

One school, 71 languages

1 WARMER: WHAT WE KNOW

Work in groups and fill in the chart to the best of your knowledge.

	... in our group?	... in our class?	... in our school?
How many languages are spoken ...			
What languages are they spoken ...			
What subjects are taught in English ...			

2 WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Skim-read the article to find the words that fit in the gaps. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

- In the UK, a _____ is a secondary school that the local people can use for classes in the evening. At Southfields, kids can also attend school full-time. (para 3)
- When you are _____, you are unable to understand something or think clearly about it. (para 4)
- to not give priority to one aspect; to keep everything equal _____ (para 4)
- to make something better _____ (para 5)
- a place in which people live and work, including all the physical conditions that affect them _____ (para 5)
- When you _____ someone in something, they spend most of their time doing it or thinking about it. (para 5)
- a division in a school day when a particular subject is taught _____ (para 5)
- When you _____, you become comfortable and relaxed in a particular place. (para 6)
- an activity or type of club in which people discuss a subject – often formally – before making a decision _____ (para 6)
- a permanent mark on your skin where you have been injured _____ (para 7)
- When you feel _____, you feel happy about your achievements, your possessions or people who you are connected with. (para 8)
- a word similar in meaning to well-educated and intelligent _____ (para 8)

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ONE SCHOOL, 71 LANGUAGES

by Toby Skingsley



- 1 The kids in a school in south London come from 60 countries. At home they speak a total of 71 languages – at school their lessons are all in English.
- 2 Imagine taking all your school exams in English, even in maths and history! What if you had to talk to your teachers in English every day? In London lots of teens do this – although English isn't their first language. Their families have moved to Britain from other countries, but these kids can't miss school.
- 3 At Southfields Community College, in Wandsworth, south London, the 1,300 pupils come from all over the world – from around 60 countries altogether. "I have friends from Pakistan, Ghana, Nigeria and Britain," **Tifunseyani Mtonga**, 14, from Zambia, says. Between them, Southfields pupils speak 71 languages – more than at any other school in Britain!
- 4 Don't all those different languages make school very chaotic? **Shahid Syed**, 16, from Pakistan, speaks Urdu, Punjabi and a little Pashto. But he tries to make things easy at school. "We speak English in the classroom so people don't get confused," Shahid says. "But at home I speak Urdu as much as possible because we try to keep our culture." Like many Southfields pupils, Shahid tries to balance school life with his own culture.
- 5 London has many multicultural schools, but Southfields can be especially proud. In 2006 it was one of the top 100 most improved schools in the country. This is great because many of the pupils who made this possible spoke little or no English when they first arrived. "We believe the best way for pupils to improve their English is by listening and speaking in class – in a real-life environment," said

Anita Sollis, a teacher at Southfields. "Most teens have some basic English when they arrive, and we immerse them in English in class. It's fantastic how quickly they learn from being surrounded by the language." If kids speak no English at all, Southfields takes these pupils out of class for one period a day to give them English lessons.

Sports and activities are also important. **Ibrahim Omar**, 15, from Somalia, speaks Somali and Arabic. She said after-school clubs helped her to make friends and settle down in Britain. "When I got here, I met friends playing sport. I didn't know how to play the games, I couldn't speak English and I didn't know anyone – but the others helped me. I still have these friends today." Southfields offers a lot of after-school sports and activities – including chess and debating. "Clubs and sports are a great way for people to mix," said Anita Sollis. "It's interesting for the British pupils too because they meet other teens from all over the world."

A lot of kids at Southfields know that education is very important. Some are extremely motivated after bad experiences they had before moving to Britain. **Fadumo Yusuf**, 15, from Somalia, told the British newspaper *The Guardian* that she saw kids shot dead in her home country. She even had to hide under her desk at school so she wouldn't get killed. Once, she was shot in the hand and still has a scar. "When I came here, I didn't know any English," said Fadumo. "Now I'm preparing for my GCSEs."

But Southfields offers much more than exams. It's a chance to learn about other cultures. **Kristina Dimova**, 13, from Bulgaria, has been there for just a few months. But she's already learned a lot about other cultures. "My friends come from Brazil, so I'm learning about their country and language. I also teach my friends about Bulgarian traditions." Walking around the playground is like a trip around the world. Kids from Italy, South Africa, India, Iraq, China, Somalia, Thailand, Bangladesh and many other countries play together. Shahid knows a lot of the kids and he's proud of his knowledge of other cultures. He said, "It makes you feel intellectual to know people from so many different backgrounds."

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3 FIND THE INFORMATION

Write full answers to these questions about the article.

1. How many languages are mentioned by name in the article? What are they?
2. How many countries are mentioned? Which ones?
3. What after-school activities are mentioned?
4. How do after-school activities help the kids?
5. Which part of London is the school in?
6. What happens if the kids cannot speak English when they arrive at the school?
7. Why is it important for the kids to speak their mother tongue at home?
8. What does Kristina like about the school?

4 WEBQUEST: FIND OUT MORE

Fadumo says she is preparing for her GCSEs. These are British school examinations.

What does GCSE stand for?

How old are most pupils when they take these exams?

What other exams can British pupils take at school and/or college?

How do these exams compare to exams in your country?

5 WRITING: A POSTER

Ifrah goes to after-school clubs.

Make a poster for an after-school club. The poster should tell other pupils:

- what they can do at the club;
- where and when the club takes place;
- why they should attend;
- how the club will help them in and outside school.

6 SPEAKING: EXPLAINING AND DEMONSTRATING

Kristina says that “walking around the playground is like a trip around the world”.

Think of a typical playground game that kids play in your country. How would you explain this to people from another country? Make notes about the game and then demonstrate and explain how to play it – in English, of course!

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KEY

2

1. community college
2. confused
3. balance
4. improve
5. environment
6. immerse
7. period
8. settle down
9. debating
10. scar
11. proud
12. intellectual

3

1. 6: English, Urdu, Punjabi, Pashto, Somali, Arabic
2. 15: Britain, Pakistan, Ghana, Nigeria, Zambia, Somalia, Bulgaria, Brazil, Italy, South Africa, India, Iraq, China, Thailand, Bangladesh
3. Sports, chess, debating
4. They meet and make friends from all over the world.
5. Wandsworth in south London
6. They get taken out of lessons for one period (lesson) a day to give them English lessons.
7. It helps them keep their culture.
8. She has a chance to learn about other cultures and to get to know people from different backgrounds and to learn about other countries and languages.