the secondary school.

But for these families who have never known schooling in France and who have only had the traumatizing experience of entering the system as a child themselves arriving from outside France, their anxiety is even more acute.

Added to this malaise is the problem of a low literacy in French, linked to a lack of progress at school or poor teaching. Instead of asking questions, these parents will retreat, not come to information evenings in order not reveal their lack of knowledge and remain disconnected from the schooling of their child. Parents who show no interest in school make for apathetic or passive parents. In order to resolve this problem, Madame Cotin, the Headteacher of College Pablo Picasso, has taken some measures beginning in 2007 concerning the admission and transfer of families and children into the first year of secondary school.

## Aims and objectives

The idea is to put all parents at the same level of finding out what the new school is like, whether they come originally from France or from another country, since they are all in the process of discovering a new system, i.e. the secondary school. Here the idea is to create a parents' induction day on the 1<sup>st</sup> September of each year.

Thus, placed in the same context of 'new parents', all parents, even the most reticent, will summon up the courage to come, ask questions and show interest in their child's education. They will also learn how to network among themselves and, in so doing, become better integrated.

As for the idea of creating a parents' induction day on the 1<sup>st</sup> September of each year, this event will be advertised in the local press in order for it to become clearly identified.

## Timetable

The day will run according to a tight schedule like a school time-table with breaks built in.

### 8:40 a.m.

#### Arrival of parents and Year 7 pupils.

The day is devoted to them and there is no other pupil in the school.

### 9:00 a.m.

#### Class registration

The Headteacher calls each pupil by first and surname to make up each class.

We are in an "education priority zone" and classes have a ceiling of 18 pupils and there are four classes in Year 7.

Gradually, as the registration progresses, the class teacher leads off the class for which he or she is responsible for the year into a classroom, while the parents enjoy a coffee break in another large study area.

In this larger room they see a PowerPoint presentation with photos introducing them to the school buildings, the general organisation of the school, the list of teachers and the administrative staff structure. It is also the occasion for them to make contact with parents of pupils of the same class and exchange some words.

### 10.00 a.m.:

#### Welcome by the Headteacher.

A document describing how the school works and a timetable for each class is distributed to each parent. Information on subjects taught and on the school's rooms and facilities are then given directly to the parents in the course of the Headteacher's address.

Parents are reminded about their legal responsibility to send their children to school and homework diary is explained.

In this diary they are shown the pages where they can find the contact details of the teachers of their children, the pages which are used for an exchange of information between the family and the teachers ( dates of meeting, personal messages, etc..) as well as pages that are used for requests for appointments.



Madame COTIN, Headteacher of the school

### **11:00 a.m.**

Parents join their children in their classroom where they have received their school books and have had their timetable explained by their teacher. All the teachers then go to introduce themselves to parents and pupils, as well as explain the various rules for each subject. The first visual contact has thus taken place between parents and teachers of the class and an initial verbal exchange can be made.



The canteen

### **12:30 p.m.** **Meal in the school canteen.**

The parents are cordially invited by the school to eat with their child free of charge with the 'subversive' purpose of getting to know the system. It is self-service and both parents and children queue up like on a school day carrying their tray. It is convivial time when parents can meet and strike up contacts with each other.

### **14:00 p.m.**

End of the first day in class, parents and children return home.

For the last two years this arrangement has allowed a significant increase of the number of meetings between teachers and parents.

It is reported that at the first parent-teacher meeting which takes place one month and a half after the beginning of the school year:

- 70 % of parents come on the day of the meeting
- 15 % come at another time making an individual appointment
- 15 % will be contacted by telephone.