

Intensive Greek language courses: the sole difference between isolation and inclusion

A NEW fast track Greek language course for the children of expatriates attending state schools has been introduced after a series of incidents involving truancy, bullying and anti-social behaviour amongst foreign pupils.

Local education officials have found it an increasing challenge to find the resources to help some of these children, most of who arrive at the school speaking no Greek at all.

Media reports last month suggested that some British expat students were disrupting lessons at Paralimni high school, with one newspaper claiming that antisocial behaviour was affecting the safety and well being of teachers and fellow students at the school.

Despite the incidents being played down by authorities, headmistress Melani Hadjicharalambous did acknowledge that there was a serious problem with the language barrier.

"Of course some new pupils caused problems, that was because they sat in class and did not understand anything at all, this new Greek language scheme is designed to help them learn quickly," she told the Sunday Mail.

Paralimni high school has a higher number of English speaking students in comparison to most other schools in Cyprus, because of a high percentage of expats moving to the area with teenage children.

Discussion amongst expats about the problems relating to the language barrier have been rife, with several parents reporting that their children had come under pressure to break the rules by friends.

Some parents have complained that their children have been skipping classes, been subjected to 'anti British' history lessons and had their viewpoint ignored by teachers and officials.

"We found out after the second time our son missed some classes, he said the other boys called him a chicken and other names if he did not skive off with them, he really didn't want to which is the sad thing," one mother told the Sunday Mail.

It has been common for the British students to stick together, especially boys, who often leave the school grounds just moments after the morning register.

"We found out our son was bunking off from a neighbour who saw him in the cafe at a local supermarket. There was a lot of shouting and arguments with the upshot being that he said he hated school and wanted us to take him home to Scotland," she added.

In recent years Ayia Napa, Protaras and Paralimni have proved popular destinations for younger expats with kids.

Hadjicharalambous said the recent influx of foreign students came from across Europe and had changed the

makeup of the school system.

"We have about 40 foreign students, not just British, but also Turkish, Ukrainian, Russian, Bulgarian and other nationalities. It is very multicultural."

The surge of English-speaking students attending state schools, which in the past have been predominantly occupied by Greek Cypriots, has meant officials and teachers within the education system have had to learn quickly to deal with the new status quo.

"It has not been easy for everyone, but we are really seeing a difference. These new lessons teach foreign pupils seven hours of Greek a week. They no longer have to attend history or religious studies, they work on Greek language. We are really seeing progress very quickly."

Paralimni high school is one of 16 schools that have adopted the programme aimed at integrating all foreign students into the state school system. In short, students will skip lessons deemed 'non essential' to attend intensive Greek courses.

It's thought that the small classes, consisting of just eight pupils and frequency of the lessons should help many students attain a workable knowledge of the Greek language within months.

The new intensive courses are designed to make life less stressful for some students, who found sitting in a classroom unaware of what was happening intolerable – thus prompting some to misbehave.

Education experts say it is possible for teenagers to adjust, but it may take longer than for younger children and getting used to a new education system and leaving friends back in the UK are two of the main difficulties for the older child.

In an interview with the Sunday Mail, District Inspector of Higher Education for Larnaca and Famagusta, Sotiris Eleftheriou, said any problems with disruptive children is born from language barriers. "We knew that students who don't speak the language could be a little bit nervous in class and even disobedient or unwilling to follow instructions. It is completely normal behaviour for every foreign speaker entering a new system. The problem is, and has always been, the language."

Eleftheriou was upbeat about the fast track language scheme, which he said was already proving to be a massive success, despite only being in its infancy.

"This pilot programme is working, the students who pick up Greek quickly can then join the system with other students, we are enthusiastic about this and we think problems will cease."

Paralimni high school is also trying to create a stronger communication link with the parents of foreign children by organising parent-teacher meetings to discuss any problems that students face.

PREMIER CALLS ON BANKS TO CUT RATES

Premier Nathan Rees welcomed the Reserve Bank's decision to cut a full percentage point off its key cash rate, reducing it to 4.25 per cent.

"This is great news for homeowners and for those looking to buy their first home," Mr Rees said. "I am now calling on all banks to drop their interest rates in light of the Reserve Bank's decision."

"If today's cut was passed on in full by lenders, borrowers with a typical 25 year \$300,000 loan would save about \$193 a month in payments or \$58,000 over the life of the loan. "Frankly there is simply no

excuse for banks not to pass the full cut to their customers," Mr Rees said.

"We know they already do well – in the last financial year Australia's major banks made a combined after-tax profits of more than \$15 billion.

"While we should be proud of their growth and strength in the current economic climate, now, more than ever, their focus needs to be on encouraging confidence back in the market rather than profiting from the Reserve Bank's decision.

"In fact, banks should be looking at their rates for all products especially credit cards and be

lowering them to suit the current economic climate.

"While people have had some respite with lower petrol prices, they are still paying too much in bank fees and charges."

Mr Rees said that housing affordability was a national challenge and required all levels of government, industry and banks to play their part. "Economists and Industry experts are now saying that the property market is slowly starting to improve," Mr Rees said. "I recently announced a \$3000 boost to the existing \$7,000 first home owners grant and that, coupled with the recent boost by the Federal Government, means people building a new home or buying a newly-constructed home now receive a total of \$24,000 to help establish their new lives.

"These initiatives combined with the fall in interest rates, if passed on in full by the banks, make buying a home more affordable and gives renewed hope for first home buyers who have been facing a pretty bleak future trying to break into the housing market in Sydney.

"Importantly it also gives a shot in the arm to the NSW construction industry which has been hit hard by the global economic downturn.

"The Government has responded and now the banks need to come to the party."

Calling all Phanariotes and their descendants



Were you born or raised in the Phanari district of Constantinople? Are your family roots from there? If so, the Hellenic Studies Program at California State University in Sacramento needs your help. An ambitious new project titled the Phanariotes Project, the Hellenic Studies program in California is working with the Centre International de Recherches Helleniques (International Center for Hellenic Research) at the University of Marseilles, France; to locate, document and research the Phanariotes.

Who are the Phanariotes one may ask? Phanariotes were members of the Greek wealthy that resided in the Phanari district (Fener today) in Constantinople. They had a strong influence in politics, and in the merchant community in the Ottoman Empire and throughout the Balkans.

Today, the Phanari district of the city is where the Greek community still resides and is home to the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

The goal of the project is to put together a documentary film and to write an academic study of the Phanariotes.

Some common surnames that hail from the Phanari area include: Ipsilantis, Kandakouzinis, Komninos, Mavrokordatos, Mourouzis, Negroponte, Palaiologos, Rodokanakis, Vlastos, Zafeiropoulos, and Zarifis.

Think your family has roots to the area, or know someone that does? Make sure they get more information on the website below. You never know where your family lineage can take you.

GREEK TRANSLATORS AWARDED

Effecting closer contact between Greek and foreign literature, the European Translation Centre (EKEMEL), in collaboration with cultural institutes in Athens representing Great Britain (British Council), France (French Institute), Germany (Goethe Institute), Italy (Cultural Institute) Spain (Cervantes Institute) award Greek literature translators every year for their work on classic and contemporary foreign literature. On December 3rd, EKEMEL hosts a literature session in honour of the translators awarded at the Italian Institute in Athens. The award for best translation from English to Greek was attributed to Serafim Veletzas for the book "13 Objects" by Howard Barker. The award for best translation from French was received by Titika Dimitroulia for Viktor Serge's "L'affaire Tulaev" ("The Case of Comrade Tulayev"). The award for the translation from German went to Giorgos Depastas for Jelinek Elfriede (2004 Nobel Laureate in Literature) "Gier" (Greed), Nikos Pratsinis received the award in the Spanish category for Ferlosio's (Cervantes Prize 2004) "Alfanhuv" and finally, in the Italian category, the award for best translation was bestowed on Panayiotis Skondras for Malaparte's "Kaputt."