

BREZEL-NEWS

Sixteenth Edition, December 2018

Newsletter of the German Saturday Schools Islington and Hackney Wick

Dear Saturday School families in Hackney Wick & Islington,

A word on our behalf: In January I will have been managing the Islington Saturday School for 20 years. Only very few people know me at our second location in Hackney, and I have to admit that I cannot always properly place the new parents in Islington anymore. We will work on that next year!

In 1999 we were a parents' initiative with barely 30 children in 3 groups. Today we have about 190 students in Islington and another 120 in Hackney Wick. Organisationally, our school is a small non-profit limited liability company with 50 part-time employees. Filling the classes, emails and admin, annual accounts, payroll, DBS checks, workshops for our teachers, data and child protection policies etc – we put in quite a lot of work all week to keep our schools running on Saturday mornings. For our school communities to thrive however, we rely on the active presence of our established as well as our new parents.

In Islington, Jochen is currently doing the rounds with the lists for our Christmas buffet once again. For years, Georg, Jessica and Alexander have been running our weekly DVD table, every Saturday Wendy and Christoph bring along our mobile coffee kitchen in 3 boxes full of cups, water

kettles, milk etc, Anne coordinates the book club... We also started a DVD table in Hackney now, Katrin has been providing a private parent mailing list for non-school-related issues for some years, and Indrajit has introduced fair trade coffee and milk in glass bottles at the coffee table, plus newspapers and biscuits - which we have promptly copied in Islington.

Our students in Islington came up with a fantastic new idea now: Two Saturdays ago, our 13-15-year-olds organised a charity cake sale. They raised an amazing £315.21 for Crisis to support the homeless; the whole class was busy baking and selling and thanks to the many delicious cakes the atmosphere in the school hall was beaming.

In this edition of the Brezel-News we look back at our lantern walks and the 100th anniversary of the World War I armistice. Remembrance Day always calls for special sensibilities in a British German setting, which we talked about in both Saturday Schools. Finally, Natalie introduces the concept of our Saturday school curriculum.

Many thanks for all your contributions. After nearly two decades, Angela Merkel has instigated her departure, the Brexit process is painstakingly progressing, and I won't stay forever either. With this in mind - we much appreciate that you are around.

Happy Christmas holidays and all the best for New Year!

Yours, Cathrin
(with Ulrike, Natalie, Anja & Kerstin)

Cathrin Cordes, Managing Director
German Saturday School Islington & Hackney Wick



Successful incentive by our students: Rosa, Jemimah, Dario, Louis, Mateo, Johnny, Emma, Mignon, Marina, Isabelle, Jolanda, Coco, Lukas & their teacher Annika raised £315.21 to support the homeless with a cake sale, as well as enhancing the atmosphere in the school hall in Islington

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Remembrance Day

Saturday School reflections

The First World War ended 100 years ago. Many of us live in British German families here in London and we want to teach our children the language and values of both cultures while our ancestors fought bitterly against one another before the weapons fell silent at 11 am on 11 November 1918.

Since then, Armistice Day has been a national day of remembrance in Britain. Throughout public life, two minutes of silence are observed at 11 am and solemn memorial events take place up and down the country. On Remembrance Sunday the contribution of British and Commonwealth soldiers and civilians who served in the two world wars as well as later conflicts is commemorated in an official ceremony at the Cenotaph in Westminster. On the occasion of the 100th anniversary, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier was the first German head of state to be invited to take part in the ceremony.

How did our Saturday school community experience this anniversary? What thoughts did the celebrations trigger? How do Saturday School parents feel about the Poppy Appeal? On the Saturday following the remembrance weekend, we discussed the topic in our two schools.



The poppy installation at the Tower of London marked the 100th anniversary of the beginning of World War I in 2014

A German mother describes her feelings: "When I first came to London, this was a completely new approach for me. I think it's great that the British deliberately pause and remember the end of the First World War. The red poppy fascinates me, too. For me, the colour red symbolises the pointless bloodshed on the battlefields of the First World War. And I take the fact that the flowers are sprouting on the battlefields and between the graves in Flanders Fields as a beacon of hope and reconciliation. The poppy installation at the Tower also impressed me a lot. However, I am surprised at the great importance of the First World War here, and the military ceremonial seems quite

strange to me."

Because of the 100th anniversary, this year the end of the First World War was also commemorated in Germany with many events. However, in other years, the anniversary does not get a lot of attention. Instead, 9 November is a more noteworthy and commemorated day in the German calendar: 100 years ago, on 9 November 1918, the German Emperor abdicated in the wake of the World War I defeat and the first German Republic was proclaimed. Just 20 years later, on 9 November 1938, synagogues were set on fire throughout Germany during Reichsprogromnacht (formerly known as "Reichskristallnacht" or "Night of Broken Glasses"). And finally, the Berlin Wall fell on 9 November 1989. 11 November, however, is more commonly noted in Germany as St. Martin's Day. Since the 19th century, various traditions have developed in this respect, one of which is the lantern walk as well as the beginning of the carnival season on 11/11 at 11:11. In Germany, this is followed by a Remembrance Sunday at the end of November, when all victims of violence and oppression are honoured. Originally, it was introduced as a memorial day for the fallen German soldiers of the First World War, but the horrors of World War I have been overlaid by those of World War II and the Nazi atrocities.

Back to Saturday School. Another mother also thinks it is adequate that we remember the wars and do not take peace for granted either. "The ceremony is very special. The British have quite a different relationship to the past than we do." Every year she buys a poppy badge and this time she watched the commemoration ceremony at the Cenotaph on television. She considered it to be a very powerful message that the German President was invited this year: "I found that very touching, especially as Steinmeier was the second person to lay down his wreath, right after Prince Charles. He also read something in Westminster Abbey afterwards, and in German!" Another mother agrees: "It was a historic moment. Steinmeier wore a poppy pin and took a very prominent position in the ceremony. I don't think that the German newspapers reported much about it."

Various Saturday School members participated in memorial events. One mother explains that due to his interest in becoming a pilot her son has joined the Royal Air Force cadets about a year ago, and this year he participated in the Remembrance Day parade for the first time. His German passport does not seem to bother anybody. For her, Remembrance Day is not limited to just one nationality, and sometimes she also wears a poppy. For her it is vital that the many victims of war on all sides are being remembered, and she hopes that this might remind people to be more

careful not to glorify wars and victories.

Another mother regards British remembrance culture and the poppies in a positive way, but says she wouldn't wear a poppy pin herself. "It's a British tradition and I did not grow up with it". A German-speaking father does not wear the flower, as for him it represents an endorsement of today's military. Associations with Afghanistan or Iraq are difficult to reconcile with his personal position. Another father takes a similar view: "I feel that the poppy culture somehow glamourises war, but in my opinion the emphasis should be on the tragedy and annihilation. On all sides, 17-year-olds were just cannon fodder. I do miss a more universal anti-war message." Others complain that wearing the poppy symbol has become virtually mandatory for people in public space, politics, television, or on the football pitch: "It should remain a personal choice, there should not be any pressure to wear the poppy."

A father in Islington wears a white poppy flower every year. This more rarely seen symbol commemorates all war victims and also represents a commitment to peace. The pacifist poppy is becoming more and more popular among the population, but is rarely seen on television and in politics. "The red poppy flower is a nationalist-militaristic symbol for me. There are, of course, people who see it differently, but the British Legion sells the red poppies and uses the proceeds for the benefit of members of the British military. It is about



Islington father with white poppy



Remembrance Day memorial event in Abney Park Cemetery in Stoke Newington

the British victims, while a total of 20 million people - soldiers and civilians - lost their lives in the First World War." He wishes that all victims of war should be remembered. "The white poppy, however, is sometimes perceived as an affront or even a provocation."

A number of Saturday School affiliates met at a special memorial event in Abney Park Cemetery in Stoke Newington. Red and

white poppies were worn and adorned the venue, and victims of the historic as well as more recent wars were commemorated with music and readings. A mother reported that her older daughter wanted to wear a white poppy at a school event, while the younger one preferred not to attract attention and opted for the traditional red poppy.

For the non-British, schools often serve as mediation channels. A father who grew up in East Germany has revised his original opinion about the badges. "I found Poppy Day irritating at first because I do not like the idea of wearing such a symbol. It reminded me of the GDR, the party badges, and everyone being forced into line." When his children were selling poppies at school, he observed that this also promoted a sense of community: "You see the children standing there and selling poppies, and they are proud. I would not wear the badge myself. That's a British concern. But it is an important tradition for the British and part of their cultural heritage. You do not have to get involved, it is a sensitive subject", he warns.

At the Islington Saturday School, the 5-6-year olds' class talked about the subject. The teacher was surprised how many of the young children knew what the memorial service meant. "The only thing they did not know was that the German word for poppy is Mohnblume", said the teacher. "That was a pretty bad time," commented one of the boys. Parents also discussed how children are introduced to Remembrance Day at school. "It is easy for the children to perceive that the good guys defeated the bad ones", one parent contemplates. "But of course, it is far more complex. My own great-grandfather fought as a teenager on the German side and was killed while his cousin fought on the English side. Was the German teenager really the bad guy?"



A Saturday School class in Islington with poppies

In one of our teenage classes in Islington, the discussion develops in a similar direction. Everyone agrees that war should not be glorified, but that one should remember the war dead. One student observed a minute of silence by herself, as she felt her German family was not taking Remembrance Day seriously enough.

The teenagers report that they are sometimes confronted with Nazi references after all, for example in history lessons or in the context

of Remembrance Day. This ranges from questions such as "Didn't your family support the Nazis?" to Hitler jokes. The First and Second World Wars are often mixed thematically. Usually the teenagers dismiss such remarks as stupid comments. They wish that there would be more thoughtfulness and Nazi references would not be used ignorantly. They are well aware that for Germans the Second World War has a much greater significance than the First World War.

Our young people realise that their German parents have been brought up with a sense of responsibility - if not guilt - for the Nazi era. They consider it right to commemorate and to remember, but there should be no more blame, because the world wars were 70 and 100 years ago, respectively.

Saturday morning and our discussions are over. All those involved spoke of stimulating and good conversations, and we sensed a great willingness and a general need to discuss this difficult subject matter with a more complex perspective. The conversations took us in a somewhat different direction than we had expected. We would like to close by remembering the words of the tragically murdered Jo Cox: "We have far more in common with each other than things that divide us."

By Martina Köpcke, Urike Hensel-Burg, Sarah Glienke and Cathrin Cordes

picked up by the two adult courses in Islington. Commemoration of all war dead is again important to British participants, and they, too, find the association of the poppy symbol with the Royal British Legion and today's military problematic. It goes without saying that their children participate in the Poppy Appeal at school. They do not think that their children are assailed because of their German descent. "London is just too international for that. This might be different beyond the M25, but there are so many nationalities in every classroom here." With regard to the military, the adult group is addressing fundamental differences between Germany and Great Britain: "Here you have a proud military that is quite present in everyday life. Many victories are also taught at school: the two World Wars, Waterloo, the Spanish Armada." A father asks the Germans in the room: "In Germany, are you not proud of your victories? For example, of Bismarck's victory over the French?" No, the political map of Germany has changed so much since Bismarck's era. It is almost as if those were different armies, not our own.

Is it possible to feel military pride as a German? The question seems to shed light on one of the major differences between German and British remembrance culture. What is unspoken in the room, is how as a German you can feel any pride in your country's history after the Holocaust. This notion is confirmed by a mother of Polish descent who grew up in Germany. "As a teenager on a visit to Portugal I suddenly realised that people there showed national pride. This was something new to me. In my opinion, education in Germany very much emphasises the guilt."

Our Saturday School Curriculum

The concept behind our approach

Parents often ask about our curriculum and how we compile our Saturday School lessons. You are justifiably curious – we are in a somewhat unique position with our Saturday School lessons. We require children to arrive with a basic knowledge and understanding of German, which means they are not traditional foreign language learners. On the other hand, very few of them are true native speakers, with many different ability levels in between. We can therefore neither lean on a traditional German school curriculum, not even for our primary school age children, nor can we apply strategies for children who are being taught German as a foreign language. As a long-term goal we also have to keep in mind that we want our students to be able to take the recognised GCSE and A level exams when they are teenagers.

Over the past twenty years our teachers have developed our own bespoke Saturday School curriculum, which we compiled into a more formalised framework about two years ago. We wrote this curriculum for children up to the age of 12 years in consultation with teachers from the Saturday Schools in Islington and Hackney Wick. Particular attention was given to the advice of our long-standing GCSE and A level teachers in Islington to establish what is required of our students to successfully participate in our GCSE exam preparation from the age of 12.



Natalie, Veronika and their class of 7-year-olds in Islington: playfully working with a book for early readers

Our curriculum is intended solely as a guideline for our teachers, there are no set lesson plans or contents to be followed. We strongly feel the success of our Saturday School and the bilingual education we provide relies heavily on the autonomy of each teacher for designing their class plans, particularly in our younger classes. Our teachers have very different individual strengths, some combining creative backgrounds with longstanding experience of the unique challenges of bilingual language education. Classes can vary greatly from year to year as teachers adapt each of their classes to the level and needs of the participating children, but always ensuring that our

overreaching objectives are met.

We do not simply want to measure the success of our schools by the academic achievement of GCSE or A level exams. We want our children to enjoy the experience of Saturday School and support them to become as close to a native German speaker as possible. We aim to provide not just an environment of language learning but want to enhance cultural awareness and openness in our multi-cultural environment. The formal exams are a further bonus, not a necessity.

Our overall objectives are:

- Speaking and understanding German
- Reading and writing in German
- German grammar
- German culture and friendships both inside and outside of the classroom
- Enjoyment of the German language and German speaking cultures

These objectives are implemented as appropriate in each year group, gradually introducing reading, writing and grammar while never losing focus on the importance of speaking and understanding.

As most parents are probably aware, our youngest classes are modelled on the German kindergarten. Singing, crafts, playing games and interactive story reading are the main focus in the children's first year with us. Through all these activities, we aim to strengthen and extend their German vocabulary and increase their confidence in using the language.

As it is not generally recommended to learn how to read and write in two languages simultaneously, the focus is on pre-literacy and social aspects to help the children get settled into our Saturday School environments. This continues into the next two years.

When the children are confident and secure in their English reading and writing, we move on to introducing German letter sounds and sound combinations. This generally – but not necessarily – happens when the children are about 6 years old and in their third year with us, bearing in mind that our classes are mixed by age and ability, depending on each child's unique language proficiency. Experience has shown that sometimes it makes sense to start a bit sooner, sometimes a bit later.

Once the concept of reading in English has been understood, the majority of children in our schools learn how to read in German with ease. Just as the children have been taught English language letter



Jana and the 5 to 6 year-olds in Hackney reading a picture book

sound combinations in their primary schools, we teach the sound combinations unique to the German language - for example the German vowel sounds, the "Umlaute", and sound combinations such as sch, ch or st. As the overall concept of blending letters is understood at this stage, regular exposure and repetition in spoken and written form of the sounds and their blends is mostly sufficient.

Considerable exposure to spoken language and opportunities to expand vocabulary benefit the process enormously. Vocabulary enrichment - from basic topics such as numbers, colours, calendar or family to more advanced topics such as professions or emotions - and speaking opportunities therefore always form the backbone for all our classes. Unfortunately two hours per week during term time are not sufficient to meet these goals and we rely on the enthusiasm and commitment of our families to provide a language rich environment at home at all times.

Along with reading, the children practise their writing in German. The more opportunities children have to engage with German texts, the easier it is for them to retain the letter combinations and spellings unique to German and different from English, reading by themselves or with others. Simply copying German texts as a first step familiarises the children with correct spellings before attempting their own writing.

As the classes progress, the children practise their German reading and writing, being introduced to ever more complex texts, starting with picture books in the youngest classes and advancing through children's and teenage fiction up to the required A level literature. At Saturday School we have the unique advantage to encourage the children to read in German in our so-called "middle years" - once

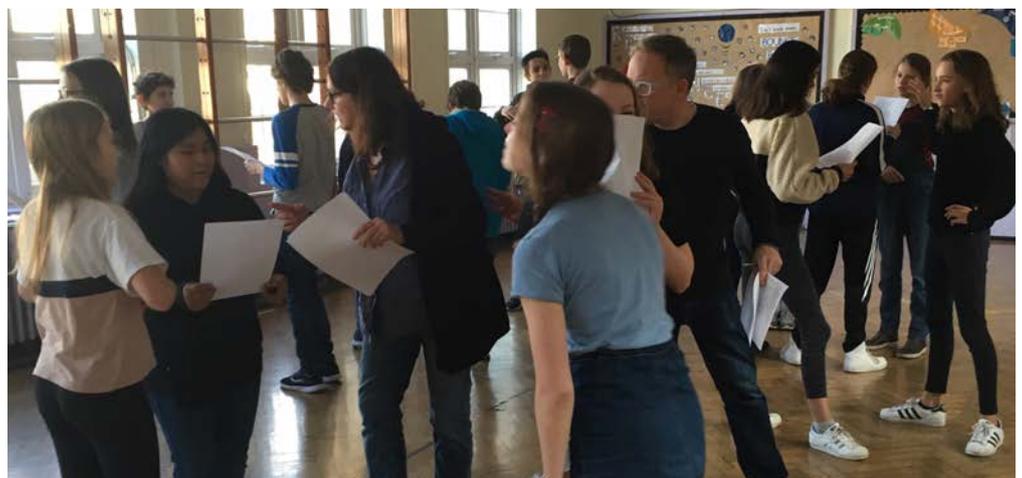
they have acquired the necessary German reading skills from about 9 years of age and before they start focusing on the GCSE exams from about 11. The British school curriculum for German as a foreign language does not have time and space for this.

Selecting a class novel can be a challenge as it needs to appeal to all the children in a class and match their reading age as well as their social and emotional maturity. We have had great success with books such as "Kreuzberg 007", "Die Vorstadtkrokodile", "Rico, Oscar und die Tieferschatten" and for older children "Als Hitler das rosa Kaninchen stahl" or "Das Austauschkind". Such books not only enhance the children's language abilities but also provide a form of cultural immersion.

Parallel to reading and writing, speaking opportunities and vocabulary enhancement, we introduce grammatical concepts. These are basic concepts in the early classes, such as articles, plurals or simple conjugation of verbs that are aided by spoken repetition. In the middle years, when children are able to absorb more abstract concepts, more and more difficult grammar topics are introduced, such as further tenses or declinations.

In all the classes, for both the older and the younger children, we aim to keep class content flexible and meaningful to include the children's interests and preferences as well as allowing our teachers to apply their special strengths. Projects and creative learning, fun and games, all contribute to the children's enjoyment of our classes and ultimately of the German language, culture and part of their identities.

By Natalie Denby



Our GCSE class in Islington during a group exercise in the school hall

"Laterne, Laterne"

On the Tradition of Lantern Walks

Finding dates for our lantern walks was not an easy task this year. 11 November is the actual St. Martin's Day and would be the ideal date. But this Sunday is Arsenal match day in Islington, and the day of the First World War Centenary celebrations. The lantern tradition is a solemn enough affair, so we go ahead with the lantern walk in Hackney. In Islington we decide to go for 4 November, although the date is just after Halloween and coincides with the many fireworks parties for Guy Fawkes Day on 5 November, and we are very concerned that not enough families will participate.



Traditional lantern and St. Martin's songs at the meeting point in Highbury Fields in Islington

St. Martin's Day is a tradition based on the eponymous saint and is also considered a day of charity and willingness to help others. Martin of Tours was an officer in the Roman Empire in the 4th century. Riding through the Roman province of Gaul, he met a freezing beggar who was dressed in rags. Martin used his sword to divide his own coat and gave one half to the beggar. Later Martin was ordained a priest and became Bishop of Tours in France. However, even as a monk he continued to live in poverty. He died in November 397 and was buried on 11 November.

In the past, it was a religious practise to organise light processions at funerals, for example from the church to the burial place. But there might be another reason why the lantern parade is part of the St. Martin's Day celebrations: At the beginning of November, the field work was finished and the harvest brought in. Farms had a lot of supplies and children went from house to house, singing and receiving treats and food by the landlords. They often used lights or lanterns to find their way in the dark. St. Martin's Day is celebrated in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and some regions of Scandinavia. In protestant regions, the date overlaps with the name day of the reformer Martin Luther, who was born on 10 November 1483.

Since the 19th century, the tradition of lantern walking, which is mainly practised in Germany, has developed around this date. Lantern walks are common throughout the autumn season in many regions and in different variations. They range from small kindergarten groups to lantern parades organised by parishes, clubs or other institutions, sometimes accompanied by a band or marching band. Children stroll through the streets with their lanterns and sing traditional lantern songs like "Ich geh mit meiner Laterne", the St-Martin song or "Laterne, Laterne". The largest St. Martin's parades with 4,000 to 6,000 participants take place in North Rhine-Westphalia.

Of course, this custom is also part of our Saturday school calendar. In Islington, we have been meeting up for over 20 years, always on a Sunday in November. In the early years, we moved from house to house through a small street in Highbury and afterwards gathered at one family's home for mulled wine. As the school grew, we walked through Finsbury Park and ended the evening in a pizzeria, but it too quickly became too small for us. Finally, we started meeting up for our lantern walk at Highbury Fields and walked towards the school. We now finish off in the school hall and have the pizzas delivered. One year, the pizzeria just couldn't keep up with the size of our order anymore and we started to split the order between two pizza suppliers.

We are very lucky that musician and former Saturday school teacher Martina Schwarz accompanies the parade with her accordion and plays the traditional lantern songs. The colourful painted and decorated lanterns, usually with traditional translucent paper, are created by the children in their classes on a Saturday morning. We have to order the translucent paper and customary electronic glow sticks from Germany in advance. In the past, real candles were used.



Lantern making stars in our beginners' class in Islington with Anja



Unfortunately, it just wasn't dark yet when we started in Victoria Park in Hackney

“Chocolate stops”, which are customary in some parts of Germany, are also part of our programme: En route from Highbury Fields to Drayton Park School, the procession stops at two or three houses, and after the children have enthusiastically sung their repertoire, they are rewarded with a few sweets at the door. Stephanie in the corner house is the American friend of a former Saturday school mother. She has been our trusted point of contact for more than 10 years, and especially for us she lights up her Halloween pumpkins one more time. At the second stop this year, one of our older Saturday students handed out sweets for the children. After eating pizza in the hall, the Islington Meistersingers (our school choir) sing autumn songs. Finally, we switch off all the lights, the children light their lanterns again and together with Martina, the lantern songs are sung once more, at the top of everyone’s voices. Over the years, many parents have contributed ideas to the development of our very own lantern procession ritual.

At our meeting point at the bottom of the big slide in Highbury Fields, we immediately realised that the beautiful dry autumn weather had tempted many more families than expected to join us. We quickly ordered a few additional pizzas. Passers-by and residents marvelled at our illuminated and singing group. Once again, we had well over 100 participants. A new highlight this year was a performance of the St. Martin’s story, spontaneously drafted by two Saturday school parents on Saturday morning. The story - with Stephanie as the beggar and Christoph as St. Martin on horseback with a broom stick and a toy horse's head - was performed twice, first in the middle of the meadow in Highbury Fields, and at the end of the evening in the school hall.

In Hackney, the lantern walk has been taking place in Victoria Park since the school opened back in 2011. As the park closes at 4.30, we have been meeting there before dusk. After plenty of rain in the previous week, dry weather was finally

announced from Sunday noon. Suddenly the sun came out and the afternoon was really warm – it felt like a late summer day which did not really suit our autumnal tradition. Luckily, Martina also accompanied us with her accordion in Hackney and about 60 children and parents joined in. When it finally turned dark, everyone got into the proper spirit of the occasion, the lanterns shone and everyone was singing the lantern songs.

There is also a much bigger lantern walk in Central London. Verena from the Hackney School and her children took part in the big lantern parade in Hyde Park on 18 November. It is organised by the German Christuskirche: "I was surprised how many people were in Hyde Park. First, they sang and performed a St. Martin play. Then there was a short parade in Hyde Park, accompanied by a brass band which played very nice St. Martin’s songs. Some children had fantastic lanterns. Then there were “Weckmänner” (traditional pastry similar to a ginger bread man, often with a clay pipe), mulled wine and other treats. It was great for the children just because it was very traditional and there were so many people."

Becket, who joined in the Hyde Park parade with his family a few years ago, finds our lantern walk "much cosier. The singing, the chocolate stops and the pizza are important parts in Islington." Other enthusiastic fans of our lantern walk in Islington are Annett and her two sons Max, 8, and Louis, 5: "Actually, the boys had football practice, but after making their lanterns on Saturday morning they much rather wanted to come to the lantern walk. They even sang along, and of course the best part was the pizza!"

Next year, we will try to make sure we also start after dark in Hackney. We are looking for a new location and parents with ideas.

By Martina Köpcke and Cathrin Cordes



Stephanie, Christoph & Martina after the Martin’s play in the hall in Islington