

Alison Hayes's visit to Fiji



Bula!

I am a trustee of the charity, Deaf Pacific, formerly EMDP (Evangelical Mission to Deaf in the Pacific) <http://www.fijideaf.net/school.html>

The organisation holds fundraising events to support the education and welfare of deaf children in Fiji. Five volunteers, consisting of two Teachers of the Deaf, Alison Hayes and Bryan Whalley from the charity, Deaf Pacific, England, visited the school in June 2026.

The school and hostels

The school and hostel are located about 10 minutes' drive from central Suva. It is the only school for the deaf in Fiji and currently educates about 50 deaf children (with 2 hearing children) from the age of 5 to 21. Twenty-five staff (approx 8 who are Deaf) are being employed in various roles in the school and the two hostels which are mainly funded by donations from Australia, New Zealand and America.



Curriculum: The school uses the Fiji's education curriculum with some language development in unit topics from USA. There are approximately 18 teaching staff with teaching or teaching related certificates in the 6 classes. Some classes are combined with two-year groups. There are no

qualified Teachers of the Deaf and the school does not have an audiologist and a speech language therapist.

The curriculum could be adapted and differentiated to stretch or support individual pupils' learning up to when they reach Year 6 to 8, in preparation for transition to Gospel High School (GHS). However, while it was evident there was a range of abilities in the pupils, I did not see any differentiation in the classes. A few continue their education at the mainstream school to further their study before applying for places at universities. Others usually attend vocational related topics and life skills at the Vocational Technical and Training Centre to prepare themselves for employment.



In school during lessons and assemblies, communication between staff and students rarely uses lip-pattern when signing. Lip patterns are crucial non-manual features. They involve silently mouthing the corresponding English word while signing. They help clarify words that share the exact same handshape or movement, such as differentiating "*nephew*" from "*niece*" or "*son*" from "*boy*".

The school has very limited resources, such as subject books, textbooks and computers. Not one student wears hearing aids or has a cochlear implant. This was agreed between the staff of the school and FAD that pupils will not benefit from wearing them. The audiologists of Hilton, a local funded government building in Suva, can provide approximately 25 students with hearing aids who have useful hearing.



Resources in classrooms: Most rooms display some examples of teacher's teaching but no pupils' work. There are no modern interactive boards linking to computers or useful books such as dictionaries, thesauruses and reading scheme books readily available in class. We did not see any resources such as games, activities, interactive learning tools and books within the classroom.



Teachers: The new head teacher has just returned from Australia, having completed her SEN post graduate course but unfortunately could not sit the deaf education modules because of her Fijian citizenship. As the school is private, professional development for staff is limited. Salaries are generally half of what is possibly earned outside the school. In this case, some staff leaves to seek alternative better paid employment elsewhere. Schemes of work, lesson plans, pupils' assessments, progress reports etc were not shown or seen.

I was quite astonished to see the children themselves cleaning up their classrooms with mops! How wonderful this would be to save school funds in the UK by having the pupils themselves to clean up the school at the end of each day.

There were no samples shown on the wall of the children's own writing or art displays. There were some language displays which was handwritten by the teacher with the accompanying signs in grammatically correct sentences.





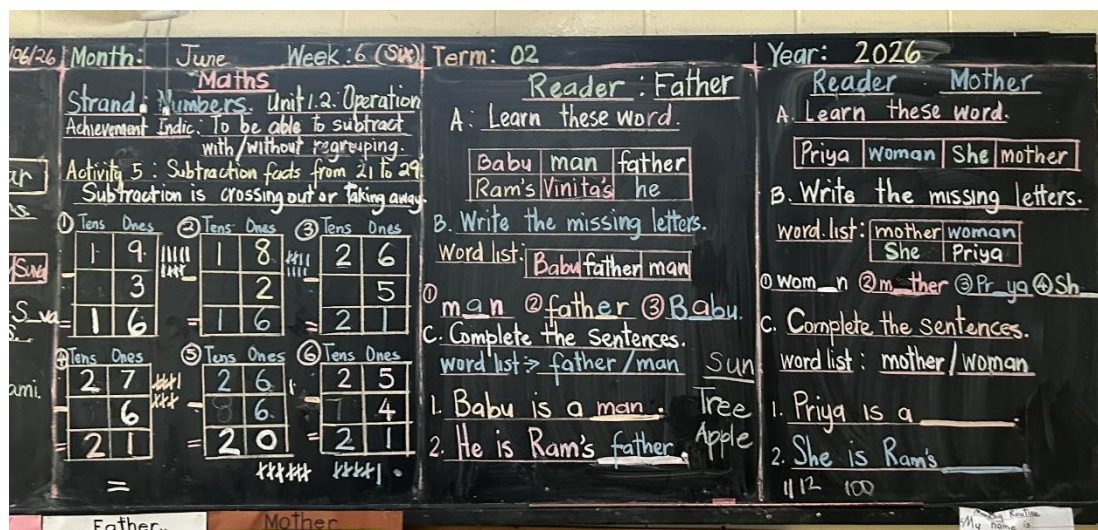
A further area identified for development was the limited availability of educational games, hands-on learning resources, and interactive activities within classrooms. Providing a wider range of age-appropriate educational materials has significant benefits for all learners, particularly for deaf children and those with additional needs such as autism and ADHD. The child who had ASD was basically left on his own in a corner with no hands on sensory activities. I gave him the sensory toolkit from England and he spent the next week completely happy with this, flapping widely every time he touched a particular spot on the toys. There were no specific teaching activities for this child and is something I am keen to develop when I return next year.

I observed that the children are enthusiastic, motivated, and eager to learn, demonstrating a positive attitude towards their education and would benefit significantly from more targeted teaching delivered by qualified Teachers of the Deaf, who have the specialist knowledge and skills to support their language development, communication, and access to the curriculum.



Throughout my sessions, I used a range of teaching resources that I had brought from England, including a laptop to access interactive educational websites, colourful PowerPoint presentations, and educational videos. These visual resources really lit up the children's faces and supported their

understanding of the concepts being taught much more easily than by copying off the board into their workbooks. This was an area of concern. The heavy reliance on copying information from the board, although the children completed this task very neatly in their workbooks, when asked to explain what they had learned, many were unable to demonstrate understanding or recall the key concepts.



I noted that the school does not currently have access to a colour photocopier. This is an essential resource for effective practice with deaf learners. High-quality colour materials, including visual timetables, vocabulary cards, illustrated worksheets, diagrams, and photographs, greatly enhance children's understanding and engagement.

To support the school's continued development, I am pleased to say that the charity will fund the use of a colour photocopier for the children's educational needs, particularly within the early years. I strongly encourage teachers to make regular use of this resource to produce high-quality visual materials, as this will support the children's understanding, improve access to the curriculum, and contribute to more effective teaching and learning.

The teachers in the school did not know much about autism & ADHD. I saw 5 children who I believed had ASD or ADHD but the teachers were unaware of how to differentiate how these children could learn. I prepared and delivered two PowerPoint training sessions: one on autism in deaf children and one on ADHD in deaf children. Both sessions were very well received, with high levels of engagement and many thoughtful questions from teaching staff. Feedback indicated that teachers felt more confident in recognising the unique presentation of autism and ADHD in deaf pupils and in implementing appropriate strategies to support these children within the classroom.

The training focused on increasing staff understanding of how neurodevelopmental conditions can present differently in deaf children, and the importance of considering the impact of language deprivation, communication differences, and sensory needs when planning support. Practical, evidence-informed strategies were discussed to enable teachers to make meaningful adjustments to their teaching practice.



I also introduced the topic of Brain Gym during the staff training session. In my experience, this is a key learning tool which helps children in so many ways. Brain gym exercises are short movement activities (5 minutes or so) that are intended to support learning, attention, and coordination. The teachers themselves tried out various movements during the training session amid much laughter at their unco-ordinated body movements in clashing with each other! They were surprised to learn that by encouraging children to move regularly was beneficial for their physical health, mood, attention, and readiness to learn.

During my visit, I did not observe library books being used or readily available within the classrooms. While the school has a library, it appeared to be underutilised. As shown in the photograph below, many books are stacked in piles, making them difficult for children to see, browse, and select independently. The organisation and presentation of the library limits its accessibility and reduce opportunities to foster a love of reading.



To promote literacy development, I recommended that the library be reorganised so that books are clearly displayed, categorised by age or reading level, and easily accessible to all pupils. A welcoming, well-organised library encourages children to browse, make independent choices, and develop positive reading habits.

The Future of the school

The culture, lifestyle, education, and attitudes on disabilities in Fiji are so different to what we have in England. The Ministry of Education in Fiji are providing access to education for disabled children but are not involved with the Gospel School for the deaf because of its' policy that all deaf children should be educated together with other disabled children at special schools. This was not accepted by the governors of the school as they viewed that deaf children are unique with their own rights in terms of identity, ability and language. The school continues to be supported by charities. The CEO of the school wishes to see the school prosper with professional development for teachers, improving its curriculum, implementing meaningful assessments, improving facilities and building a new hostel.

