

The Companions Programme Guide

The Companions Programme and its objectives

The Companions Programme is the first and longest standing programme of Jesuit Missions (hereafter, JM) for schools. The programme is an exciting school linking scheme between young people in Jesuit and Catholic education in the Global South and Global North. St. Ignatius called his first followers Companions and it is in the spirit of St. Ignatius that the Companions' Programme has been set up.

The Companions Programme aims to:

- Form 'men and women for and with others';
- Enable students and educators to learn more about the work of the Jesuits and Jesuit schools overseas;
- Challenge schools to rethink their educational practice through equitable exchange.

Mission Statement

'The Companions Programme nurtures a global community of schools who enrich each other and improve the world around them through mutual learning'

What this Guide is about

The Society of Jesus believes that networking is essential in order for the Jesuit community to thrive, innovate and respond to the challenges of the world today¹. The Companions Programme is a unique occasion to become active part and parcel of this network and to enable pupils to grow attentive and loving towards people of all backgrounds, treating the world as their house.

This short guide will help you to make the most of the Companions Programme, to make sure that it adds value to your school's educational offer, and that it helps you to form attentive and loving global citizens.

Gioia Caminada

¹ See Jesuitnetworking.org

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What can I share with my partner school?

Which activities can I share with my partner school?

It is a good idea to start off slow with simple activities. As time goes by, do look at your school's curriculum and find activities that can be shared with your Companion school.

Some good websites for educational resources that you can share with your partner school are:

- jesuitmissions.org/schools - You can also request activity booklets for the Companions Programme at education@jesuitmissions.org.uk;
- schoolsonline.britishcouncil.org/classroom-resources (specifically for school partnerships);
- globaldimension.org.uk.

Letters should not be the only means of exchange, because they do not always have educational value and can reinforce stereotypes. Letters can also make pupils disappointed if they don't receive a reply, as overseas schools generally have much bigger classes.

I am short of ideas about what to exchange

Take advantage of international days and religious occasions, and share your work with your partner school. You can order a free global wall planner for your school at globaldimension.org.uk/wallplanner.

Also, remember that there is room for exploring every aspect of our lives: *'The exploration can start with practical activities and daily events at school, for example with food given out during school meals. Pupils can research and analyse where it comes from, and what can be done to make the food chain more just.'* (Emma Scripps, St. Cecilia).

Can I also share other information about my school?

Please do. For example, share information with your partner school about extra-curricular activities and educational practice in your school. For example, how does your school take care of pupils with special needs? How does it nurture pupils' spirituality?

Do we need to have a plan?

Preparing a curriculum exchange plan at the beginning of the year, including activities to be exchanged, dates and staff involved will make your life easier in the upcoming months. However, don't feel tied up to it if all of a sudden you come up with a great idea that you'd like to implement!

Can I share the best activities with Jesuit Missions?

Yes please! Your activities can benefit all schools involved in JM's educational programmes. For example, some of JM's' school assemblies will be based on the work of St. Rupert's Primary school in Zimbabwe, and of the Justice and Peace Group of St. Aloysius College in Glasgow.

How can I make communication work?

How often should I communicate with my partner school?

We recommend to get in touch and share material at least once per term, as communicating regularly via email, social media or phone is essential in order to keep your school partnership going. Besides educational activities, you can exchange news, schools bulletins, photos, general updates... Do not give up if you don't receive an immediate answer. Many schools overseas don't always have internet connection, and sometimes it is easier to just phone them up.

How can I know if my partner school is happy with the link?

Plan together with your partner school about themes and educational activities to share during visits, via email or phone. Choose common goals for the link together (*you can download the star tool from our website*). Ask JM for support if you are struggling.

How can I communicate cheaply?

Skype, WhatsApp and phone cards for international phone calls from your newsagent are the cheapest ways of communication. Skype can be used to phone mobile phones and landlines, too.

- www.whatsapp.com
- www.skype.com/en/

What if my partner school is not particularly responsive?

School partnerships experience bumps and breaks, and a short communication break can be normal. However, if your school has not been responsive for a while please inform the JM office and we will work on the issue.

What if I need some extra help?

If in doubt about how to handle an issue, please make use of JM's support system! For example, JM can support you about communication issues, curricular exchange, fundraising, international visits, etc.

How can I make sure my partnership lasts?

How can I involve the whole school?

Some good ways to involve all students in your school are:

- Sharing news about your partner school on your school's website, in newsletters and during school assemblies;
- Undertaking whole school activities on the same occasions with your Companion school;
- Creating a Companions Programme display in your school's hallway;
- Holding assemblies about your school partnership, especially after visits.

How can I make sure the link lasts for a long time?

In order to make the Companions Programme last, it is important to get the whole school on-board!

- Involve senior management and at least two teachers/chaplains in the partnership, and agree on clear roles and responsibilities.
- Agree and sign a partnership agreement with your Companion School. Partnership agreement texts can be requested at education@jesuitmissions.org.uk
- Make sure the link is included in the school development plan.
- Try to use a calendar and an action plan with deadlines for your exchange.

How can I evaluate my school partnership?

Evaluating the educational impact of your school partnership is important, and JM can offer you support with this – please contact us. New JM material to evaluate your partnership is on its way...

Does my school need to allocate specific funds for the Companions Programme?

This may not be necessary – however, extra funds are often required, especially during school visits. It is a good idea to make sure there is funding to administer the link right from the beginning of the school year.

Is there any training available about school partnerships?

Yes, and involving teachers and chaplains in training about global education is a great idea. For information about free training for school staff, please visit:

- [Jesuitmissions.org.uk/schools](http://jesuitmissions.org.uk/schools)
- <https://schoolsonline.britishcouncil.org/professional-development>

How can I make the most out of International school visits?

Why are international school visits important, and how can I make the most out of them?

International visits can be an excellent way to reinforce your school partnership, if they follow specific educational aims and if educators share their learning with the whole school afterwards. In order to make the most of school visits:

- Lay out specific expectations before travelling. What are your objectives?
- Choose one or two areas for investigation about educational practice and curricular exchange to concentrate on during the visit.
- Plan together with your host teachers about future exchange, or prepare school activities together during the visit. *Please download JM's tools for action planning from our website.*
- Include some time for class observation and for the preparation of educational activities in the programme.

Please download the JM guide to international visits from our website.

Is there any funding to support school visits?

Yes. The British Council offers grants for international school visits under the 'Connecting Classroom' programme (bit.ly/1sW4iUs). The JM office can offer support in the application. Contact us for more details.

Is it important to keep track of the work shared with my Companion School?

Yes. This is essential in order to:

- Evaluate the progress of your partnership;
- Apply for future funding for school visits;
- Make sure the educational aims of the partnership are met.

Shall I evaluate the visit at the end?

Yes please! Please download the *Ignatian reflection session* from our website, and fill in the *evaluation form* from JM at the end of your visit.

The reflection session will enable you to identify what you have learnt during the visit and possible future steps to take the partnership forward. The feedback form will help us to improve the Companions Programme. Thank you!

Shall I train students before visits?

Yes, especially as regards health and safety, cultural adaptation and rules of politeness. JM can offer support both through our international visits guide and tailored training sessions. Please contact us to find out more.

What should happen after an international visit?

After a school visit, it is essential for that educators:

- Fill in JM's evaluation form;
- Hold a whole school assembly about the visit (or some form of learning derived from it);
- Prepare an action plan about next steps with your partner school.

This is essential in order to:

- Share your learning with the whole school;
- Raise awareness of your school link;
- Use the visit to enrich your school's educational offer all year round.

How can I involve the wider community?

How can I 'advertise' the partnership to parents and visitors?

A Companions' display in the school's hall is a great way to grab the attention of the wider community. The display should not only show your partner school's problems, but also their resources. Make sure that the Companions Programme aims (above, introduction) and your school's expectations are also displayed.

How can I involve governors and parents?

Parents and governors can be involved, for example, through special events, or by adding information about your partnership to the school's newsletter. Parents are usually more involved in the school's life during primary school, and many miss this involvement during secondary school. This is a good opportunity to involve them.

How can I involve the wider community?

The local parish is often eager to be involved and to include news about the partnership in their bulletin. It's also a good idea to involve expatriate communities from your partner country in special events or school assemblies. Expatriates in your area know their home country and can help maintain the link's momentum: for example, they can be invited to share stories about your partner country during assemblies and special events.

How shall we go about fundraising?

Can I send second hand equipment to my partner school?

This is not generally advisable. Please consult the JM office first: items such as clothes, stationery and books are widely available in countries like Zambia and Zimbabwe. Sending boxes from the UK to overseas can be pricey and import tax in Zimbabwe is very high. It is often more beneficial and less costly to send items to local charities.

Can I raise funds for my partner school?

Currently JM is supporting the Jesuits of Zimbabwe to develop Education for Justice, a programme for the development of all Jesuit schools in the country, and we would be really grateful if you could raise funds for this programme (please see details below).

Why raise funds for Education for Justice Zimbabwe?

Education for Justice Zimbabwe is the development programme for Jesuit schools of Zimbabwe. It includes 'Happy Readers', a literacy development project for primary school students that enables primary schools in the UK to raise funds directly for their partner school. Education for Justice also supports all Jesuit schools in Zimbabwe to provide quality education for the poor, reaching out to more than 14,000 students. Please find out more on our website.

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