



SEVEN OAKS
SCHOOL DIVISION
community begins here

Community

B E G I N S H E R E

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École Constable Edward Finney School

A well-rounded approach to education is an apt description for Constable Edward Finney School. The 420+ students at this K – 5 school are encouraged in everything from the academic subjects to expressing themselves in art, music, and physical activity.

"The arts are an integral focus here," comments principal Cathy Horbas, pointing out some of the unique student self-portraits on display around the school.

You will see evidence of the arts in every nook and cranny of the school. You will see the visual arts beautifully displayed in cabinets, frames, and covering the walls in classrooms. The music program is integral to the school day. Filmmaking and animation are a part of the technology learning. Every child in the school made a pottery bowl last year as a part of developing a social conscience and learning about world hunger connected to the Amanhia project. (See Out of Africa.)

"The arts are a vehicle in which every child can be included and be successful," Mrs. Horbas added.

Built in 1989, the school offers a dual track program, with about 156 students in the French immersion track. Like many Seven Oaks School Division schools, Finney also provides a preschool program for parents and children in a dedicated Family Centre room.

"The Family Centre provides a welcoming environment to families, many of which are new to Canada." Ms Horbas says. "It also is a place where we instil the value of learning another language as a natural part of being a Canadian. The preschool programs celebrate literacy through stories, songs,

fingerplays, play and art. Families become comfortable in the school even before they start Kindergarten."

Whether they are in the English or French track, Constable Finney students enjoy an atmosphere that helps them see themselves as part of a broader community. If they participated in the Family Centre as preschoolers, students will have heard about and even tasted foods from different cultures. Some of the English and French classes share daily physical activity times, enhancing a sense of belonging to a place while learning in different languages. All students are introduced to an even broader view of the world thanks to the school's connection with a village school in Ghana (see Out of Africa story).

The centrally located library at Constable Finney, with its glass walls creating an open and welcoming feeling, provides an ideal venue for promoting literacy. The library serves as the hub for many literacy activities at the school. It is a positive experience for students, helping set the stage for life-long learning and literacy.

OUT OF AFRICA

In 2001, Eda Korchynski, a grade 3 French immersion teacher at Constable Finney, spent a year in Ghana. Mme Korchynski wanted to learn more about drumming and to visit some of the local schools. She ended up volunteering as a teacher in a small village called Amanhia (pronounced Ah-men-shee-ah) where she learned much about the culture and made life-long friends.

"The students and teachers all said 'do not forget us,'" Mme Korchynski recalls. "Now we have an 'Africa Committee' of students, teachers, and parent volunteers to help our school learn about African culture and stay connected."

Although communication with the school in Amanhia is difficult – there

are no computers or telephones and paper to write on is expensive – the two schools have maintained a contact and helped students in these distant places develop a kinship with each other.

"We have lots of technology and sports," says grade 5 student Christina, a member of the Africa Committee. "They play soccer with plastic bags wrapped together. We've raised funds to help them buy medicine and school supplies."

Christina and fellow grade 5 student, Sasha, enjoy being able to help out their peers far away and learning about life in Ghana. They also like helping their fellow Constable Finney students learn about Africa.

"We learn about their culture and we have pretended to be part of it," Sasha adds. "We did a performance at Rainbow Stage, dressed up like the kids in Amanhia and with rhythm instruments."

Mme Korchynski and Pat Malis, the library technician at Constable Finney, believe the Africa Committee is important to raise awareness among the students and their families about Africa.

"When our students saw a photo of the Amanhia students taking machetes to school, they were surprised," Mme Korchynski says. "But they have to cut the grass around their school to have a field. Students there do much more to help in their family's daily survival."

"We are broadening the committee to look beyond Amanhia and to other places," Ms Malis says. "We have raised funds to send to the Sudan, for example."

The Africa Committee continues to bring a new perspective to the school and community and, in turn, they help send school, sports, and medical supplies to people in need. The big difference and the best part about how this is happening at Constable Finney School is that the students and their families feel a connection with where and how the funds they raise are being used.

C O M M U N I T Y B E G I N S H E R E

Français s'il vous plaît

Many parents who enrol their children in French at Constable Finney have said it is a gift to their children. Edith Muzyka and Fay Pahl, French language resource teachers, agree.

"Learning any second language helps in your thinking," Mme Pahl says. "We help students learn in a hands-on way, through singing, poems, drama, and using gestures. It helps students who are struggling express themselves."

Constable Finney is fortunate in having bilingual music and physical education teachers, extending the French immersion experience for the students. French assemblies add to the immersion focus and have been motivational for younger students who hear how the students in the higher grades have advanced in their French language skills.

"We also have developed French literacy kits, with audio, games, and hands-on activities to encourage students to take out and read French books and help their parents," Mme Muzyka adds.

Two grade 5 French immersion students, Kirsten and Patrick, have been in the program since kindergarten.

"I like being able to talk to my friends in a different language. It's cool learning a new language," says Kirsten.

"I can help my younger sister with her homework," comments Patrick. "When my family went to Montreal, I used my French."

Both Kirsten and Patrick want to improve their French and become more fluent. Constable Finney will have given them a good foundation on which they can build as they graduate into middle and then senior school.



Quality Daily Physical Activity is the motto at Constable Finney. In addition to gym classes every other day in the cycle, classroom teachers get their students moving in the class, in the gym, or outside. The enthusiastic response to this is evident not only among the students but with the teachers as well.

Teachers Bob Burns (French, grade 5), Ron Solomon (English, grade 5), and Robert Kennedy (English, grade 5) often combine their classes to promote community and physical activity. They also coach some of the many extracurricular activities offered at the school, including handball, basketball, floor hockey, and tennis.

"It's neat that the kids at this age can participate in these after-school sports," says Mr. Burns. "By the time they are in grade 5, they have had 3 years of tennis and other sports and have had a chance to get to know the other kids in the school."

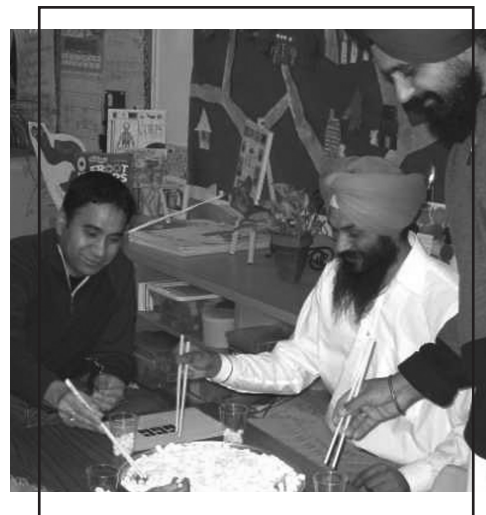
"Some students struggle in the classroom," adds Mr. Solomon, "but they can excel in a sport. Extracurricular activities are a great way to build a relationship with kids because they see you having fun too. It makes it easier for them to approach in other situations."

The tennis 'pro' at the school is Robert Kennedy (English, grade 5). His commitment to the sport has introduced many Constable Finney students to the sport with some, including French grade 5 student Kirsten, wanting to pursue it long after they have graduated from the school.

In the gym class, students have the more traditional activities and enjoy special events organized by physical education teacher Jason Desgagnes. This year, Mr. Desgagnes is organizing winter Olympic and Festival du Voyageur events, the latter a particular interest since he is bilingual.

"Thanks to the great participation of staff, we are able to offer so many activities from September to June," Mr. Desgagnes adds.

If the teachers are enthusiastic, the students are too. Three grade 5 English students, Robbie, Taylor, and Samantha, appreciate the variety of sports they can enjoy.



"It would be boring if we didn't have these sports," says Taylor, who says she likes football and hockey as well as basketball.

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