

PRIDE OF THE CROATIAN COMMUNITY IN AUSTRALIA

A delegation of Holy Family Primary School Bell Park of Australia's Victoria, the only such school in the world at which the Croatian language is part of the mandatory curriculum, was in Croatia in March for a one-week working visit. Holy Family principal Peter Brunt and Katica Perinac, the long-standing president of the Association of Croatian Language Teachers in Victoria, met with competent officials at the science and education ministry and the Education and Teacher Training Agency, and had very constructive talks at the State Office for Croats Abroad, the Croatian Heritage Foundation, the University of Zagreb's Faculty of



The Holy Family Primary School delegation at the Croatian Heritage Foundation

Teacher Education, the foreign and European affairs ministry, publisher Školska knjiga and at two school, the Women's General Gymnasium of the Society of the Sisters of Mercy and Zagreb's Hospitality and Tourism Secondary School.

This was the third such Australian visit undertaken at Perinac's initiative, the previous being in 2008 and 2012. At the education and science ministry the Australian guests were received by assistant minister Momir Karin, state secretary Hrvoje Šlezak and the head of the joint tasks and programmes sector Vera Šutalo and her team. The two sides agreed to continue their work together in the Teacher Assistant

Program in Victoria and the ongoing assistance we send in the form of expert literature, textbooks, handbooks and other necessities for Croatian language instruction.

"The education and science ministry has already signed the memorandum of approval on cooperation in the area of Croatian language instruction, and it will be signed on our part on Monday the 1st of May 2017 at Holy Family Primary School. The signatories to the memorandum will work out the detailed terms that pertain to providing financial support to the teaching programme at our school through an executive programme on cooperation in education that will be worked out jointly within six months of the signing of the memorandum," said a satisfied Perinac. "The Education and Teacher Training Agency, where we were received by Boris Vampula, the head of the international cooperation and EU projects department, offered the possibility of further education for Croatian language teachers in Victoria in the form of professional training via the Internet and the use of various applications that help in teaching the Croatian language," Perinac added.

At the State Office for Croats Abroad the Australian team was received by state secretary Zvonko Milas and by Milan Bošnjak, an advisor with special status on Croatian ethnic minorities abroad. The discussion also focused on the possibilities and methods of providing systematic support for Croatian language instruction at Holy Family Primary School. State secretary Milas expressed his continuing support for this valuable programme. The status of the Croatian language in Australia and cooperation between the country of origin and the Croatian community in Australia was in the focus of the talks at the foreign and European affairs ministry, where the delegation met with Vice Skračić, the head of the sector for Africa, Oceania, the Russian Federation and eastern partnership and with ambassador Mladen Andrić, the director of the diplomatic academy.

The delegation also visited the University of Zagreb's Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Talks with assistant professor Lidija Cvikić, the vice dean for science, art and international cooperation, and with assistant professor Siniša Opić, the vice dean for student and academic affairs, centred on faculty programmes that focus on the early learning of foreign languages and research on Croatian as an inherited language. The two sides agreed that there were many areas in which cooperation could be achieved between the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and Holy Family Primary School, for which appropriate support would be provided by the science and education ministry. Given the importance of expert and other literature to conducting classes, the meeting at publisher Školska knjiga saw the company's director Ante Žužul promise to support the Holy Family programme with not only the appropriate literature, but also by providing access to the publishing house's Internet portal, which will be of great help in providing Croatian language instruction.

At the CHF the delegation met with acting director Mirjana Ana-Maria Piskulić and with the head of the education, science and sports department Lada Kanajet Šimić. Perinac gave a short overview of the history of Croatian schooling in Australia, with an emphasis on the current situation. Croatian language instruction in the schools of Victoria are integrated into the regular curriculum, pupils have the option of learning the Croatian language from the moment they start school, i.e. from the age of six through to the final twelfth grade when they can take a Croatian language exam, which is also the basis for continuing in all study programmes. For decades now one of the critical institutions on this path has been Holy Family Primary School Bell Park in Geelong, a richly multicultural city some eighty kilometres from Melbourne that is home to some seven thousand Croatians.

As principal Peter Brunt pointed out, Holy Family Primary School is an Australian private Catholic school that covers several parishes. The school's name is a source of encouragement to the school administration, which aims to live in the spirit of the Catholic religion and to abide by its tenets. It was opened in 1955 by



The meeting at the science and education ministry

the Sisters of Mercy and has, from day one, had over fifty per cent enrolled pupils of Croatian ancestry. The Croatian language was introduced as a mandatory subject in 1978 and has been integrated into the curriculum since then. This year 373 pupils, of whom 187 are of Croatian extraction, attend classes: third and fourth generation descendants of the people who moved to Australia from Croatia.

Along with this school the Australian state of Victoria has since 1980 offered Croatian as a subject at Melbourne's Victorian School of Languages, which pools all supplementary Saturday Croatian language instruction classes. Also very active is the association of Croatian language teachers in Victoria.

Thanks to the tireless lobbying undertaken by Australian Croatians it was the first to recognise the distinct nature of the Croatian language. The state of Victoria did so on the 27th of April 1979 – the following year supplementary Saturday schools were offering Croatian language instruction. Also noteworthy was the year 1975 when national broadcaster SBS began offering shows in the Croatian language, and 1983 when a Croatian studies department was established at Sydney's Macquarie University. Croatian was referred to by its national name in Australia before this was achieved in the homeland.

Since moving to Australia in 1978 Katica Perinac has been and remains at the forefront of the lion's share of activities in the local Croatian community – she teaches at both of the cited schools, and has for over thirty years served at the important and demanding post of president of the Association of Croatian Language Teachers in Victoria. Among its other activities the association organises graduation ceremonies for Croatian language graduates, poetry competitions, writing competitions, Croatian culture days and the Top Scorers event which sees the Artur Nalis Prize awarded to pupils that have achieved exceptional success in Croatian language at the state final exam. In 2003 she was presented with a decoration of the



Katica Perinac with award winning pupils

State of Victoria, presented by the state's premier, for her contribution to the preservation of the Croatian identity and the promotion of multiculturalism.

At the meeting in the offices of the Croatian Heritage Foundation Perinac asked the CHF to support a proposal that would see the late Artur Nalis and the late Tomislav Starčević, two Croatians and prominent figures in culture in Australia, receive top Croatian national decorations, to be presented posthumously for their contributions to the recognition of the Croatian language and in the promotion of Croatian cultural heritage in Australia. Also under discussion was the need to revive the Croatian Days for Children, Youth

and Teachers project organised in February of 2009 by the Croatian Heritage Foundation, with the support of the science and education ministry, at Holy Family Primary School and the Victorian School of Languages.

Acting CHF director Mirjana Ana-Maria Piskulić thanked the dear guests for their visit and for everything they have done to the benefit of the Croatian community in Australia. She expressed her support for the initiatives and the need to sound out the best possible models for the Croatian language instruction programme at Holy Family Primary School within the frame of both education systems, in Croatia and in Australia.

"Mr Peter Brunt and I wish to express our heartfelt thanks to all the institutions we have visited. We are very happy that the science and education ministry has understood how important it is to preserve Croatian language instruction at the Holy Family Primary School in Geelong and wish in particular to thank our hosts at the competent ministry for their great efforts in signing the agreement on financial support for this unique school," Perinac said.

By: Lada Kanajet Šimić; Photography: Snježana Radoš