

Alexandra Park School

Case Study – Mandarin at Alexandra Park School

Background:

After two years (2007-2009) of successfully running an after-school Chinese Language and Culture Club it became apparent that we were ready to take our provision up to the next level. Thinking ahead in terms of China's global influence and with the intention of enriching and broadening language options, our school decided to embark on a new linguistic journey by offering Mandarin on the School Curriculum. In 2009, Mandarin became a compulsory language for all Year 7 students and in 2013 we started Mandarin at GCSE level.

Rationale:

We aim to be a world class school where our students leave prepared for life as global citizens. How could we not offer Mandarin?

From conception we decided to teach mandarin 'our way'. We did not copy others or turn to an existing programme. It was 'the APS way or no way'. This has underpinned our success. Our new pupils have almost zero exposure to this language. Therefore they all have the opportunity to begin this linguistic and cultural journey together. Many of them, at the start, don't even know how 'bad' they are; and we don't let on – confidence breeds success!

Partnerships:

Our first link with a Chinese Secondary School was established through the British Council. In 2007, our Design and Technology Department embarked on a joint curriculum project with the Art Department of Beijing No.109 Middle School culminating in a home stay exchange visit. A more recent link was established with Beijing No.57 School where we participate in home stay exchange visits every two years.

In 2015 we became a UCL IOE Confucius Classroom and our Hanban teachers now actively work with neighbouring primary and secondary schools delivering a Mandarin language and Chinese Culture Programme.

As a teacher training school we work closely with UCL IOE offering placements for Mandarin Chinese student teachers.

Staffing:

We started by recruiting an external teacher to run the after-school Mandarin Club while we supported a member of the Languages Department to participate in Mandarin Language learning through study programmes in China offered by IOE/Hanban. Whilst still undergoing further

language training our Year 7 Mandarin programme was launched. This programme was supported by a volunteer assistant native Mandarin speaker. The following year we offered a GTP Mandarin placement which finally led to recruitment. To support our KS4 Mandarin provision it became essential to employ an additional Mandarin Teacher. The Languages Department currently has a Mandarin team comprising of three teachers (two native and one non-native Mandarin speaker) as well as two Chinese assistants provided by Hanban.

Curriculum:

All Year 7 students study either French or Spanish (4 lessons a fortnight) coupled with one compulsory Mandarin 'taster' lesson (once a fortnight). At the end of Year 7, students are given the choice to continue with Mandarin into Years 8 and 9 or to opt out. Nearly one third of the Year 7 cohort continue with Mandarin and numbers are increasing each year. In Year 8, Mandarin lessons are increased to two lessons a fortnight and in Year 9 to three.

We take full advantage of any learning opportunities be it Language Camps in China or the HSBC Mandarin Speaking Competition where one of our Year 8 students emerged as winner in February 2015. Our Year 9 Mandarin students who participate in the UCL IOE/Hanban China Summer Camp programme take the YCT tests in listening comprehension.

From 2013, we offer Mandarin GCSE and this year we introduced HSK4 as an enrichment course to Year 12 students wishing to continue with their Chinese studies. We are investigating the possibility of increasing our Mandarin provision at post-16 by offering Mandarin at Pre-U together with work experience opportunities in China.

Outcomes:

Mandarin is thriving at Alexandra Park School. Students study it from year 7 through to year 13 and it has become a key part of our school and of a students' experience. Built into our Mandarin teaching programme is 'mindset growth' where students are eased out of their comfort zone and taught to challenge any limiting beliefs that hamper motivation or success. The teaching and learning of Chinese characters offer the perfect opportunity for fostering risk-taking and resilience. Students are encouraged at all times to exercise their imaginative and creative minds in order to 'decode' Chinese characters and to improve their memory skills. The skills and confidence gained through our approach to the teaching of Mandarin spreads out across our school.