

<http://dx.doi.org/10.16926/pe.2025.18.09>

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How to cite [jak cytować]: Lisowska, K. (2025). Polish Saturday School in Medway – a local centre of Polish intangible cultural heritage in the United Kingdom. *Podstawy Edukacji*, 18, 139–154.

Polish Saturday School in Medway – a local centre of Polish intangible cultural heritage in the United Kingdom

Abstract

This paper discusses the Polish Saturday School in Medway – a local centre of Polish intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in the United Kingdom. The research focuses on the characteristics of the institution's functioning, its activities in the field of promoting, sustaining and safeguarding Polish ICH, as well as examines the school's potential and the difficulties it faces. The research material was collected through interviews with teachers and parents, as well as observation and analysis of secondary sources. The institution is a family-like community, shaped by interactions among students, teachers, and parents. The goal of the teaching process is to foster the bonds between children and young people and their homeland, while Polish ICH is perpetuated and protected through the organisation of holiday festivities, national celebrations, and cultural events. The school must address limitations in terms of infrastructure, staff, and funding, as well as varying levels of cultural identification among its pupils.

Keywords: cultural heritage, cultural education, emigration, Polish Saturday Schools, cultural identity.

Introduction

According to the Office for National Statistics' 2021 data, approximately 614,000 people who identified as Polish lived in England and Wales. At the same

time, 612,000 people stated that Polish was their main language of communication, making it the most widely used foreign language in the United Kingdom (United Kingdom Census, 2021). Statistics Poland reports that in 2023, the United Kingdom had the largest community of Polish emigrants in Europe, with a population of 440,000 (GUS, 2023).

Based on data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there are approximately 180 Polish Saturday Schools operating in the United Kingdom. Run by local Polish community organisations, they bring together both temporary migrants and permanent residents. The primary goal pursued by such institutions is to pass on Polish traditions, history, and culture, teach the native language to the children of emigrants, and prepare students for the GCSE exam in Polish as a foreign language (ORPEG, 2025). The schools operate thanks to the involvement of local communities and volunteers, promoting Polish intangible heritage among the younger generation. One such institution is the Polish Saturday School in Medway, which combines education with the nurturing of tradition and cultural identity within the emigrant community.

Research assumptions

The aim of this article is to present the Polish Saturday School in Medway as a local centre of Polish intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in the United Kingdom. The author focuses on answering the following main question: What characterises the Polish Saturday School in Medway as a local centre of Polish ICH in the United Kingdom? It also examines certain specific issues: What is particular about the institution's functioning? What efforts does the school undertake to promote, sustain and safeguard Polish ICH? What is the school's potential in terms of protecting and promoting ICH, and what difficulties does the institution face?

The research material was collected on the basis of:

- participant observation;
- semi-structured, problem-focused interviews conducted individually with 12 teachers (9 women, 3 men) aged 30-60 and 30 parents (20 women, 10 men) aged 28-50;
- analysis of secondary sources: the institution's curriculum and teaching materials (Rubacha, 2016)

Observation and interviews were carried out with a view to obtaining data on the essential premises of the school's operation in Medway and its activities aimed at promoting, sustaining and protecting Polish ICH in the United Kingdom. The following system was used to analyse and compile the material collected during the interviews: number of the respondent/gender/role, e.g., teacher – I/F/T; parent – I/M/P.

The information from secondary sources formed a body of text in which both explicit and hidden variables were sought. Explicit variables included all elements of the curricula as well as teaching materials used to promote and protect Polish ICH. Cultural codes contained in the curricula and materials that enable such objectives to be achieved indirectly constituted the hidden variables (Rubacha, 2016).

The acquired material was then subjected to reduction, representation and verification of data in a circular arrangement. The reduction was carried out by aligning content with analytical categories that corresponded to the research problems (taking into account the layered selection of units). In effect, it was possible to identify the elements that constituted the context of the data. The verification procedure involved analytical induction, whereby hypotheses were qualitatively confronted with all cases observed in the studied domain (Rubacha, 2016).

A coding and categorisation system was employed, and the following theoretical codes were formulated:

- functioning—the institution relies on staff from the local Polish community; cooperation between teachers, parents and pupils resembles family interactions and fosters the propagation and safeguarding of Polish ICH;
- activities—the school plays the role of an institution that passes on traditions, language, customs and national values through educational activities, celebrations, workshops and competitions;
- potential—the institution takes advantage of the competencies of teachers and the involvement of parents and pupils to create a space conducive to the preservation of ICH;
- difficulties—the institution struggles with a shortage of qualified staff and adequate infrastructure, financial limitations and uneven levels of language skills in the school community, diverse cultural identities of students and the difficulty of upholding intergenerational traditions.

ICH: theoretical premises

Growing international awareness of the threats posed by globalisation, migration and cultural homogenisation has prompted the realisation that the intangible aspects of culture—language, customs, rituals, traditional knowledge and social practices—require intensive legal and social protection (Blake, 2017). The essential document regulating ICH at the international level is the 2003 UNESCO Convention. The act defines intangible cultural heritage as “practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural herit-

age” (Convention, 2003, Art. 2). The Convention emphasises that safeguarding ICH is inherently dynamic and consists in supporting living traditions and passing them on to future generations in the context of contemporary changes. ICH is transmitted between generations and undergoes continual reconstruction within cultural communities whose relationship with the environment and history is constantly transforming. For any given community, that heritage is a fundamental source of identity and cultural continuity (Schreiber, 2005).

Mechanisms have been introduced to support countries in identifying, documenting and promoting elements of their ICH internationally. Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity includes 892 entries; List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding—81 entries; Register of Good Safeguarding Practices—40 entries (UNESCO, 2025). The Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of ICH, selected by representatives of the governments of the states that have ratified the Convention, decides on the entries to the lists. Only those elements of heritage that are already included in the national register can be entered on the international lists. Poland ratified the Convention in 2011 (UNESCO Convention, 2011), and the national ICH list is maintained by the Minister of Culture and National Heritage in cooperation with the National Institute of Cultural Heritage (Schreiber, 2023).

In line with the guiding principle of the Convention and the Ethical Principles for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage adopted in 2015, intangible heritage is not subject to valuation. Its fundamental importance stems from its capacity to engender a sense of belonging to a community, nurture bonds within a community or group, foster joy in shared practice, as well as pride and a willingness to act for the benefit of one’s milieu among its bearers. Intergenerational transmission of traditions is a vital component, as it strengthens intra-group bonds. Although partly repeatable, ICH is inherently dynamic and adaptable. The role of institutions and individuals involved in safeguarding ICH is to foster conditions that promote the development of protected cultural practices (Schreiber, 2023).

In the United Kingdom, the 2010 Equality Act is the primary normative act pertaining to national and ethnic minorities. The Act uses the term race, defined as a protected attribute. Within the meaning of the Act, race includes colour, nationality, as well as ethnic or national origins. The Act prohibits discrimination, harassment and victimisation on the grounds of skin colour, nationality, and ethnic and national provenance. Such a legal framework ensures equal treatment in the public sphere and guarantees the freedom of national and ethnic minorities to cultivate and disseminate their cultural heritage. It enables equal access to all areas of social life, including education and the right of association (Barszcz, 2022).

The United Kingdom ratified the 2003 UNESCO Convention in 2024. Until then, national minority heritage had been protected and promoted chiefly as

part of equality and cultural diversity policies. Efforts to support ICH were mainly undertaken at the local level by social organisations and educational institutions (UNESCO, 2024). Groups that are particularly active in this respect include Polish emigrants and communities of South Asian, Caribbean, African, and Eastern European origin. The traditions and practices cultivated by minorities are not only a form of cultural expression but also a means for negotiating identity in the host society (Barszcz, 2022).

Polish Saturday Schools in the United Kingdom

Polish Saturday Schools (also known as *Szkoły Przedmiotów Ojczystych*, meaning School of Homeland Subjects) enable children and young people to learn their native language and explore Polish culture and history. The contemporary form of these institutions began to take shape after World War II, in response to the needs of the large Polish émigré community. Established on the initiative of parents, teachers and Polish community organisations, the schools were not only venues of education, but also played a cultural and formative role. Since Poland's accession to the European Union, the number of students and the demand for new institutions have substantially increased, resulting in intensive development of the network of Saturday schools (Zamecka-Zalas, 2021).

Saturday schools focus primarily on nurturing children's cultural identity, anchored in Polish values and traditions. Through formative and educational activities, as well as social initiatives, they preserve and pass on the Polish cultural heritage, encompassing customs, language, traditions, and history. The education process takes place on Saturdays, while the meetings of special interest clubs and scout teams are organised in the afternoons. The centres are attended by pupils aged 3 to 16 years old. Each child takes a test to assess their knowledge of Polish, based on which they are assigned to the appropriate group or grade. In smaller schools, children work in same-age groups, but their proficiency in Polish varies (Zamecka-Zalas, 2021). An important milestone for students is the preparation for the GCSE exam in Polish as a foreign language, which they take at the end of their education at Saturday school (ORPEG, 2025).

The teachers, who are engaged as volunteers, must hold a certificate stating that they have no criminal record. It is also stressed that every educator should possess the appropriate qualifications to teach. In practice, the primary experience of most teachers is confined to caring for children and upbringing, though all have completed higher education, often in the humanities and social sciences. They are responsible for developing the curriculum, including lesson plans, providing care to children during their stay at the facility, preparing them for celebrations and national holidays, and for comprehensive cooperation with parents (Howe, 2016).

Saturday schools serve as a community-like space where children can grow in all areas: linguistically, emotionally, socially, and culturally. Thanks to the dedication of teachers, parents, and volunteers, these institutions create a unique environment in which each child can feel valued, understood, and connected to both Polish traditions and British culture. (Zamecka-Zalas, 2018).

Polish Saturday School in Medway – analysis of research

a. Characteristics of functioning

The data provided here represents the outcome of document analysis, individual interviews with teachers and parents, as well as participant observation.

The Polish Saturday School in Medway was launched in the 2014/2015 school year. It is run by the Polish Club of Medway in Kent, in cooperation with the Polish Educational Society in the UK. It uses premises rented from local schools, currently from St Mary's College. Its community consists of pupils aged 3-16 who have Polish roots. The majority of children were born in the United Kingdom, and at least one parent is of Polish origin. The number of pupils fluctuates between 110 and 130, with the majority aged between 3 and 10. The school is funded primarily by parental contributions and support from various sources, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The teachers work on a voluntary basis, receiving cash rewards or exemption from school fees for their children. The youngest group (aged 3–6, comprising 25 pupils) is supervised by a volunteer with no teaching qualifications, supported by a 16-year-old Polish girl who was raised in the United Kingdom. Meanwhile, a group of 55 pupils aged 6-10 is being educated in line with the curriculum for grades I–III. The school has two first-grade classes (12 pupils each) and two second-grade classes (10 pupils each), which is due to different command of Polish, as well as one third-grade class (11 pupils). The children participate in sports classes led by a volunteer who previously worked as a physical education teacher before emigrating. Class IA is taught by a qualified teacher, while IB is taught by the mother of one of the pupils, who has a background in the humanities. Class IIA is taught by a graduate of family mediation, class IIB by a volunteer with 10 years of experience at the institution, and class III by a teacher with 20 years of experience in Saturday schools. The teachers are supported by graduates of the institution who are over 16 years of age and have passed the GCSE exam in Polish.

Given the smaller number of students in grades IV–VIII, the institution has combined groups based on Polish language proficiency, as interest among young people in learning at a Polish school has declined. Specific subjects are taught by

five teachers (two men aged 40-55 and three women aged 45-59) with backgrounds in the humanities and social sciences, but without formal teaching qualifications; their competency is attributed to multiple years of experience in Saturday schools.

The school in Medway creates a unique space that functions not unlike a family community. During classes, parents remain on the premises, engage in discussions and exchange their observations on life in the UK and events in their home country. The Parents' Committee is responsible for maintaining the school's furnishings, engaging in fundraising efforts, preparing prizes, arranging rooms, and organising celebrations, picnics, and competitions.

Due to the limited number of meetings, the priority in teaching is not to convey as much information as possible, but to stimulate interest in Polish history and tradition and to foster a sense of emotional bond and belonging to Polish culture. The school fosters an environment in which pupils can establish relationships with their Polish peers, which helps them develop a sense of belonging to a linguistic community characterised by distinct traditions and culture. The school is the cornerstone around which the students develop their national identity. There, children are given the opportunity of regular exposure to the Polish milieu and culture, which strengthens the bond with their homeland. The school shapes social attitudes by teaching collaboration, collective action and respect for peers and adults.

b. Activities in the field of promoting, sustaining and safeguarding Polish ICH

CHILDREN AGED 3–6

In the preschool group, children are introduced to elements of Polish tradition and history, particularly as they relate to national holidays and state symbols. The basic method is learning through play, supplemented by music and art classes. Knowledge of the Polish language is nurtured, among other things, by singing the national anthem and patriotic songs, such as: *Mali patrioci* (Śpiewające Brzdące), *Jestem Polakiem* (Niezwykłe Lekcje Rytmiki), *Ja jestem Polką, a ty Polakiem* (Małe Aniołki). Activities of this kind help children naturally familiarise themselves with new vocabulary without feeling lost in the learning process. Parents emphasise that such activities help build bonds with grandparents and other family members. "It is important for us that our daughter understands the Polish language and knows that it has its historical roots" (II/M/R). Additionally, using Polish helps children of Polish emigrants develop a sense of belonging, whether it is within their family, the local Polish community, or the broader circle of Polish culture. This is a crucial element in fostering the cultural identity of the youngest immigrant generation.

It follows from an analysis of secondary sources and the conducted interviews that children are regularly read fairy tales, fables, and poems in Polish. These include both the classics of children's literature, such as *Cinderella*, *The Ugly Duckling*, and *Hansel and Gretel*, as well as works that evoke Polish history and patriotic values, including *Mądre bajki* [Wise Fairy Tales], poems by Władysław Bełza, and *Poznaję Polskę. Wiersze o Polsce, Legendy o Polsce* [Discovering Poland. Poems about Poland, Legends about Poland]. In the experience of teachers, literature serves not only a linguistic function, but also an axiological one, i.e., it shapes attitudes based on friendship, respect and tolerance, while at the same time making children aware of the realities of life in bi- and multicultural environments. Through references to questions of identity, i.e., "Who am I?" or "What are my roots?", the youngest children have the opportunity to become rooted in the intangible heritage of their culture of origin, while at the same time benefiting from the experiences and cultural patterns of their host country.

Art education is an important area of patriotic formation, as it focuses on national symbols, Polish holidays and traditions. Classes involve making collages, cut-outs, tear-outs and other forms of artistic expression, allowing children to actively participate in celebrations. In preparation for Independence Day, children create national flags, coloured items, and works depicting national heroes, prominent figures in science and culture, as well as historical events that are part of Polish tradition. In addition, they collaborate with older students to make wreaths to be placed at monuments commemorating the fallen of World War II. Such activities nurture respect for national traditions and enable children to participate in the collective experience of historical memory.

GRADES I–III

In grades I–III, Polish language learning is combined with the content related to national traditions. Learning through play is also employed here, including crossword puzzles, rebuses, riddles, and team games. The themes of the activities focus on the Polish language, Polish national symbols, important historical figures and events that are significant for building national awareness. Pupils eagerly participate in charades, prepare language tasks for their peers and take part in an educational paper chase.

According to the teachers, these types of activities are an opportunity for children to gradually discover their own national identity and understand fundamental questions: Who am I as a Pole? Where do I come from? At the same time, they develop language skills, enabling the clear expression of thoughts, expand their vocabulary, and develop the skill to use correct Polish. "Learning through play makes them more willing to absorb cultural content, which they associate with pleasure and positive emotions. They do not feel forced to learn" (V/K/N).

Parents emphasise that puzzles and themed games relating to Polish customs, legends and holidays teach children respect for ICH and build a sense of pride in being part of the national community. They also note that team games support social development by teaching cooperation and presenting culture as a structure that is jointly created and shared among individuals. "They play, have fun and laugh. Polish school is not a boring chore, but a time spent with friends" (XX/M/R).

Interviews with teachers reveal that children's and young adult literature play a vital role in the teaching process. The works used include *Akademia Pana Kleksa* [The Academy of Mr. Inkblot], *Bolek i Lolek*, *Legendy o Polsce* [Legends of Poland], *ABC małego patrioty* [Young Patriot's ABC], as well as the works by Jan Brzechwa and Julian Tuwim. Here, children not only learn to read and comprehend texts in Polish, but also reflect on the values rooted in national tradition. Analyses of the attitudes of literary characters and their decisions support the emotional and moral development of children, shaping their empathy, courage, ability to cooperate, and ability to distinguish between good and evil. Literature becomes a tool for integrating children with Polish ICH and showing how it can be drawn upon in the present day.

GRADES IV–VIII

Based on interviews with the teachers and parents, it may be observed that older students learn about Polish tradition and culture in greater depth. This is achieved through exposure to legends, historical narratives and information about the lives of prominent Poles. Teachers stress that their goal is not just to impart knowledge, but also to build an emotional bond between students and their homeland. "It's not just about children remembering dates or names, but about them feeling proud and respectful of the history of their nation" (III/M/N). As part of the classes, pupils learn about the historical regions of Poland, their ICH, natural assets and the particulars of social and economic life. Teachers note that this approach enables children to appreciate the diversity of traditions and their shared cultural foundation. "When we talk about Mazowsze, Podhale or Kaszuby, children come to realise that Poland is a mosaic of traditions that together make up a single national identity" (V/K/N).

Literature, both classical and patriotic, remains an important element of teaching. Students are introduced to the works of Henryk Sienkiewicz, Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, Bolesław Prus, Aleksander Kamiński, Stefan Żeromski, as well as the fables of Ignacy Krasicki and the songs of Jan Kochanowski. These texts serve as a source of knowledge about the experiences of national heroes, the values cherished by successive generations, as well as the social norms and events that have shaped Polish culture. Pupils are not expected to

receive that content passively, but prepare their own interpretations of the works, which they subsequently present at school ceremonies and celebrations of national holidays. "When children recite excerpts from *Ordon's Redoubt* or perform scenes from *Stones for the Rampart*, they begin to understand that these are not just required reading, but also stories about their own roots" (III/M/N). Parents confirm that this approach elicits deeper emotions and a bond with tradition in children. "For the first time, my son told his grandfather about the heroes from his reading material, and I saw pride in his eyes. It wasn't just schoolwork, it was a conversation between generations" (V/M/R).

In grades IV-VIII, pupils continue to learn patriotic songs and even attempt to compose their own related to Polish history, while also drawing on traditional songs, such as "Nie martw się Polsko!" [Don't Worry, Poland!], *Polskie kwiaty* [Polish Flowers] and *Jest takie miejsce taki kraj* [There is Such a Place, Such a Country]. These songs are performed during school ceremonies and historical anniversary celebrations. "When they sing *Polskie kwiaty* together, they understand that it's not just a melody, but a memory of the sacrifice that made Poland free" (VII/K/N). Parents note that this teaches young people to appreciate the sacrifice of the previous generations. "My daughter told me that she now understands better why her grandfather is so emotional about the anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising. It's wonderful that the school gives them the tools for such conversations at home" (VIII/K/R).

Extracurricular activities

The school's range of basic activities in terms of cultural development includes a variety of extracurricular undertakings, which represent one of the important sources of shaping the cultural identity of Polish emigrant children. Parents are actively involved, assisting their children with their preparations and taking an active part in the school's life. The events include ceremonies, celebrations, and picnics on the occasion of national holidays, as well as integration activities to consolidate the local Polish community.

Interviews with teachers and parents demonstrate that students readily participate in school celebrations, including national festivities and initiatives aimed at preserving Polish traditions. Such events serve as an important vehicle for knowledge about national culture and customs that may be encountered in both local communities in Poland and in Polish homes abroad. The beginning and end of the school year are particularly important moments. "British schools do not practice the tradition of a ceremony to mark the start or end of the school year, children do not come in festive attire or give flowers to their teachers before the holidays" (I/K/N). "It's here, in Polish schools, that children have the opportunity to see the flag bearers, hear the national anthem and learn the meaning of the

commands given during the assembly" (II/M/R). Ceremonies of this kind introduce the school community to the world of values and traditions, and also inspire respect for national symbols. They are accompanied by the student initiation ceremony (a ritual not found in British schools), which is a unique experience for children. "Children impatiently look forward to being inducted as pupils. It is a special moment that makes them feel more connected to the school community" (III/M/N). The end of the school year is a time for recapitulations and honouring pupils' achievements. During the assembly, diplomas, awards and acknowledgements are presented, while certificates and small gifts are handed out in individual classes.

An analysis of secondary sources and observations suggests that pupils actively participate in regular events dedicated to Polish history and tradition. These include: National Education Day, National Independence Day, National Day of Remembrance of Cursed Soldiers, Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Katyn Massacre, Feast of the Baptism of Poland, Labour Day, Flag Day of the Republic of Poland and the May Third Constitution Day. Children and young people prepare decorations, recitations, theatrical performances and patriotic songs. Additionally, they participate in patriotic marches and lay wreaths at monuments commemorating those who lost their lives in World War II. Parents emphasise that the performances are a major experience for children. "It's a big effort for them. They have to learn the text in Polish and present it in front of an audience. However, they feel proud and understand how important tradition is" (IV/K/R).

Another significant event in the school calendar is the International Mother Language Day, celebrated on 21 February. On this day, family days are held, during which pupils set up educational language stands with competitions and tasks. "International Mother Language Day reminds us how important language is in shaping culture and identity. If we care about our mother tongue, we care about who we are as a nation" (IV/K/N).

The institution promotes customs and holidays that are part of Polish tradition, including Nativity plays and Christmas gatherings, Women's Day, Mother's Day, and Children's Day. Children and young people prepare greeting cards, Christmas decorations and artistic performances, during which they sing songs (*Kiedy Babcia była mała* [When Grandma Was Little], *Piosenka dla Dziadka* [Song for Grandfather]) and carols (*Cicha noc* [Silent Night], *Bóg się rodzi* [God Is Born], *Dzisiaj w Betlejem* [Today in Bethlehem]). The entire school community contributes to the celebrations. "Then we are one big family. A family from Poland" (V/K/N). "We all do something. Someone sews costumes, someone helps with learning the text. But the most beautiful thing is that the kids do it with great joy" (IV/K/R).

Pupils regularly participate in competitions for Polish emigrant children in the United Kingdom, such as the recurring Wierszowisko poetry recitation con-

test and the Polish Schools in England and Wales Spelling Competition for the Golden Pen, awarded by the Consul General of the Republic of Poland in London. Teachers stress that “reciting poems develops a sense of rhythm, sound and beauty of the Polish language, while spelling competitions teach sensitivity to linguistic correctness. Ultimately, this translates into a deeper understanding and respect for national culture” (I/K/N). Parents, on the other hand, note that participation in such projects strengthens children’s self-confidence and self-esteem. “When my daughter competed and did very well, I saw enormous pride in her. It builds their identity” (IX/M/R).

Analysis of sources and interview data suggests that extracurricular activities at the school in Medway contribute to maintaining national identity, fostering cultural awareness, and promoting cooperation, thereby strengthening inter-generational bonds and a sense of community among Polish emigrants.

c. Potential

The close cooperation between teachers and parents, which creates a cohesive and enriching educational environment, should be considered an essential asset of the institution. In educational and formative activities, particular importance is attached to cultivating the Polish language, upholding national traditions and shaping cultural identity in children and young people. “We are building one big community. All children are ours” (II/M/N). “Without the work of the parents, our efforts would be meaningless. Thanks to collaboration, we can teach children the Polish language, pass on and make them aware of Polish culture and tradition” (IV/K/N).

Teachers observe that parents actively support the education process, i.e., they participate in school celebrations and events, help create decorations, prepare costumes, and share their knowledge and experience. Their presence and involvement reinforce the cultural message, showing children that Polish identity is an integral part of everyday life. “Through their commitment, parents underscore the fact that they find cultivating Polish culture important. All such activities build an invisible bridge between school and home” (II/M/N).

Observation reveals that many teachers are also parents of the pupils at the Medway school, which further contributes to the institution’s atmosphere. They bring their family experiences into the educational space and get their family members living in the UK involved in their undertakings. As a result, school life takes on a personal and emotional dimension, and children naturally integrate with the culture of their ancestors. Parents emphasise that, in effect, the teachers to adopt an empathetic approach to the organisation of the teaching process. They do pay attention to the individual characteristics and predispositions of students, observing them outside the school walls as well. “The school gives our chil-

dren what English schools do not offer—contact with Polish culture, history and language. It's important that the teachers put so much heart into it" (XV/K/R).

The results of the research indicate that cooperation between parents and teachers yields an environment where students effectively develop linguistic and social competencies, laying the foundation for further, conscious participation in Polish culture.

d. Difficulties

According to interviews with parents and teachers, the school in Medway faces several organisational and financial challenges. One of the primary concerns is the shortage of stable, qualified teaching staff. This is due to both limited funding for teachers and the small number of teachers living outside the country who are willing to work in such institutions.

Another barrier is insufficient funding from the Polish government, as well as complicated formal procedures involved in obtaining funds. As the teachers emphasise, the number of documents required and the poor administrative competencies of the school staff make it very difficult to apply for financial support effectively.

Inadequate infrastructure is also a major problem, especially for the youngest students, who must have their classrooms rearranged each time before lessons begin. After class, all teaching materials must be stored in a designated cupboard, which forces teachers to keep most of their worksheets and art supplies at home and bring them back for the next class.

In the daily functioning of the school, tensions arise due to language barriers and the varying degrees of cultural identification among pupils. Teachers draw attention to the difficulties in maintaining intergenerational transmission of traditions, especially in older grades. Teenage pupils often lose interest in attending school on Saturday, especially when they are involved in other extracurricular activities at the same time.

Conclusions

The Polish Saturday School in Medway serves as a local centre for Polish intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in the United Kingdom. It creates a unique environment that functions like a family community, shaped by interactions among students, teachers, and parents. The primary goal of the teaching process is to build an emotional connection between children, young people, and their homeland, helping to embed them in their cultural roots and increase their awareness of their native traditions and language. Polish ICH is promoted, maintained, and protected through the following methods:

- structured teaching aimed at passing on traditions, language, customs, cultural symbols and national values;
- celebration of national holidays and traditional events established in Polish schools and Polish culture, special events, theatre performances and family picnics;
- social campaigns in the form of patriotic marches;
- student participation in competitions promoting the Polish language.

Regarding the safeguarding and promotion of Polish national culture, the institution's main strength lies in close collaboration between teachers and parents, who together establish a unified educational environment. Significant emphasis is placed on nurturing the Polish language, national traditions, and the cultural identity of children and young people. Parents actively support the educational process by sharing their knowledge and experiences, which enhances the cultural message. At the institution, many teachers also serve as parents, adding a personal touch to school life and strengthening the integration of students into their ancestral culture.

However, the school in Medway faces challenges due to a lack of properly adapted teaching infrastructure, as well as the need for qualified staff and stable funding for education. The school's community also struggles with tensions and limitations caused by language barriers, differing levels of cultural identification among students, difficulties in maintaining intergenerational tradition transfer, and declining interest in Polish culture among older students, which impacts the organisation of the educational process.

Because there are few qualitative studies on contemporary Saturday schools in the UK, it is hard to compare this analysis with other researchers' findings. Since Polish Saturday Schools in the United Kingdom create unique spaces for intergenerational interaction, maintain Polish culture among the younger generation of the Polish diaspora, and shape their emotional connection to national traditions and customs, they undoubtedly require in-depth, qualitative research. Specifically, it would be helpful to compare data based on the experiences of teachers, students, and parents with observations and analyses of secondary sources. Additionally, it would also be relevant to compare individual institutions based on their location in the United Kingdom, the number of students, and the qualifications of the teaching staff.

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Polska Sobotnia Szkoła w Medway – lokalne centrum polskiego niematerialnego dziedzictwa kulturowego w Wielkiej Brytanii

Streszczenie

Artykuł prezentuje Polską Sobotnią Szkołę w Medway – lokalne centrum polskiego niematerialnego dziedzictwa kulturowego (NDK) w Wielkiej Brytanii. Zagadnienia badawcze koncentrują się na specyfice funkcjonowania placówki, jej działaniach podejmowanych w zakresie upowszechniania, podtrzymywania i ochrony polskiego NDK oraz na potencjale szkoły i trudnościach, z którymi się mierzy. Materiał badawczy zebrano za pośrednictwem wywiadów przeprowadzonych z nauczycielami i rodzicami oraz obserwacji i analizy źródeł wtórnych. Placówka tworzy wspólnotę rodzinną, na którą oddziałują interakcje pomiędzy uczniami, nauczycielami a rodzicami. Celem procesu dydaktycznego jest kształtowanie więzi dzieci i młodzieży z ojczyzną, a podtrzymywanie i ochrona polskiego NDK realizowana jest poprzez organizację świąt, uroczystości narodowych i wydarzeń kulturowych. Szkoła zmagą się z ograniczeniami infrastrukturalnymi, kadrowymi, finansowymi i zróżnicowanym poziomem identyfikacji kulturowej uczniów.

Słowa kluczowe: dziedzictwo kulturowe, edukacja kulturowa, emigracja, Polskie Sobotnie Szkoły, tożsamość kulturowa.