

A SCHOOL VISIT IN NEW MEXICO



Walking down the road from our hotel in Albuquerque, New Mexico, we noticed an illuminated sign outside Manzano Day School, announcing an Open House the following morning. We decided to go and see if we could look around. It was for parents, pre-application for admission.

We were received with great courtesy and welcome, and over two hours were shown round the school by the Director of Development, Clara Kilcup. (The parents went round in groups with a parent guide but we got the treatment.) We met class and specialist teachers, and, briefly, the Head of School. What follows are notes I made after the visit.

Manzano is a private day school of high quality, established in 1938 and affiliated to the appropriate professional bodies. It takes children from pre-kindergarten (PK) to 12 years old, when they move on to other, private, secondary schools. The school is funded by tuition fees, grants from private enterprise, sponsorships, and many fund raising activities, some very imaginative. The Director of Development is a full time fund raiser, and has a full time assistant.



Buildings: mostly modern, centred round an old, adobe-built part. There is an enormous playground with picnic tables, slides, play areas, etc. The official entrance to the school is on one side, and where the children come in is the other: large gates, security. Large classrooms, with at least two computers in each, masses of storage, specialist rooms for gym & games, music, science, art, Spanish, IT, with specialist teachers who teach half classes (ie 9: see below). The gym was splendid, and the Library very large. The level of equipment throughout made my eyes water, especially the music room where there were a several thousand pounds-worth of pitched percussion alone. Masses of stuff for the little ones too. Quite a palace.



Entrance by application, report from previous school if any, assessment and interview. Some full time, whole-school-life tuition bursaries available for less well off applicants. The school is racially mixed (a bit) and included children with special needs, but obviously the social catchment range is what you might expect of a fee paying school. There is a full time Director of Admissions.

Class organisation: 18 to a class. In PK & K a class teacher and a FT classroom assistant (ie 1:9). !!!!! There are four classes to each year 1 to 5. Each class has a class teacher. We went into classes at work, where the children were friendly, confident and eager to show you what they were doing. The philosophy is **active and self-directed learning, from an early age**. The day's programme is on the white board, and sometimes the week's as well, and children work at their own pace and interest. Reading ages in eg the year 4 class we saw (aged 11) span the whole range from poor to exceptional. A lot of work is done on appropriate classroom behaviour – looking at the teacher when he/she is talking, consideration

for others, listening to each other. We saw a presentation by one girl of a project the class had been doing – “Invent a Country”. She was dressed up, and had designed maps, the flag and what it symbolised, described resources, language and system of

government etc. There were good questions from the class afterwards too. Another class were working on the use of graphs, in a joint English/Maths project. The Balloon Festival was stimulating a lot of art and computer design work. There is a certain amount of assessment and target meeting, but nothing like the UK, or France. As an accredited school, **they have a lot of freedom in designing their own curriculum.**

I did not notice any really disruptive behaviour, though the special needs class of 5 year olds showed potential! For those with difficulties, there is a full time Counsellor and a full time Nurse, who work together.

It felt a very happy school. Driving out of Albuquerque on the freeway, there was a huge roadside poster advertising it. If you want to see more of how the other half lives over the pond, check out the [web site](#)



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