

Chief Minister's Expert Input Powers Westside's PBL Journey as Gibraltar's First Secondary Exhibition Showcases Real-World Learning

Westside School opened its doors today for a landmark event: Gibraltar's first ever secondary school Project Based Learning (PBL) exhibition. The showcase marked the culmination of a powerful cross curricular learning journey that saw all Year 7 pupils explore the central question:

"How could we help people in Gibraltar live, work, and stay connected if the frontier suddenly closed?"

The project began with a special screening of Times of Closure, a documentary exploring Gibraltar's 1969–1985 frontier closure and the broader post Brexit context. From there, pupils explored the historical, political, economic and social implications of a sudden border closure, guided by their teachers and a range of expert contributors from the community.

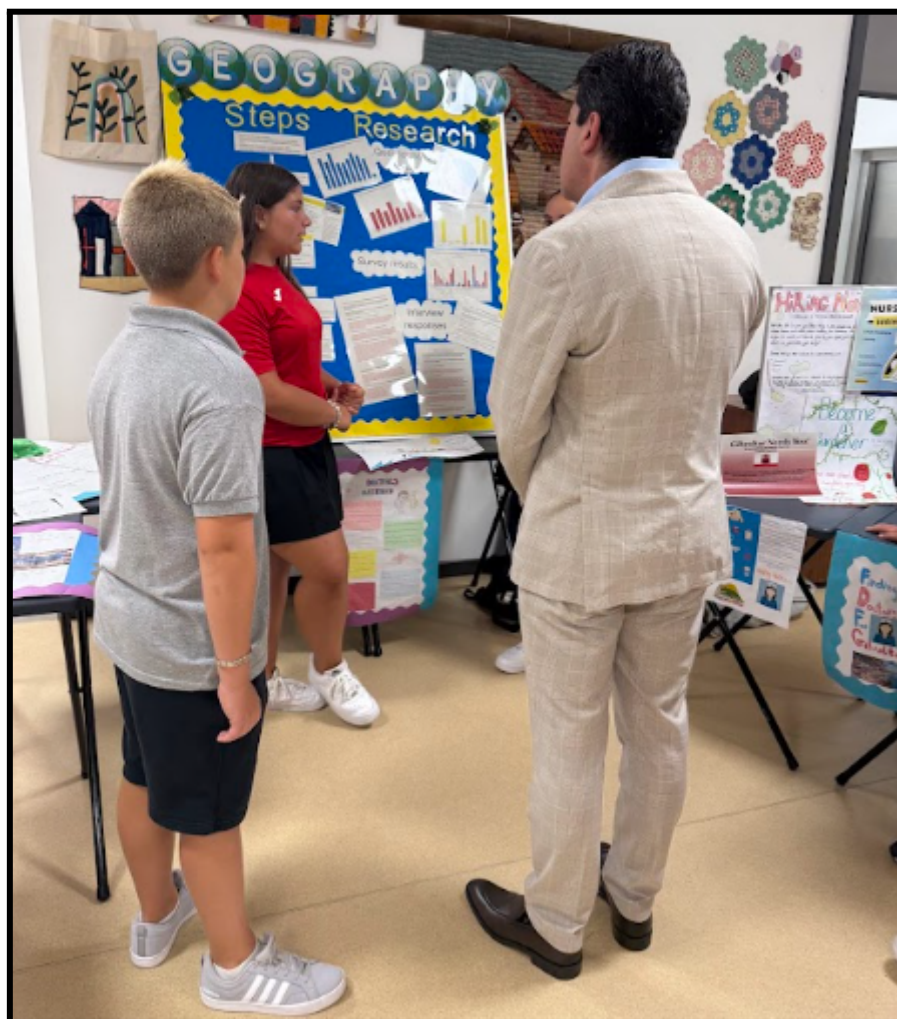
Among the most impactful early moments was a visit from the Chief Minister, who joined pupils as a guest expert. He spoke about the realities of treaty negotiations and the implications of a frontier closure. He also connected pupils live to the No.6 Bunker, where they spoke directly with the Deputy Chief Minister and Ivor Lopez of Civil Contingencies. This session grounded the project in real world complexity and gave pupils a rare insight into national planning.



Presentation by the Chief Minister to all Year 7 pupils, with a connection to the Bunker at No. 6 in May.

Led and coordinated by Westside teacher and University of Gibraltar Master's pupil Mrs Pitaluga, the project ran across the summer term and brought together learning from multiple subjects including History, Geography, English, Science, Maths, Music, Art and Physical Education. It gave pupils opportunities to think critically, work collaboratively and apply knowledge in meaningful ways.

In Geography, pupils examined Gibraltar's reliance on cross border workers and considered how the community might respond if access to that workforce were suddenly lost. One group focused on actively promoting Gibraltar's own nursing qualification at the University of Gibraltar as a way to increase local capacity in the healthcare sector. They carried out surveys in town and even interviewed Dr James Vinales, Head of School for Health Sciences at the university, to learn more about training as a nurse and its future role in meeting Gibraltar's healthcare needs.



Geography display: focusing on recruiting workers to fill gaps that would be left behind by Spanish workers.

In Science, pupils worked alongside experts from AquaGib and Gibelec to investigate ways of securing sustainable energy and water supplies for the Rock. These sessions explored local infrastructure, resource limitations and future-facing solutions to help Gibraltar adapt in the face of disruption.



Science Stand: looking at sustainable energy sources

In Maths, pupils gathered and analysed data on public opinion about food pricing and essential goods, presenting their findings using pie charts, bar graphs and creative supermarket simulations.



Maths work on increasing percentages in food prices and how to ensure they could afford essential items with a limited budget.

In Music, pupils composed original pieces using Apple Mac platforms, capturing both the sadness of family separation and the joy of reunion. These were shared through QR codes at the exhibition.



Music displayed QR codes which can be scanned to hear the children's compositions

In Physical Education, pupils adapted traditional playground games to reflect Llanito identity, celebrating local culture through play.



Children at the PE stand challenged the Director of Education 'a jugar a los meblis'

In Spanish, the children wrote diary entries and poems in the Spanish language imagining what life would be like for them today if the border was closed.



Spanish diary entries and poems

In English pupils began by learning how to conduct interviews and developed skills in question formation and listening techniques. They then created their own oral histories by interviewing a family or community member who had lived through the original frontier closure. These narratives brought a personal and human dimension to the project. Following talks by Dr Darren Fa and the Chief Minister, as well as writing their own newspaper articles, pupils worked in groups to brainstorm resilience strategies for a potential future closure. Each group presented their proposal to the class, and a vote was held to select the strongest idea. The winning solution focused on growing fruit and vegetables on balconies as a way to reduce the cost of fresh produce. Pupils then created posters for a campaign to encourage the local community to take part.



English consisted of authentic oral history interviews, campaign drives and recreating the letters from the past

In History, pupils divided themselves into groups and explored three further driving questions:

- How did Gibraltar ensure a continuous supply of food and medicine during the closure?
- How did people keep themselves entertained?
- How did people stay connected with loved ones?

In response, they created articles, videos and historical models of key symbols and sites from that era. This included a reconstruction of the Mons Calpe ferry and a model of the famous 'Scalextric route' that many Gibraltarian families drove on Sunday afternoons, a cherished tradition for staying connected and lifting spirits.



The History stand included models to help pupils understand the “Scalextric’ and Mons Calpe Routes

The Art department borrowed fencing panels from GJBS to mount symbolic lino prints representing the frontier and its emotional impact. Pupils also created beautiful clay tiles inspired by the slogans that once adorned Gibraltar's walls during that era: powerful messages of resilience and defiance in the face of Spanish pressure.



The Art Department used fencing symbolic of the frontier to display their art work

The exhibition featured confident pupil presentations, interactive displays, creative writing, scale models and visual storytelling. It was attended by the Director of Education, parents and many of the expert contributors who had supported the project from the beginning.

Headteacher Sonia Lopez said:

"This event embodies everything education should be, courageous, relevant and transformative. I want to pay heartfelt thanks to the dedicated team of teachers whose vision, creativity and professional agency made this possible. Delivering a project like this takes tremendous behind the scenes effort, and the outcome: the depth of knowledge and understanding our pupils have gained, is a direct result of their hard work and commitment. I am also deeply grateful to the many experts from our community who supported us along the way. This has been a true collaboration, and one that reflects the very best of what education in Gibraltar can be."

Project Based Learning was first introduced in Gibraltar through the primary sector. This exhibition marks a significant step in extending that approach to secondary education. Teachers will now reflect on this first cycle and explore how to build on it further, working towards an interdisciplinary approach. Plans are already underway to grow the programme next year, with renewed emphasis on deeper learning, relevance and celebrating Gibraltar's unique culture and identity.

