

# Kerala Community Supplementary School (KCSS)

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## **Introduction**

Kerala Community Supplementary School (KCSS) was set up by a group of eight parents who met and got to know each other at various cultural events in Ipswich. They were all from the state of Kerala, which is on the south west coast of India. They decided to set up a supplementary school, as part of a wider cultural organisation responding to the needs of Keralites living in and around the town of Ipswich in Suffolk.

Set up in May 2010, KCSS provides out of school learning activities for children and young people aged 5 to 18, to support their social integration as UK citizens and raise awareness of their cultural heritage so that they can celebrate the best of both worlds.

The supplementary education programme aims to develop children's language skills in both English and their mother tongue, Malayalam (the most widely spoken language in Kerala).

KCSS also runs dance, karate, and music (keyboard) classes, maths and (English) reading club, personal and leadership training, educational outings, nature projects and holiday clubs. It is active in the local community and carries out partnership projects with Ipswich Council, mainstream schools and other voluntary and community groups.

KCSS is a registered charity and has an annual turnover of approximately £11,000.

## **How the Supplementary Schools' programme began**

The founding members of KCSS all got involved with the mainstream school that their children were attending, St Alban's Catholic High School. At an open evening, their children performed a dance typical of their native state, and the parents prepared food for the evening. Impressed by what they saw, two teachers asked them how the school could support the community to celebrate their cultural heritage. The parents said it was difficult to run activities as they had no venue at the time. The Assistant Headteacher agreed to host them in a classroom at St Alban's every Saturday at no cost.

At this stage, the parents had not heard of the term 'supplementary education', but because of these weekly activities, they were invited to a meeting held by the County Council and hosted by Young Suffolk which is responsible for its youth services. They were then invited to a further meeting along with the Extended Schools' Programme Manager and the Inclusion Manager for English as an Additional Language. This was to explore the potential for a supplementary school that would be supported by Young Suffolk and by the National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education.

The parents did not have any teaching experience, but came up with a creative idea: parents would lead the sessions and they would ask their older teenage children to act as junior volunteers to support the classes as they already had experience of what worked in a mainstream school classroom. They would develop their confidence and leadership skills whilst, at the same time, supporting the progression of the younger children.

The very first session supported 28 children aged 5–11, to learn about Kerala and the Malayalam language. They were supported by one volunteer parent and nine junior volunteers aged 14–18.

### **Getting the mainstream schools on board**

Getting the first mainstream school on board was relatively easy as most of KCSS's students attended St Alban's Catholic High School. The Headteacher of the school at that time, Mr McGarry, was happy to provide premises for the supplementary school as had already heard about the good work that they were doing from his Assistant Headteacher.

Initially, St Alban's offered to host the sessions free of charge, but later introduced a charge of £10 per session. When a teacher from St Alban's went on to work at Northgate High School, she started to organise annual multicultural festivals here, and invited KCSS and other community groups to run various workshops so that the children and young people there could celebrate different cultures and backgrounds.

### **The programme**

40 families are registered with KCSS, and 45 children between the ages of 5 and 18 participate in its various activities. Specialist tutors for dance, karate and keyboard lessons are paid, while nine young volunteers and the six adult volunteers work together to deliver language classes and other activities. Although they are not paid, they bring boundless enthusiasm and commitment to the programme. The supplementary school is now over-subscribed as many have heard of its success through word of mouth.

The children work towards accredited outcomes for learning outside of the core curriculum (e.g. English, maths) and use a 'passport' to record their progress at the supplementary school. The passport records points for hours of additional learning accumulated and those points result in awards named after professional qualifications so that these become familiar to the children. They can receive certificates, diplomas, degrees, masters, doctorates and even fellowships! At an annual 'graduation', children are recognised for their hard work and this further contributes to their aspirations.

Suja Varughese, who coordinates the School said that: *"having the passport is a fun way to introduce qualifications and the expectation that they will all go on to further and higher education. We also want to raise their confidence. We have a lot of performances which help to do that. The children like attending here because they have made good friends who they enjoy seeing."*

KCSS has received widespread recognition for its work. It received a Bronze Award from the National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education and the Lite Quality Standard from Community Action Suffolk, both of which recognise KCSS as a well-run organisation and safe provider of services. As a result of its participation in the Cleaner Ipswich Campaign, KCSS's work was featured on the local Suffolk radio station. As a recipient of a grant from BBC Children In Need, KCSS's work also featured in their BBC television campaign.

In 2012, KCSS won the British Academy Schools Language Award for "creative foreign language teaching". It was one of 15 supplementary and mainstream schools to receive this award out of 159 applications. A DVD made by the students as part of the submission was well-received by the judges as it strongly demonstrated the enrichment, enjoyment and skills' development that KCSS provides its students.

Partnerships are an important part of the supplementary education programme. *'We want our children to be well-rounded UK citizens that are both proud of their heritage but also positive contributors to society. For this reason, we have made an effort to set up local partnerships so that we can show our children how important it is to help and support others.'*

The children have worked with the Safer Neighbourhood Team to clean up Ipswich, and got involved other projects through KCSS's links with Young Suffolk, Suffolk Children's University, Suffolk Constabulary, Children & Young People's Services, Suffolk County Council and the Rotary Club of High Suffolk. Their partnership approach has sometimes led to financial benefits too. For example, after meeting representatives of the Rotary Club at an annual Indian Mela event, they helped KCSS to fundraise £2,500 by jointly organising a fundraising dinner attended by 150 Rotary Club members, who each paid £20 per ticket.

## Finance

All families registered with KCSS pay an initial membership fee of £10. They pay additional fees for the dance, keyboard and karate classes, which are subsidised by the partner mainstream school.

Karate classes are £2 per session: £1 is paid by the school and £1 is paid by the family. Keyboard classes are paid in the same way, but they are more expensive at £9 per session. Dance sessions are sold in groups of four which costs £20. Again the family and the school each pay half of these costs. Overall, these fees contribute about 10% of KCSS's income.

Due to the British Academy Schools Language Award, KCSS received a prize of £4,500. In 2012-13, volunteers and trustees also secured funding from Children in Need (£3,200) and through the Young Suffolk Maths' Challenge, they received £1,500.

The cost of paying specialist teachers of dance, music and karate made up 50% of total expenditure. Outings and other activities for students made up just over 20% of expenditure, while venue costs were only 8%. As many of KCSS's activities are run on a voluntary basis by parents and teenage children, this helps to keep the delivery costs low.

KCSS also makes a donation to charity each year. In 2012, it chose to support a children's hospice.

Financial Year	Income	Expenditure
2010-11	£8,070	£5,011
2011-12	£6,518	£5,583
2012-13	£11,225	£8,565

## What next for KCSS?

By working in partnership with schools, other organisations and local agencies, KCSS has been able to publicise and show the impact of its work. This has led to other opportunities and additional sources of income. The management committee aims to continue this approach.

The model that KCSS uses, where older children support younger children in their learning alongside specialist teachers and parent volunteers - is not without challenges. *"As the children are getting older and thinking about college and university, we need to see if the 12 and 13 year olds are ready to take the step-up and support the delivery..."*

News of the supplementary school has reached many people outside of Ipswich, and KCSS recently registered three new families, one of which had moved to Ipswich from Norwich when they found out about the thriving Keralan community there. The other two families will travel from Bury St Edmunds to attend the School. The management committee is confident, that by continuing to involve new families in KCSS activities, there will be enough children who will develop the skills and confidence to take on a volunteer role as they get older, with support from parent volunteers.

In order to meet the increasing demand for its services which requires more space, trustees are seriously considering hiring a building to share with other supplementary schools. This may be a better option financially too, because St Alban's High School has gradually increased its charges to £30 per session.

St Alban's continues to recognise KCSS's achievements. Shortly before retiring, its Headteacher, Mr McGarry, had this to say:

*'The work that you do adds an important dimension to the school and I think that the range of activities that you provide the students with are quite exceptional... the school works hard in terms of its community cohesion and that its facilities can be used in a way that enables you to maintain your culture, is important.... I've been impressed by what I've seen and there's an opportunity to give your work greater exposure ... through assemblies or even through other areas of the curriculum. Academically you are very good role models, committed to the work and you achieve very good results. The example that you set is second to none...'*

It is clear that there is no shortage of support for the work of Kerala Community Supplementary School and this bodes well for its future.