

The Mandarin Excellence Programme Evaluation Report 2023/2024

Prepared for UCL Institute of Education
and the DfE

by



Table of Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Executive Summary	5
3. Reflections and lessons learned	11
4. Summary Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	13
5. Overview of The Mandarin Excellence Programme	14
6. Methodology	16
7. Key features of MEP	20
8. School and pupil participation	23
9. Programme Design and Delivery	32
11. Impact	45
12. Sustainability	61
13. Appendix: Details of Statistical Modeling	64

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

- This report sets out the detailed findings of an evaluation of the Mandarin Excellence Programme (MEP) focusing primarily on activity and impacts during academic year 2023/2024.
- The Mandarin Excellence Programme was launched in 2016/2017 to support state schools in England with funding provided by the Department for Education (DfE). Academic year 2023/2024 was the 8th year of the programme overall and the third and final year of the second phase of funding which began in academic year 2021/2022.
- The lead delivery partner for MEP from its inception has been UCL Institute of Education (UCL IOE). The British Council is also an important delivery partner focusing in particular on delivering the intensive study in China element of the programme.
- This report builds on a summative evaluation of the first five years of the programme (2016-2021) completed in 2022 (<https://ci.ioe.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/MEP-Independent-Evaluation-Report-2016-2021.pdf>) and two previous evaluation reports focusing on academic years 2021/2022 and 2022/2023.

1.2 Aims and objectives of MEP

- Mandarin Chinese is the most widely spoken first language in the world. The wider context for the Mandarin Excellence Programme is the growing importance of China globally as an economic, cultural and political power. China's pivotal role on the world stage makes an understanding of both the Mandarin Chinese language and of the people and culture of China vitally important for the trade, economic and political future of the UK.
- Against this background, MEP was established to boost the quantity and quality of Mandarin teaching and learning in state schools in England. It seeks to give motivated pupils within the state sector the opportunity to acquire Mandarin language skills at an early stage in their learning journey, potentially giving them an advantage in their future careers.
- Prior to MEP, Mandarin Chinese had been taught in only a small number of state schools in England and proportionately, more pupils were learning the language in independent schools. Approximately 7% of all school children in Key Stage 4 (KS4) in England are educated in independent schools according to the Independent Schools Council (<https://www.isc.co.uk/research>) but data published by the DfE show that in the 2018/2019 academic year (the last year for which data is available prior to the first MEP cohort taking GCSEs), 33% of all entries for GCSE Chinese through schools in England were from students in independent schools.

- The vision for MEP was to make progress in three complementary areas:
 - Increase the number of state schools in England offering Mandarin Chinese on the curriculum,
 - Increase the number of students with both the interest and the opportunity to study Mandarin Chinese on the curriculum,
 - Facilitate the above by improving the supply and retention of teachers qualified to teach Mandarin Chinese in schools in England.
- A Theory of Change (ToC) for MEP was developed by DfE and UCL IOE which identifies a number of specific short and long-term target outcomes and incorporates Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the programme. This Theory of Change is reproduced as Appendix XXXX.
- Among the key outcome targets for MEP within this Theory of Change are:
 - Increased pupil uptake in Mandarin at KS4 and higher attainment,
 - Increased teacher understanding of how effective teaching can engender a positive attitude towards Mandarin, combating the *'Mandarin is too difficult'* culture,
 - A sufficient supply of Mandarin teachers (recruitment and retention),
 - Evidence generated to inform roll-out of MEP model for other languages.
- Indirect, long-term impacts of MEP include:
 - A permanent increase in the number of state schools teaching Mandarin and the number of pupils learning Mandarin at KS4,
 - Increased pupil uptake in Mandarin at KS5 and higher attainment,
 - Higher numbers of pupils going on to study Mandarin at HE level.

1.3 MEP Delivery Partners

- The lead delivery partner for the Mandarin Excellence Programme since its inception has been **The Centre for Chinese Language Education within the Institute of Education (UCL IOE)**(<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/departments-and-centres/centre-chinese-language-education>).
- UCL IOE has more than 6,000 students, 900 staff, 190 research collaborations and cross-sector partnerships spanning five continents. Its six departments and 40 centres work across education, culture, psychology and social science to improve lives.
- The Centre for Chinese Language Education at UCL IOE supports schools in starting and developing the teaching and learning of Mandarin Chinese. The Centre consists of a team of Chinese teaching specialists in London who work with a large network of schools, headteachers and Chinese language teachers. IOE's vision is that every child in England who wishes to should be able to learn Chinese and that every school has access to high quality Chinese teaching. Key to the realisation of this vision is the development of the effective teaching of Chinese language in schools in England and beyond.

- **The British Council** is the second delivery partner for the Mandarin Excellence Programme. The British Council office in China leads on the organisation of the Intensive Study in China, one of the most important and high-profile elements of the overall programme.
- The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. It was founded in 1934 and incorporated by Royal Charter in 1940 (<https://www.britishcouncil.org/>).
- The British Council aims to create friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries. It does this by making a positive contribution to the UK and the countries it works with – changing lives by creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust. The British Council works in more than 100 countries across the world in the fields of arts and culture, English language, education and civil society. In 2022 its work reached 600 million people overall, including online, social media and through broadcast and publications.
- **Impact Stories**, the lead author of this report, is an insight and evaluation consultancy specialising in education, culture and social change. It works to collate, illuminate and interpret information to provide actionable insights and learning for organisations and programmes in the UK and internationally.
- Insight and evaluation for this year's report has been significantly improved by close cooperation between the evaluators, Impact Stories, and the **Curriculum and Qualifications Analysis and Research Team at the Department for Education (DfE)**. From this team, Analyst James Chudy undertook most of the data matching, cleaning and analysis of MEP profile and GCSE outcomes data presented in this report. His expertise has greatly supported and enriched the evaluation report.

1.4 Organisation of this report

- The evaluation of MEP within this report is organised around four main sections which follow a summary of the background to, and key features of, MEP alongside a discussion of the methodology for research and analysis.
 - **School and Pupil Participation:** Analyses the numbers and profile of schools and pupils participating in MEP,
 - **Programme Design and Delivery:** Reviews how MEP has been implemented, discusses satisfaction with aspects of design and delivery and looks at the key features and challenges to that delivery,
 - **Impact:** Discusses the impacts of MEP against its target outcomes, including its success in increasing participation in Mandarin learning, its effects on learning outcomes and its wider role in broadening the horizons and raising the aspirations of pupils,
 - **Sustainability:** Examines prospects for the continued teaching and learning of Mandarin on the curriculum building on the platform created by MEP.

2. Executive Summary

2.1 Overview

“In my many years in education, this programme is the best I've been involved with.” School Leader, MEP (2024)

“The MEP is a superb provision and is a jewel within our crown as a school. It is often highly commended by pupils, parents and external visitors - including in our most recent Ofsted where it was described as phenomenal by inspectors.” School Leader, MEP (2024)

- MEP continues to be highly regarded by the majority of participating school leaders and teachers. 93% of staff responding to the 2023/2024 survey would encourage other schools to join the programme.
- Many staff offer high praise for the programme, highlighting the value of support provided by the IOE and the British Council, its positive impact on children studying Mandarin and often its impact on the school more generally. Some experienced school leaders describe it as the best school programme they have ever been involved in.
- The reintroduction of in-person intensive study in China in 2024 has re-energised the programme, creating an excitement and buzz which has significantly reduced challenges around motivation which had emerged during the Covid pandemic. Participation in intensive study is seen to build confidence, motivation, cultural understanding and practical language skills and to boost interest in continuing to learn Mandarin. Teachers and school leaders frequently use the words *‘life-changing’* or *‘transformational’* to describe the impact, especially on children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- 33 of 58 MEP schools with GCSE candidates in 2023/2024 were believed to have newly introduced Mandarin onto the curriculum.
- MEP schools contributed in excess of 40% of all GCSE candidates from state schools teaching Mandarin on the curriculum. The programme has been especially influential in widening access to Mandarin to pupils from backgrounds other than Chinese and MEP’s contribution in 2023/2024 was close to 50% of all GCSE candidates without Chinese first language and/or heritage studying Mandarin on the curriculum.
- Multivariate modelling confirms that participation in MEP makes a unique contribution to average GCSE attainment of more than half a grade, rising to close to one full grade for pupils at more established Cohort 1 schools. MEP’s impact is especially large at the top end of the grade distribution.
- Staff often highlight the programme’s impact on children from disadvantaged backgrounds. On average, these children have slightly lower attainment at GCSE level but staff point to the programme’s considerable impact in broadening horizons and raising aspirations for these children.
- An increasing number of MEP schools are developing a Mandarin offer in KS5 including pathways to enable pupils to continue Mandarin learning alongside other A-levels.

2.1 School and pupil participation

- MEP ran at its target capacity of 80 schools in academic year 2023/2024.
- The programme's focus on excellence continues to attract high performing schools but the overall profile of schools within the portfolio has changed over time, making it less focused on London schools and on selective or faith schools which tended to be the type of schools teaching Mandarin before the introduction of MEP. An important minority of schools within the portfolio have catchment areas marked by relatively high levels of economic deprivation, including schools in both urban and rural areas.
- An estimated 7,678 pupils were studying within MEP in 2023/2024. At the end of 2023/2024, the total number of pupils either having taken GCSE through MEP or actively participating in MEP stood at 9,822.
- An important feature of MEP is its appeal to families without Chinese heritage. In 2023/2024 an estimated 93% of pupils taking GCSE within MEP did not have Chinese heritage and/or first language whereas among candidates for GCSE Mandarin-speaking Chinese within state schools outside MEP the share is far lower at 69%
- The annual pupil attrition rate over four years between end of year 7 hurdle test and GCSE for the 2023/2024 GCSE cohort was 9%. The largest drop-out within MEP is at the transition between KS3 and KS4 in Year 9 and Year 10 when pupils make their wider GCSE choices.
- 35 of the 56 MEP schools (63%) giving at least one response to the staff survey said that they had an offer in KS5 during the year. Average KS5 numbers per school are typically small, generally fewer than 5 and sometimes as few as one or two for A-level Chinese, but no systematic tracking of MEP pupils into KS5 or Higher Education has been undertaken.

2.2 Programme design and delivery

- In 2023/2024 most MEP schools adhered to a curriculum model in KS3/KS4 which has become the template within MEP in choosing to deliver the minimum of four classroom hours and the further four hours as guided home study.
- Among MEP schools with a KS5 offer, almost half report they are offering A-level, a similar number offering HSK4 and smaller numbers offering IB as a full curriculum or as the MEP-specific standalone course. These courses are offered in various combinations. Ten schools were formally enrolled into the new MEP sixth form extension programme in 2023/2024.
- The MEP staffing model continues to vary considerably across the school portfolio. A small number of more experienced schools have four or more teachers either qualified or in training while twenty-four (44%) of 55 schools responding to the online survey are currently delivering the programme using only one qualified teacher.

- The vital contribution which the engagement and motivation of key teachers makes to MEP's success is widely recognised by school leaders and many, especially those at schools which do currently rely on only one teacher, worry about the programme's vulnerability to losing key staff,
- In this context, support from Chinese language assistants sourced through CLEC or the British Council is very often highlighted by MEP teaching staff as being crucial to the programme's success.
- More than half of 32 schools responding to the question in this year's survey say that teachers have trained or are currently training at their school within MEP. 13 PGCE Mandarin students were enrolled in study at UCL Institute of Education in 2023/2024 and several of these train within MEP schools and may well go on to work in one post-graduation.
- Support for in-service teacher training by IOE through MEP, alongside considerable resources development and a variety of networking opportunities, are widely valued by teachers, especially newly qualified ones. Among 46 teachers responding to the staff survey, 80% say they are satisfied or very satisfied with '*Support to teachers and teaching practice*' and 85% with '*Teaching and learning resources available.*'
- Reinstatement of in-person intensive study in China is widely seen by staff to have re-energised the programme contributing to a boost in motivation, to an increased pride among pupils in being part of MEP and to increased interest in pupils and parents entering the school in Year 7.
- 1,187 Year 9 pupils and 158 teachers from 61 MEP schools participated in the first full-scale intensive study in China post-Covid held in July 2024. Within the 61 schools, an estimated 82% of all Year 9 pupils who could have participated in the intensive study did so.
- Both pupils and teachers who took part were overwhelmingly positive about the structure, organisation and impacts of the intensive study. Among participating pupils, mean score likelihood to recommend on an 11-point (0-10) scale was 8.3 with a Net Promoter Score (NPS) of 41%, well ahead of scores recorded for virtual intensive study held during Covid affected years.
- Among teacher participants, mean score likelihood to recommend was 9.2 with a Net Promoter Score (NPS) of 77%. Teachers and school leaders frequently use the words '*life-changing*' or '*transformational*' to describe the impact of the in-person intensive study, especially on children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- The perception among a large majority of participating teachers and school leaders continues to be that MEP is a well-conceived and well-rounded programme which has the benefit of funding and strong support from IOE and the British Council. Forty of forty-six (87%) teacher respondents to the 2024 MEP online survey say they are 'Satisfied' or 'Very Satisfied' with the, '*Overall programme structure*' and 83% with the, '*Learning pathway from Y7 to Y11.*'

- The extension of MEP into KS5 was new in 2023/2024. Among 28 teacher respondents to the 2023/2024 survey, 14 (50%) said that they are satisfied or very satisfied with 'MEP support to Mandarin teaching in KS5' while 7 (25%) say they are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with this support.
- Teachers who are dissatisfied often remain uncertain about appropriate pathways with some wanting more support with HSK and IB.
- Both teachers and school leaders now identify in-person intensive study and financial support as the two key success drivers for MEP. These two factors are followed in importance by support from IOE, the provision of teaching and curriculum resources and extended in-classroom learning time for Mandarin.
- Timetabling and accommodating at least four hours of teaching within the curriculum has always been the main practical challenge to MEP delivery in schools and continues to be so. The stable core of schools within the portfolio has evidently found ways of making the timetable work but it remains a point of strain for schools new to MEP and is still a reason why some schools leave the programme.
- The need to resource adequately for extra teaching hours is of course one reason why grant funding through MEP is seen to be so necessary. School Leaders also had a particular focus on financial stability in 2023/2024 in part because of the uncertainty which existed for much of the year around continuity of MEP funding.
- There remains a difference of opinion within the MEP teaching community as to whether the use of HSK3 as a hurdle test in Year 10 is a help or a hindrance to progress towards GCSE. Many teachers, especially the more experienced ones, appear to incorporate preparation for HSK3 relatively seamlessly into their teaching practice and to see it as a fairly natural progression for pupils towards GCSE. A minority of teachers continue to see HSK3 as a distraction and possibly a barrier to progression, viewing it as a separate syllabus and vocabulary set running almost in parallel, rather than in line with, preparation for GCSE.

2.3 Programme Impact

- It is estimated that across the state and independent sectors in England the number of schools offering Mandarin on the curriculum has approximately trebled from slightly more than 100 in 2018/2019 to close to 300 in 2023/2024.
- The 58 MEP schools with GCSE candidates in 2023/2024 represent 20% (one in five) of all schools and 31% of all state schools offering Mandarin on the curriculum. Of these 58 MEP schools, 33 (57%) are believed to have introduced Mandarin onto the curriculum within MEP.

- A total of 6,691 Chinese GCSEs were taken at all schools in England by pupils reaching the end of KS4 in 2023/2024, an increase of 18% over the year and a more than threefold increase relative to 2018/2019. MEP's share of all Chinese GCSEs rose from 12% in 2020/2021 to 19% in 2022/2023 before falling back slightly to 17% in 2023/2024. However, this headline data underestimates to a large extent the real contribution of MEP to growth in the number of pupils actually studying Mandarin on the curriculum in schools.
- 38% of all the Chinese GCSEs reported in the 2023/2024 headline data were for the Cantonese-speaking variant of the exam, the vast majority of which are believed to have been taken by private candidates not studying Chinese on the curriculum. Further, many candidates for GCSE Mandarin are also private candidates who take advantage of their Mandarin first language and frequently sit the examination in advance of the end of KS4.
- The upper estimate of the number of Mandarin-speaking GCSEs taken in academic year 2023/2024 by pupils who have actually studied the language on the curriculum is 2,697, meaning that MEP contributed at least 41% of these candidates. 21% of these Mandarin GCSEs were believed to have been taken by candidates with Chinese heritage/first language (a high share of whom are likely to have been private candidates), meaning that MEP contributed 48%, or very nearly half, of Mandarin-speaking GCSEs taken at state schools by candidates studying Mandarin on the curriculum without Chinese heritage/first language.
- After allowance is made for candidates with Chinese heritage/first language who constitute a far larger proportion of pupils studying outside MEP, the headline GCSE results for pupils studying within MEP are statistically significantly higher than for those for pupils in state schools studying outside the programme.
 - Mean attainment within MEP is 6.4 vs 5.8 outside MEP
 - Share achieving grade 5+ within MEP is 80.4% vs 72.9% outside MEP
- The increase in attainment within MEP is especially large at the top end of the grade distribution. The proportion of non Chinese heritage/first language pupils achieving grades 8 or 9 is 36.5% within MEP vs 23.2% outside MEP.
- Statistical modelling confirms that participation in MEP does make a unique, independent contribution to attainment in GCSE Mandarin Chinese of 0.55. i.e. on average, a pupil within MEP will achieve just over half a grade point higher than an otherwise identical pupil studying Mandarin Chinese in an otherwise identical state school outside the programme. This result is consistent with the overall impact of MEP identified in 2022/2023.
- The independent impact of MEP is statistically significant in both Cohort 1 and subsequent cohort schools but is higher (0.87) in more experienced Cohort 1 schools than in these other cohorts (0.42). Pupils at Cohort 1 schools show especially strong performance at the top of the grade distribution.

- Staff teaching within MEP often caution against measuring the impact of MEP purely through exam results, believing that the programme provides a level of cultural awareness and enrichment to young people and helps to expand their horizons, global understanding and preparedness for life in the 21st century which goes well beyond pure language skills.
- An important impact of MEP is seen to be on the motivation and aspirations of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Staff frequently argue that the actual impact on children from disadvantaged backgrounds is greater than on those from more privileged ones irrespective of GCSE.
- MEP and support through IOE continue to have a positive impact on teacher confidence and skills. Feedback through the survey from 46 teachers found that 80% agree or agree strongly with the statement: *“Through MEP my confidence as a teacher has improved”* and 85% with the statement, *“Through MEP I have become more confident in delivering a rigorous model for teaching Mandarin.”*

2.4 Sustainability

- 85% of teacher respondents and 86% of school leader respondents to the staff survey said that they feel Confident or Very Confident in their school’s ability *‘to offer high quality Mandarin teaching and learning on the curriculum over the long term.’*
- Schools which lack confidence in their ability to sustain the subject over the longer term almost always identify concerns around staff retention and recruitment and the risks inherent in their (over)reliance on the skills and commitment of key staff.
- As has been observed in previous evaluation reports, while most MEP schools are committed to maintaining Mandarin on the curriculum, a majority also say that they would be likely to revert to a less intensive curriculum model more typical of other MFLs if programme funding were to be withdrawn.
- More than a third of school leaders responding to the survey say that either they do not know what would happen in the absence of continued funding or expect to have to discontinue teaching Mandarin altogether. Invariably, these school leaders point to the wider financial challenges facing schools and the likely difficulty of being able to continue to fund teachers
- The success of MEP in bringing through a generation of young learners to GCSE Mandarin at the end of KS4 is creating a focus within a growing number of schools on pathways in KS5 and beyond into university.
- Developing pathways for Mandarin as an adjunct subject is especially important for schools both to widen access to higher level Mandarin and also to make the KS5 offer financially viable in terms of teacher/pupil ratios. Schools are currently exploring both HSK4 and IB as an intermediate level offer but typically, neither is considered ideal.
- Schools can find resourcing for KS5 a particular challenge because many of the teachers supporting MEP in KS3 and KS4 are in early-stage career and often lack experience and sometimes confidence teaching at a higher level.

3. Reflections and lessons learned

- The results of the 2023/2024 MEP evaluation are extremely positive.
- The programme was running at its target portfolio size of 80 schools during the year and a large majority of school leaders and staff in those schools are extremely positive about MEP's design, implementation and impact.
- MEP is widely viewed as being a well-balanced programme addressing issues both of supply (teacher capacity and skills) and demand (pupil/parent interest, motivation and learning pathway). The support provided by IOE within the programme is increasingly recognised and valued by participating schools as is support from the British Council around the intensive study in China. An increasingly rich bank of resources has been developed within the programme to support teaching and learning of Mandarin Chinese.
- The reinstatement of in-person intensive study has highlighted its multiple impacts and benefits and its integral role within the wider programme.
- Many staff see MEP as very much offering a model for how all MFL in school should ideally be organised and delivered.
- The programme has largely succeeded in its original aims of increasing the number of state schools offering Mandarin on the curriculum and increasing the number of pupils studying the language. Nearly ten thousand children were either currently studying during the academic year or had completed GCSE through MEP and the very large contribution the programme is making to the number of pupils actually studying the language on the curriculum is now far better understood through the more detailed analysis of data for GCSE Chinese which has been undertaken this year.
- A notable achievement of MEP has been in widening access to the language to children without Chinese heritage and in lessening perceptions that Mandarin is *'too hard'* for children other than those with Chinese heritage.
- Accommodating intensive hours within the curriculum remains a challenge for some schools but a core of schools within the portfolio of 80 has successfully managed to do so and many schools who have participated in the programme for multiple years have more or less incorporated the programme into their curriculum as business as usual.
- The unique impact on GCSE attainment of MEP is clear and measurable but its less measurable impact in terms of increased pupil confidence, broader horizons and higher aspirations is now increasingly recognised within participating schools. These wider impacts are believed to be particularly profound for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Supporting Mandarin teaching and learning in KS5 will now need to become an increasing focus of MEP if the platform established in KS3/KS4 and the pipeline of Mandarin learners is to be built on.

- Teacher and learner reaction to the revised A-level curriculum is not yet known but A-level Mandarin is still likely to attract only relatively small numbers of MEP KS3/KS4 alumni. Supporting teaching and learning for HSK4 and IB as adjunct subjects in KS5 which provide access to far larger numbers of learners is therefore going to be increasingly important.
- Widening understanding of HSK4 within universities or far more significantly, bringing HSK qualifications within the UCAS points scheme, would boost interest in the pathway.
- Continuing to boost the supply of Mandarin teachers and aligning the allocation of CLEC and British Council teaching assistants to schools most in need will continue to be important in reducing the vulnerability of the programme in schools to the continued health and engagement of sole Mandarin teachers.
- Analysis for this year's evaluation has highlighted the severe limitations of using published data around 'GCSE Chinese' as a means of assessing the attainment of pupils studying Mandarin on the curriculum.
- Immigration and a significant increase in the number of children with mother tongue fluency is a challenge for the assessment of all MFLs taught on the curriculum (French, Spanish). But it is a more significant challenge for 'Chinese' because it is essentially two languages with one of these languages (Cantonese) a wholly community language akin to Turkish or Punjabi while the other (Mandarin) is a language with a significant number of speakers in the community which is now increasingly being taught on the curriculum, too.
- Nearly 40% of GCSE candidates are community learners of Cantonese, while a further 20%-30% are likely to be community learners of Mandarin, many of whom sit GCSE as private candidates. As a result, the combined data for GCSE Chinese provides very little insight into the success of Mandarin teaching and learning on the curriculum and even runs the risk of supporting conclusions which are incorrect.
- As Mandarin teaching and learning in schools expands, it would be sensible for the DfE to collect and report data for GCSE Cantonese and Mandarin separately. The data is already available through Pearson Edexcel. This exercise might also lead to a reassessment of how grade boundaries for the two language variants are set.
- As a more general point applicable to understanding the teaching and learning of all MFL on the curriculum, it would be valuable over the longer term to move towards collecting and reporting GCSE data for private candidates separately to that for pupils studying on the curriculum. While this would impose some additional reporting burden on schools, those schools do already collect the data in order to administer the exam.
- The level of understanding of the impact of MEP would be increased in future evaluations through profiling on the NPD against measures of disadvantage such as FSM and the tracking of pupils into KS5.

4. Summary Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Outcome	KPI	Result: Academic year 2023/2024	Data Source
A growing portfolio of schools on the programme	Baseline: 75 schools in 2021/2022 Target: 80 schools by 2023/2024	80 schools in the programme 33 of 58 MEP schools (57%) entering candidates for GCSE in 2023/2024 new to offering Mandarin on the curriculum	Programme Data
Increased number of pupils on track to a high level of fluency in Mandarin	At least 9,000 pupils within the programme by academic year 2023/2024 11,000 pupils have participated in the programme since inception	7,678 pupils within the programme (2023/2024) 9,822 pupils currently studying within MEP in 2023/2024 or have taken GCSE Chinese since inception 13,491 pupils completed at least one year of Mandarin since inception	Programme Data (numbers taking end-of-yr tests)
Improved pupil attainment in Mandarin	GCSE attainment compared to national averages for state schools	80.4% GCSE Grade 5+ (72.9% ex MEP) 36.5% GCSE Grade 8+ (23.2% ex MEP) 0.5 grade point average increase in attainment within MEP (based on multivariate regression modeling) Data for Yr 11 pupils taking GCSE Mandarin speaking variant of GCSE in calendar year 2023/2024 and without Chinese heritage / first language	Analysis of GCSE attainment data available to DfE
Pupils are engaged and highly motivated to study Mandarin	% of pupils retained in the programme (90%+ pa)	91% p.a. (Number of GCSE candidates vs pupils taking Yr7 Hurdle Tests four years prior in schools remaining within MEP between 2019/2020 - 2023/2024)	Programme Data
Expansion of supply of qualified Mandarin teachers	Number of PGCE places offered by UCL IOE annually for the Mandarin Languages PGCE	13 places in 2023/2024	Programme Data
Improved quality of Mandarin teaching practices	Teacher satisfaction with: - Learning pathways - Programme structure - Hurdle tests - Support - Resources	Satisfied+Very satisfied with.... (N=46) Learning pathway from Y7 to Y11 - 83% Overall programme structure - 87% Hurdle Tests as a tool for assessing pupils' progress - 85% Support to teachers and teaching practice - 80% Teaching and learning resources available - 85%	Online survey of MEP teachers
Improved teacher confidence in teaching Mandarin	Self-reported teacher confidence	Agree+Strongly agree (N=46) Through MEP my confidence as a teacher has improved - 80% Through MEP I have become more confident in delivering a rigorous model for teaching Mandarin - 85%	Online survey of MEP teachers
Increased pupil confidence, resilience and self-esteem	Teacher reported: - Confidence - Resilience - Self-esteem	Agree+Strongly agree (N=51) Participation in MEP improves pupils' self-esteem - 65% Participation in MEP improves pupils' resilience - 65% Participation in MEP improves pupils' self-confidence - 67% Participation in MEP supports the confidence and resilience of children from disadvantaged backgrounds - 67%	Online survey of MEP teachers
A higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils within MEP schools are engaged in the programme	Share of pupils within the programme eligible for FSM vs 2021/2022 baseline	Data unavailable for 2023/2024	Analysis of NPD data available to DfE

5. Overview of The Mandarin Excellence Programme

5.1 Background

- On 20th May 2016 the Secretary of State for Education awarded a contract for the delivery of the Mandarin Excellence Programme (MEP) in schools in England. The contract was awarded to UCL IOE as lead delivery partner working with the British Council.
- The Programme, focusing on teaching and learning in KS3 and KS4 in preparation for GCSE Chinese, had an initial investment of £10m to run over a four-year period from 2016 to 2020. This initial contract and investment was extended to cover a fifth academic year (2020/2021). A new three-year contract for this second phase of the programme was then put in place to run through to the end of the 2023/2024 academic year (with the option to extend for a fourth year). In June 2024 this second phase funding was extended for a fourth academic year (and the ninth year of the programme overall) to run until 31st August 2025.
- The focus of this evaluation report is the third year of the second round of funding 2023/2024.
- In summer 2025, a further phase of funding was announced which allowed for continuation of the programme in schools, albeit with a reduction in funding and a reduction in the number of mandated teaching and learning hours devoted to Mandarin Chinese in participating schools.
- In order to participate in MEP, schools need to have an Ofsted rating of *Good* or *Outstanding* and be able to select a minimum annual cohort of 20 pupils into the Programme in Year 7.
- On commission, the headline aim of the programme (which was achieved), was to have at least 5,000 pupils within state schools in England on a path to fluency in Mandarin Chinese by 2020 and in doing so create a model for delivery and development of the language providing:
 - diverse geographical location of schools to ensure the development of teaching and learning of Mandarin Chinese in schools across the country;
 - school-led development of the Programme, translating centralised guidance and support into local practice;
 - a framework for the sustainability of Mandarin Chinese in England beyond the life of the Programme;
 - an opportunity for schools with strong existing Mandarin Chinese delivery to act as Hubs to implement successfully the step-up of teaching required within the first year of the Programme, and to be able to lead confidently additional new schools in following years;
 - intensive activities for schools, including residential intensive language study in China at the end of year 8;
 - a high-quality online environment to provide resources;

- development of teaching capacity and expansion of the provision of training places;
- a communications plan and strategy;
- stakeholder engagement to build demand.
- The specific aims of the second phase of MEP were to:
 - Support, retain and where needed recruit secondary schools to maintain 75 schools in the programme. In March 2023 this formal target was increased to 80 enrolled schools by academic year 2023/2024.
 - Involve the rigorous study of Mandarin by highly able and motivated pupils for a minimum of eight hours a week, made up of a combination of at least four hours of class-time teaching, after school teaching and self-study, including forms of blended/online learning;
 - Ensure continued recruitment and training of UK-based Mandarin teachers to contribute to meeting the needs of schools in England;
 - Embed effective, sustainable teaching practices that will continue to increase the number of pupils studying Mandarin beyond the funding of this project;
 - Provide pupils with an immersive experience of China through an intensive study period in China for most pupils who reach Year 9 on the programme and/or through the use of digital media where travel is not permitted or possible;
 - Achieve at least 9,000 pupils on the programme and 11,000 pupils since the beginning of the programme on track to a high level of fluency by academic year 2023/2024.
- During the period covered by phase 2 funding, participating schools with pupils in KS3 and KS4 received £20K core funding, plus extra per-pupil payments reflecting pupil retention year-on-year and levels of participation in the Intensive Study in China.
- On October 14th 2023 at the Annual Chinese Teaching Conference at IOE, the Minister for Schools Standards announced that MEP would be expanded into the Sixth Form from the 2023/24 academic year.
- By increasing the number of schools teaching Mandarin Chinese, MEP also aims to support wider efforts to grow the number of teachers of the language in England by boosting the number of schools in which trainee and early career teachers can gain experience and fulfill their teaching practice requirements.
- The MEP lead delivery partner UCL IOE trains the largest number of UK teachers of Mandarin Chinese (achieving qualified teacher status [QTS]) through the IOE Mandarin Chinese PGCE.

6. Methodology

6.1 Research and analysis

- The evaluation within this report is based on six main elements of data collection and analysis:
- **Analysis of programme data collected by UCL IOE**
 - This data covers the portfolio of schools in the programme, the number and attainment of pupils taking the standardised end-of-year Hurdle Tests designed by UCL IOE to assess pupil progress and the teaching hours delivered by schools.
- **Analysis of pupil profile and GCSE attainment data within the National Pupil Database (NPD)**
 - Data on pupil profile and GCSE attainment was identified by DfE analysts within the National Pupil Database (NPD) for all pupils in England studying Chinese at school. The subset of these pupils within MEP was identified to allow comparison between the two groups (studying within MEP and studying outside MEP).
- **An online survey distributed to staff in participating MEP schools**
 - The survey was designed with a common core of questions for all staff plus some additional, differentiated questions for two groups of staff:
 - Mandarin teachers were asked questions directly to the delivery of the programme in the classroom,
 - School leaders (Heads, Deputies, Heads of Modern Foreign Languages) were asked questions which focused more on the role and impact of MEP within the school more widely.
 - The survey carried over some questions from previous waves of research but was updated to reflect developments impacting the programme within the academic year, including the resumption of in-person intensive study in China and the establishment of an MEP sixth-form programme.
 - The survey received 88 useable responses in total (cf 87 responses in 2022/2023).
 - At least one staff response was received from 56 schools (cf 53 schools in 2022/2023) out of a total of 80 schools in the MEP Portfolio during the year (70% response rate – Table 1).

Table 1: Summary online survey response

Category	Number	%
Total MEP staff respondents	88	
...of which		
Mandarin Teachers	51	58%
School Leaders (Heads, Deputies, Heads of MFL)	37	42%
Total schools with at least one staff response	56	
Share of schools in the MEP portfolio (n=80) providing at least one response		70%

- **Visits to two schools within the MEP portfolio**
 - Half-day visits were made to two of the schools within the portfolio. One of the schools is a more experienced school which joined the programme as part of MEP Cohort 3 (2018/2019), while the second is a less experienced schools which joined as part of Cohort 7 (2022/2023).
 - At each school there was an opportunity to observe MEP lessons, talk in-depth to an MEP teacher and to a school leader. At one of the schools informal discussions were held with three small groups of MEP students in different year groups. These student discussions focused on experience of MEP and ambitions around Chinese studies in the future.
- **In-depth interviews with staff in MEP schools**
 - In addition to four in-depth interviews (two with teachers; two with school leaders) conducted during the school visits a further eight interviews were conducted with staff from schools in the portfolio
 - Schools for interview were chosen to give a broad representation across the portfolio of different MEP cohorts and different regions of England. Interviewees were two school leaders and six teachers to provide different perspectives on MEP.
 - Interviews were held via Teams and explored issues raised through the online survey in greater depth. They lasted 30-45 minutes.
- **Analysis and reporting on Intensive Study in China (July 2024)**
 - In-person intensive study in China for Year 9 MEP students, a key element of the overall MEP programme, resumed in July 2024 following a small-scale pilot for Year 10 students from 5 participating schools held in October 2023.

- Separate evaluation reports on both the pilot and full-scale intensive study have been prepared for the British Council. These reports drew on data from two surveys, one for participating teachers and one for participating students, distributed by the British Council at the end of the intensive study. The surveys focused on the perceived value and benefits of the intensive study and its contribution to the overall target outcomes of MEP.
- The surveys distributed at the end of the full-scale intensive study in July 2024 received 758 responses from participating students (64% response) within 57 participating MEP schools and 113 responses (72% response) from teachers supporting the intensive study.

6.2 Challenges and future opportunities for research and analysis

- Data collection from schools is always challenged by pressures on staff time. Yet, response rates to the survey and the level of response to requests for in-depth interviews were relatively high and the breadth and quality of data collected gives a very representative perspective across schools within the programme.
- It again proved difficult to arrange on-site visits to schools because of the time pressures on staff. There is the potential to coordinate those visits with UCL IOE programme staff so that the same schools do not receive separate requests for visits from multiple sources.
- The analysis of MEP's impact on attainment in GCSE Chinese was again facilitated by analysts at DfE who undertook identification of MEP students' records within the National Pupil Database (NPD). The process of data matching and subsequent analysis was informed and made more efficient by learning from prior years.
- The option available to candidates in GCSE Chinese to take Mandarin or Cantonese speaking variants complicates the analysis of the impact of MEP. GCSE data is routinely reported by the DfE in a composite category of 'GCSE Chinese.' It has become clear from prior year analysis that data often identified as relating to Mandarin learners in schools is inaccurate because it includes a potentially large number of candidates sitting the Cantonese speaking variant. These candidates often sit the exam as a private candidate, using the school as an examination centre but not studying it on the school curriculum. The majority of these candidates have Chinese heritage and potentially first language Cantonese and many also sit the exam in advance of Year 11.
- A focus of this year's work has been to undertake a more granular analysis to understand better how many students are taking GCSE Mandarin having actually studied Mandarin at school on the curriculum. These candidates are the appropriate comparator set for understanding the impact of MEP as an in-school teaching and learning programme.
- Data on GCSE candidates split by Mandarin/Cantonese speaking variants was sourced from Pearson Edexcel which is the only Board to offer the choice.

- As a consequence of focusing some of the analysis on Mandarin learners rather than Chinese learners and the availability of some more accurate data, some results are not directly comparable with those set out in previous evaluation reports.
- Analysts at the DfE have faced resource constraints during the year and were unable to provide some data (only potentially available through the NPD) including data on the Free School Meals status of pupils participating in MEP (a proxy for disadvantage) or on the learning paths into KS5 or into Higher Education of MEP pupils.

7. Key features of the Mandarin Excellence Programme

7.1 Overview

- In order to participate in MEP, schools need to have an **Ofsted rating of Good or Outstanding** and be able to select a minimum annual cohort of 20 pupils into the Programme in Year 7.
- **Participating schools receive £20K core funding p.a.** plus extra per-pupil payments reflecting student retention year-on-year and levels of participation in the intensive study in China, especially among disadvantaged pupils qualifying for pupil premium.
- In the first year of the programme (2016/2017) state schools which already had experience of teaching Mandarin on the curriculum were recruited into the programme to act as **mentor schools and beacons of good practice** for schools recruited in subsequent years which would be introducing the subject onto the curriculum for the first time.
- Pupils are recruited into the programme within participating schools in Year 7 with the shared expectation of school and parents that the child's participation will run through to taking GCSE Mandarin Chinese at the end of Key Stage 4 (KS4) in the summer of Year 11.

7.2 The programme in KS3 and KS4

- **Extended learning hours.** Learners have to undertake 8 hours of study per week organised by the school, of which at least four hours per week must be delivered face-to-face within the curriculum. Additional learning hours take the form of guided self-study.
- **Milestone end-of-year hurdle tests** set by UCL IOE to assess progress. These are set and assessed for MEP pupils nationally at the end of Years 7, 8 and 9. Each test has reading, listening, writing and speaking components, although to reduce teacher workload, there is no speaking component in the Year 9 test.
- At the end of **Year 10, pupils sit the HSK Level 3 exam (HSK3)** as a milestone test.
 - The HSK (Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi) testing system sits outside the UK's formal examination structure but is familiar to many UK universities. It is the standard test of Chinese language proficiency for non-native speakers and is recognised by universities in China where it can facilitate access to study at FE/HE level. HSK currently consists of six levels. A general comparator is the IELTS testing system for speakers of English as a foreign language.
 - While there has been no formally recognised mapping between HSK and UK examinations, the standard of the UK's GCSE Mandarin Chinese is generally taken to lie in-between HSK3 and HSK4.

- Periods of intensive study in the UK for students in Year 10 and intensive study in China for students in Year 9. The **intensive study in UK** is typically hosted at a UK university(s) and brings together pupils from MEP schools in a 3-5 day programme of learning activities, talks and projects around Chinese language and culture. The focus of recent intensive study in the UK has been on a China-focused tourism project supported by trainee (PGCE) practitioners.
- The **intensive study in China** is a two-week programme hosted by a number of universities in China. It involves classroom teaching and a programme of cultural activities allowing children to interact with their peers and to experience daily life and Chinese culture first-hand.
- The intensive study is organised and delivered by the IOE and the British Council's office in China working alongside China's Centre for Language Education and Cooperation (CLEC) which also funds the teaching, accommodation and cultural activities within the country.
- In 2017/2018 and 2018/2019, MEP pupils in Year 8 undertook intensive study in China in the summer term. The Covid pandemic prevented any intensive study in 2019/2020 and for the following three years, intensive study in China was held as a virtual programme for MEP pupils in Year 9.
- In-person intensive study in China resumed in 2023/2024 with a pilot of five schools held in October 2023 followed by a full intensive study programme for all MEP schools with a Year 9 cohort in July 2024.
- **A Hub and Partner model of peer support** which links a small number of Partner schools new to Mandarin on the curriculum with a single Hub school which has longer experience and, typically, more experienced teachers of the language.
- **Extra-curricular activities and cultural events** at school level and with schools within the Hub and Partner cluster.
- **Ongoing support to teachers and schools by UCL IOE** including learning resources, project resources for different year groups, in-service training to teachers and regular forums for teachers and school leaders within MEP to share experience and to collaborate.

7.3 The programme in KS5

- MEP was originally designed to take pupils through to GCSE. As the first cohorts of learners have moved into KS5, a **MEP KS5 extension programme** was introduced in academic year 2023/2024 to support schools and learners to continue their learning journey in sixth form and potentially into Higher Education.

- Ten schools were recruited into the KS5 programme in 2023/2024 from among the 48 schools in the portfolio which joined MEP in the first three cohorts between 2016/2017 and 2018/2019. Schools in these three cohorts had pupils who had already taken GCSE within MEP and had moved into sixth form in 2023/2024. The intention was to expand recruitment to a further ten schools in 2024/2025 including those from MEP cohort 4 which joined the programme in 2019/2020.
- Schools eligible for the KS5 extension programme have to be committed to be delivering one or a combination of three qualifications in KS5 for a minimum of 5 students.
 - Level 3 qualifications: Mandarin A level or International Baccalaureate (IB).
 - HSK4: As discussed above, HSK sits outside the formal examination system in England but is widely understood and valued by UK universities (and indeed by universities worldwide) as evidence of advanced competence in Mandarin Chinese. HSK4 is generally understood by teachers to be at a level somewhere between GCSE and A-level.
 - IB Standard Chinese as a standalone IB subject. This option was negotiated with IB to be available exclusively for MEP schools with trialing during 2023/2024 and formal start in September 2024.
- MEP Sixth Form Schools receive £10,000 per year, ongoing support, resource development and CPD from UCL IOE and permission to use the accreditation of 'MEP Sixth Form'. Core commitments of the schools include:
 - Teaching Chinese qualifications at KS5, and associated CPD,
 - Building interest, motivation and take-up of Chinese ensuring that pupils already participating in the MEP have the option to seamlessly continue with their MEP studies into KS5,
 - Continuing to recruit 5 or more MEP sixth form students in Year 12 in September each year, throughout the lifespan of the agreement,

7.4 Support for teacher supply

- By increasing the number of schools teaching Mandarin Chinese, the **programme also aims to support efforts to grow the number of teachers of the language in England.**
- UCL IOE produce the largest number of PGCE Newly Qualified Teachers of Mandarin through the UCL IOE Mandarin PGCE which has significant Mandarin-specific input for student teachers. UCL IOE also offers a Mandarin upskilling programme which aims to develop the capability of teachers of other subjects (typically other languages) to teach Mandarin in KS3.
- MEP's contribution to an increase in the number of schools teaching Mandarin has also increased the number of opportunities for pre and in-service training for Mandarin teachers. Where possible, schools within MEP agree to offer PGCE language student placements for IOE PGCE students.

8. School and pupil participation

8.1 School participation in MEP

- An initial cohort of 15 schools was recruited into MEP in the 2016/2017 academic year. Schools in this initial cohort were actively recruited because they had previous experience teaching Mandarin on the curriculum. It was intended that these schools would serve as beacons of good practice and mentors for other schools without prior experience in the language.
- By 2023/2024 a total of 99 different schools in England had joined the programme over its eight-year lifespan. Before the start of the academic year, 19 of these 99 schools (19%) had withdrawn from the programme so that the MEP Portfolio ran at its target size of 80 schools during academic year 2023/2024 (Table 2).

Table 2: Growth of the MEP school portfolio

Academic Year	Number of schools joining MEP	Number of schools leaving MEP at end of year	Portfolio of schools <u>during</u> academic year
2016/17	15		15
2017/18	23		38
2018/19	26		64
2019/20	13	1	76
2020/21	5	9	72
2021/22	6	1	77
2022/23	6	4	79
2023/24	5	4	<u>80</u>
Total	99	19	

Source: UCL IOE MEP programme data (2024); Analysis by Impact Stories

Notes: One school classified here as a Cohort 1 (2016/2017) school joined the programme but did not receive programme funding until 2018/2019. In internal programme data it is sometimes referred to as a Cohort 1 school and sometimes as a Cohort 3 school

- Throughout the programme's life, schools which have withdrawn have done so mainly for two reasons:
 - A challenge at school level. For example, a change in Ofsted rating (meaning that the school can no longer remain within the programme) or a change in school leadership and overall direction,
 - Difficulty in managing and resourcing the extended hours and the timetable consequences of MEP within the wider school curriculum.
- Four schools which participated in 2022/2023 did not continue within MEP in 2023/2024. As we noted in last year's report, three of these four schools belonged to the same Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) and the decision was largely taken at the level of the MAT. In a reflection of the supply-side challenges to MEP, this MAT decided to withdraw from the programme because of an inability to recruit and then retain suitable teachers. This MAT's experience was that few suitable teachers were willing to commit to living in their part of the country, with suitable candidates preferring opportunities in London or other major cities with a large Chinese diaspora community. The MAT's decision was taken reluctantly and despite considerable enthusiasm and demand among parents and children.
- A further five schools which were within the portfolio in 2023/2024 left at the end of the year. Two of these schools had wider challenges within the school and two were relatively recent additions to the portfolio which had struggled to accommodate the intensive programme within the curriculum. Uncertainty over the future path and sustainability of funding contributed to the decision to withdraw.

8.2 The profile of schools within MEP

- The MEP programme is only open to applications from schools holding an Ofsted rating of *Good* or *Outstanding*, so the profile of the schools within the portfolio is a subset of these schools, rather than of the total universe of secondary schools in England.
- Many of the schools joining the programme in its early years were among the relatively few state schools in the country already teaching Mandarin on the curriculum and these tended to be schools which were academically high achieving, often grammar or faith schools and concentrated in London and the South East.
- The programme's focus on excellence has continued to attract academically high performing schools but the overall profile of schools within the portfolio has changed over time. Of the five schools joining MEP in 2023/2024 only one was a grammar school. None of the schools were in London and none had previously offered Mandarin Chinese on the curriculum.

- The MEP portfolio remains concentrated in the major conurbations with the largest group in London and other significant urban clusters in the West Midlands and Leeds-Manchester. As the portfolio has expanded, efforts have been made to widen the geographic reach and to bring in schools in more rural areas. Of the five schools joining MEP in 2023/2024, two were in the South East (outside London) one in East of England, one in the South West and one in the North West.
- Participation of multiple schools within a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) has become an increasingly important characteristic of the portfolio over time.
- MEP aligns well with the focus of schools which prioritise internationalisation within their curriculum. Many MEP schools have existing international links and/or participate in other international programmes such as the International School Award (ISA) run by the British Council.
- An important minority of schools within the portfolio have catchment areas marked by relatively high levels of economic deprivation, including schools in both urban and rural areas. Leaders in these schools are typically attracted by the programme's potential to broaden the horizons and challenge the aspirations of their children (and parents) and also to provide a platform for interaction and engagement as peers with pupils from more advantaged backgrounds elsewhere in England. The aspirational nature of the programme is sometimes seen as an important point of alignment for all school stakeholders.

“The fact there is an element of it being aspirational means Governors [are] keen to support.” **School Leader, MEP (2024)**

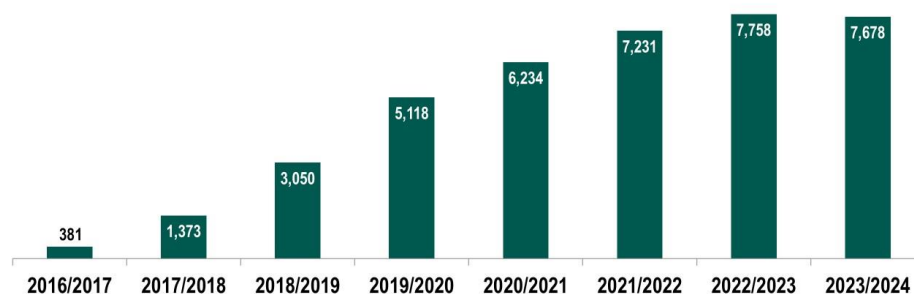
8.3 Pupil participation in MEP

- The second phase of MEP had a primary goal of 9,000 pupils on the programme and 11,000 pupils since the beginning of the programme on track to a high level of fluency by academic year 2023/2024.
- An estimated 7,678 pupils (Chart 1) were studying within MEP across 80 schools in 2023/2024. This total is based on the number of students taking end-of-year tests, so almost certainly undercounts to some extent the total number actually studying during the year.
- The number of pupils within the programme increased every year after launch in 2016/2017 to 2022/2023 as the number of schools within the portfolio increased. The number of participating pupils declined slightly (-1.0%) in 2023/2024 as the portfolio reached its target of 80 schools. There was a small decline in the number of pupils joining the programme, as measured by the number taking Year 7 (first year) end of year hurdle tests in 2023/2024.
- The perceived attraction of the programme for parents and children remains its cultural relevance, the importance of China within the global economy of the 21st century and the competitive advantage in the employment market that understanding China and its language might provide to young people.

Chart 1: Growth in Pupil Numbers within MEP

Number of pupils within MEP (number taking end of year tests)

By academic year



Source: Programme data from UCL IOE based on numbers of pupils taking end of year Hurdle Tests (Yr7-Yr9), HSK2/3 (Yr 10); GCSE data from DfE (Yr 11). GCSE data includes one school in the MEP portfolio which enters candidates for GCSE at the end of Year 9



NB: In individual years, small numbers of pupils may not take year-end Hurdle Tests, so the number of students actually studying within MEP during an academic year may be slightly higher than the numbers shown. Data for 2019/2020 is estimated because the pandemic prevented the administration of end of year Hurdle Tests



- Over the three prior academic years 2020/2021, 2021/2022, 2022/2023, 2,144 pupils had taken GCSE Chinese on completion of the MEP programme. So, at the end of 2023/2024, the total number of pupils either having taken GCSE through MEP or actively participating in MEP stood at 9,822 (Table 2).
- This number excludes pupils who have studied for only part of their 5-year cycle. An estimated total of 13,491 students have completed an end of Year 7 hurdle test within MEP since 2016/2017 and therefore studied within the programme for at least one year. It is also the case that some of the schools which have left the programme and whose pupils are not counted within the total, have continued to offer Mandarin on the curriculum, albeit typically in a less intensive format.

Table 3: Pupil participation in MEP since inception – total students taking GCSE or actively participating in 2023/2024

Academic Year	End of Year Test	Number of pupils
2020/2021	GCSE	323
2021/2022	GCSE	768
2022/2023	GCSE	1053
2023/2024	Yr 11 - GCSE	1138
	Yr 10 - HSK3	1129
	Yr 9	1613
	Yr 8	1783
	Yr 7	2015
Total	Total	9,822

Source: UCL IOE MEP programme data (2024); Analysis by Impact Stories

8.4 MEP pupil profile

- No comprehensive profiling has been undertaken of all pupils within MEP but some insight is available from various, partial data sources.

Boys and girls

- Based on survey responses from 758 Year 9 pupils participating in the Intensive Study in China in July 2024, 51% self-identified as boys, 46% as girls with the balance identifying as Other or declining to say. Among 794 respondents participating in Intensive Study in July 2025, 54% self-identified as boys, 44% as girls with the balance identifying as Other or declining to say.
- A number of the schools which joined the programme in cohorts 1 and 2 were all boys schools, and these more experienced schools tend to have larger year groups, so it is intuitively sensible that there is a slightly higher proportion of boys studying within the programme overall.

Diversity

- A feature of MEP is the high proportion of pupils from non white-British backgrounds, reflecting the ethnically diverse urban catchment areas from which they are often drawn and, possibly, the more international priorities of their parents.
- But there are also schools in the portfolio with more than 90% white British students and some of these schools are also in areas of significant deprivation in both urban and rural settings.
- As one indication of the diversity of MEP students, among 794 MEP Year 9s who responded to a survey following intensive study in China in July 2025, 46% claimed to, '*speak a language(s) other than English at home or with members of their family.*'
- Again, it is not a direct comparison but data published by DfE suggest that nationally, 19.2% of all pupils in mainstream secondary schools have a first language which is not English.

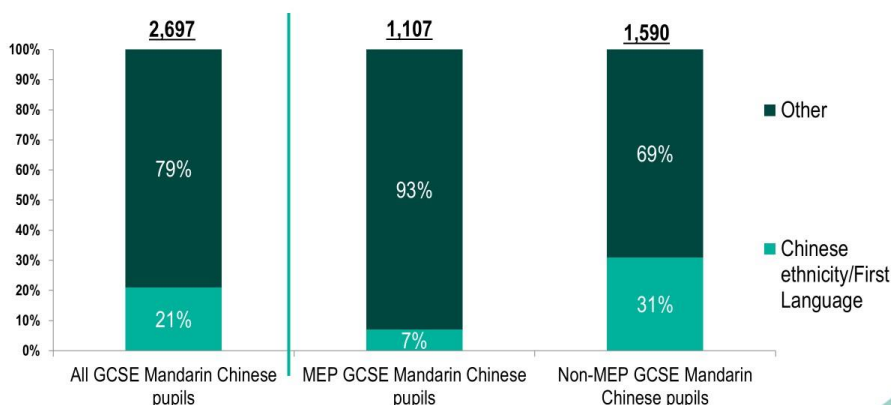
Chinese heritage/first language

- It was noted in last year's evaluation report that prior to MEP a high share of pupils in England taking GCSE Chinese in both the state and independent sectors have had Chinese heritage and/or first language fluency, in part because of the common perception among children and parents without Chinese heritage that '*Mandarin is too hard*'.
- MEP was consciously designed to counter this perception among non-native speakers of the language and the programme is typically unattractive to native speakers because of the time commitment demanded within the curriculum.
- The Chinese heritage and language profile of MEP pupils is therefore relevant to understanding the programme's success in widening access to the language and as discussed in Chapter 10 to understanding its true impact on attainment at GCSE level.
- In this year's analysis an attempt has been made to separate out pupils taking the Mandarin speaking variant of the Chinese GCSE from those taking the Cantonese speaking variant in order to make the analysis more directly relevant to understanding the role and impact of MEP specifically as a programme supporting the teaching and learning of Mandarin Chinese on the school curriculum. Therefore results presented here are not comparable with those presented in previous evaluation reports which looked at pupils taking both variants of the GCSE exam.
- Virtually all students taking the Cantonese speaking variant of GCSE Chinese are believed to have Chinese heritage and/or first language fluency.
- Data on the first language and ethnicity of pupils in state schools is taken from the school census and held on the NPD but is not available for pupils in the independent sector.

- In 2023/2024, an estimated 31% of pupils who sat GCSE Mandarin Chinese in the state sector outside MEP had Chinese heritage and/or first language fluency. Within MEP only 7% were believed to have Chinese heritage and/or first language (Chart 2).

Chart 2: MEP is widening access to Mandarin to pupils without Chinese heritage

Pupils sitting GCSE Mandarin-speaking Chinese in state schools in England (2023/2024) by ethnicity/first language



Data is for state schools in England and for pupils sitting the Mandarin speaking variant of GCSE Chinese during the 2023/2024 academic year only

Source: DfE (2024); Analysis by Impact Stories

Note: MEP data excludes candidates from one school which enters candidates at the end of Year 9



Disadvantage

- Eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM) is a key indicator of relative disadvantage within the pupil household. The latest available data relates to Year 7 pupils entering the MEP programme in 2022/2023. These show that 16.7% of MEP Year 7s were eligible for FSM in the year. It is an imperfect comparison but nationally¹, 22.7% of all pupils within state funded secondary schools were eligible for FSM in the same year.
- The relatively lower share of FSM eligible pupils within MEP is explained by the recruitment of schools already teaching Mandarin in the early cohorts. These schools were selected from among a small number already teaching Mandarin at that time and were often selective grammar schools likely to have a share of FSM pupils lower than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils within the programme who are eligible for FSM has been increasing (as it has been nationally, too) as the portfolio of schools has been consciously widened to include more schools new to the subject. While all schools need to have an Ofsted rating of Good or Outstanding in order to participate in MEP, some of these more recently enrolled schools are in catchment areas marked by very high levels of deprivation and consequently have a share of FSM pupils well above the national average.

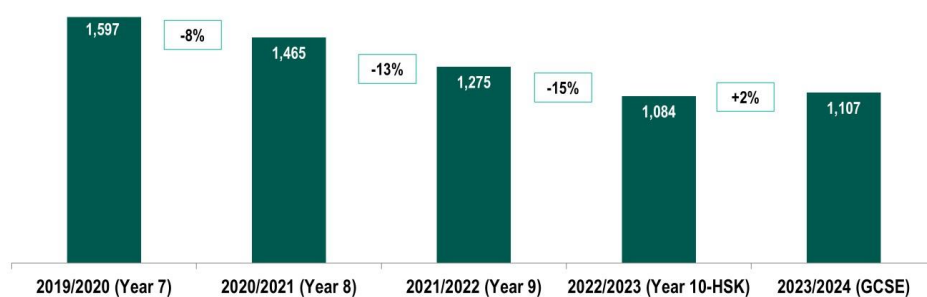
¹ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/fast-track/2b4b7f7a-fbf5-433d-30b4-08dd75bd7dc2>

8.5 Pupil retention

- Understanding pupil retention within MEP is complicated by the fact that the largest source of pupil drop-out is the withdrawal of whole schools from the programme. As discussed above, since 2016/2017 19 of 99 schools had withdrawn from the programme in advance of the 2023/2024 academic year.
- A very small number of pupils join the programme after Year 7, perhaps having changed school, but the vast majority of students who take GCSE within MEP will have joined the programme in the same school five years previously in Year 7.
- Chart 3 shows the number of pupils recorded as taking end-of-year tests within MEP pupil Cohort 4, the Cohort which sat GCSE Chinese in 2023/2024. The data relates only to pupils in 57 schools which have remained within the programme continuously since 2019/2020 when Cohort 4 pupils took Year 7 Hurdle Tests.
- The data show that within these 57 schools, 1,597 pupils took Year 7 hurdle tests at the end of academic year 2019/2020, meaning that the average Year 7 MEP group size was 28.
- Four years later, at the end of academic year 2023/2024, 1,107 of these pupils (69%) sat GCSE, an average of 19 pupils per school.

Chart 3: Pupil attrition through MEP

Number of pupils taking end-of-year tests
MEP Cohort 4: Pupils joining MEP Year 7 in 2019/2020 and taking GCSE in 2023/2024



Source: ICL IOE Programme data, DIE (2024); Analysis by Impact Stories



Notes: Data relates to 57 MEP schools entering GCSE candidates at the end of Year 11 in 2023/2024; these schools had participated in MEP continuously since 2019/2020 (Year 7)
Data excludes one MEP school which enters schools at the end of Year 9



- This equates to an average annual attrition rate over four years of 9%. The largest drop-out within MEP is at the transition between KS3 and KS4 in Year 9 and Year 10 when pupils make their wider GCSE choices. While pupils and parents are typically told by schools at the start of Year 7 that MEP is a five-year commitment, pupils and parents typically prioritise and focus their time and effort as they start KS4 and schools understandably do not compel pupils to take a subject if they decide it is not right for them.

“Our biggest challenge is ‘converting’ KS3 students into KS4 students.”
Teacher, MEP (2024)

- Analysis in last year’s evaluation report suggested that the level of attrition within MEP has increased over time as the proportion of schools within the portfolio which are new to Mandarin on the curriculum has increased.
- More experienced Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 schools tend to have more stable year groups over time.

8.6 Pupil participation in KS5

- Schools in the first three MEP cohorts could, potentially, have had MEP alumni studying Mandarin in KS5 during 2023/2024. Alumni from the first school cohort could have already been studying the language at university.
- As discussed in Chapter 9, more than 30 MEP schools report offering Mandarin teaching in KS5 for a number of exam pathways. On school visits the evaluators have met a number of alumni of the MEP KS4 programme currently studying towards A-Level Chinese or HSK4 and some intending to pursue Chinese studies into Higher Education.
- Average KS5 numbers per school are typically small, generally fewer than 5 and sometimes as few as one or two, but no systematic tracking of MEP pupils into KS5 or Higher Education has been undertaken.

9. Programme Design and Delivery

9.1 The curriculum model adopted in schools

- The process of recruiting pupils into the programme at the beginning of KS3 in Year 7 continues to vary widely across different schools.
- Some schools pre-select on entry, some schools offer an extended trial period for all Year 7 pupils while others select for ability and motivation based on a short trial period. A small number of schools offer teaching outreach to pupils in local/feeder primary schools within their catchment area, in part as an opportunity to generate pre-entry interest and awareness of MEP and in part to facilitate selection into the programme.
- Often, more academically able children at participating schools enrol in the programme in Year 7. Many schools now make a particular effort to ensure equitable access to children from more disadvantaged backgrounds.

“Our selection method is good, but we are currently reviewing whether a carousel model may work better at the start of Y7 rather than students opting before they join the school to further improve take-up among disadvantaged students.” **Teacher, MEP (2024)**

- The timetabling model for KS3 and KS4 adopted within the school curriculum has been discussed extensively in previous evaluations.
- Data collected from schools by UCL IOE show that in 2023/2024 most, although not all, MEP schools adhered to a curriculum model which has become the template within MEP in choosing to deliver the minimum of four classroom hours and the further four hours as guided home study. The data show that this average of four classroom hours is very consistent from Year 7 through to Year 11.
- One or two of these teaching hours is typically taken from a variety of other parts of the curriculum or delivered outside the standard school day – during lunchtime or before or after the standard school day.

“We use mentor time, PE lesson and after school time to do Mandarin lessons.” **Teacher, MEP (2024)**

- Several schools run the timetable over a two-week period to provide greater flexibility. One MEP school is very much an outlier in offering nine hours of classroom teaching in Year 7 and Year 8 as part of a highly immersive programme designed to equip pupils with the skills to pass GCSE in Year 9. A number of schools which have enrolled in the programme more recently are offering 3 hours of classroom teaching in KS3 as they build teaching capacity.
- The extended teaching hours within the curriculum are seen by teachers as providing time to establish strong foundations in the language during KS3 and to consolidate and prepare for GCSE in KS4.

“The extended curriculum time is central to the success of teaching Mandarin in our context....” **Teacher, MEP (2024)**

- The additional hours (again, typically 4) are guided self-study undertaken by the pupils at home and supported and monitored by teachers. The focus of this guided self-study covers homework and consolidation, project work and wider cultural learning.

“Offering after-school clubs, weekend trips, and cultural activities, along with plenty of independent homework enriches students’ learning experience.”

Teacher, MEP (2024)

- The increasingly rich resources built up during MEP, including year group project resources, are widely appreciated by teachers and are often used to stimulate and structure independent study.
- In practice, some teachers continue to monitor the amount of home study very closely while others take a more hands-off approach, on occasions as a reflection of a school’s wider policies and some growing unease among teachers and parents around screen time, especially for younger children in KS3.

“Students are required to be conscientious and independent learners outside of the classroom. I have been pleased with how motivated the students have been in this. Students support each other and share resources and revision ideas, not only in year group, but across all year groups studying Mandarin.”

Teacher, MEP (2024)

- Learning apps have been used widely within MEP since the programme’s inception. Feedback from teachers in 2024 suggests that a range of apps are used in particular to support independent study. Quizlet remains by far the most commonly used learning app followed by GoChinese, and Kahoot.

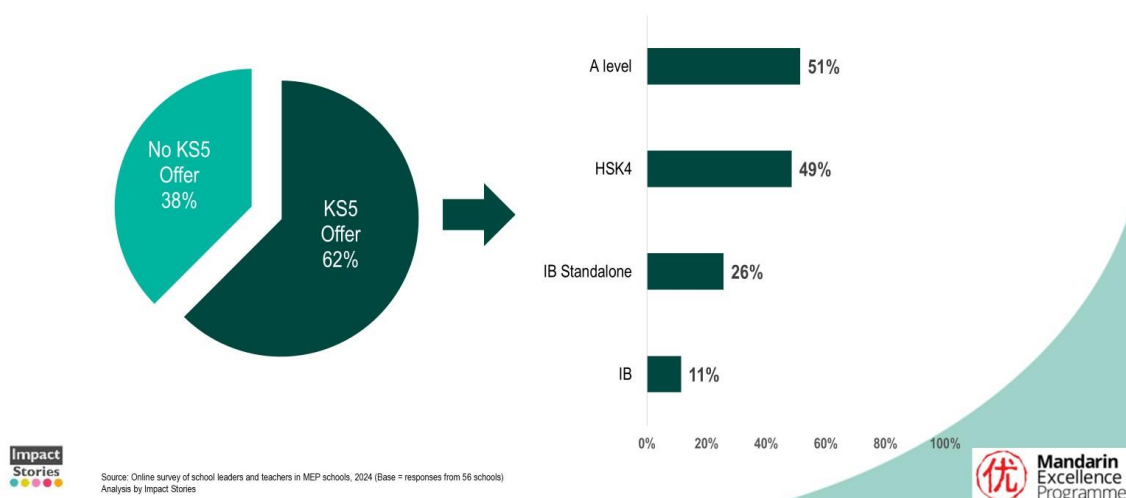
“For the extra-study time, we use online learning, such as quizlet, duolingo etc.”

Teacher, MEP (2024)

- 35 of the 56 MEP schools (63%) giving at least one response to the staff survey said that they had an offer in KS5 during the year. Of course, some schools new to the subject have not yet brought through any students to KS5.
- The data is not completely accurate but suggest that of these 35 schools almost half are offering A-level, a similar number offering HSK4 and smaller numbers offering IB as a full curriculum or as the MEP-specific standalone course (Chart 4). Several schools report offering both A-Level and HSK4, possibly with the latter acting as an intermediate qualification. Various other combinations are also reported. A small number of schools offer courses for new learners of Mandarin within KS5.

Chart 4: The MEP KS4 offer is diverse including A-level, HSK4 and IB

Which, if any, Mandarin course(s) does your school currently offer in KS5?
School level responses



9.2 In-school delivery

- The MEP staffing model continues to vary considerably across the school portfolio.
- A small number of schools, most commonly cohort 1 schools with extensive experience of Mandarin on the curriculum, have 4 teachers either qualified or in training. Several of these schools are also delivering non-MEP Mandarin streams as well as delivering teaching in KS5.
- Twenty-four (44%) of 55 schools responding to this question in the online survey are currently delivering the programme using only one qualified teacher. A further 21 (38%) have two teachers either qualified or in training.
- Some of the schools with only one teacher are recent joiners to the portfolio with possibly only Year 7 and Year 8 classes but a number of schools are delivering teaching to five year-groups with one teacher, which continues to make the success of the programme highly dependent on the motivation and retention of that individual teacher.
- The vital contribution which the engagement and motivation of key teachers make to MEP's success is widely recognised by school leaders.

“The enthusiasm and conscientiousness of our Mandarin teacher is a key contributor to the overall success.” **School Leader, MEP (2024)**

“The passion and enthusiasm of the teacher who delivers Mandarin inspires our students.” **School Leader, MEP (2024)**

- Many school leaders acknowledge and worry about the programme's vulnerability to losing key staff, especially those at schools which do currently rely on only one teacher.

"Our Mandarin teacher is excellent and extremely committed to the school and its students but we are very reliant on him." **School Leader, MEP (2024)**

"The teacher is excellent. So as long as she stays with us, it will be great!" **School Leader, MEP (2024)**

- In turn, teachers often acknowledge the support they receive from school leaders and see leadership engagement as a key determinant of the programme's success. A small number, especially those teachers who are running the programme on their own, do express concerns about their workload and the calls on their time outside the typical school day.
- In this context, the critical importance of the support of Chinese language assistants sourced through CLEC or the British Council is very often highlighted by teaching staff. Of the 40 schools responding to that question in the 2024 staff survey, 32 (80%) say they have access to a Chinese language assistant which suggests that access to assistants has increased relative to earlier years of the programme

"We also cannot achieve what we have without the hard work of the professional CLEC teacher we get every 2 years." **Teacher, MEP (2024)**

"Offering teaching assistants to MEP schools is highly valuable." **Teacher, MEP (2024)**

9.3 Cross-school resourcing and collaboration

- A quarter of schools responding to this year's survey say that teachers within MEP also assist in some way at other schools. Most commonly this is teaching Mandarin taster courses at local primary/feeder schools. It was noted above that some schools use this opportunity to generate interest in MEP and/or as an informal part of selection for MEP in secondary school.
- A number of schools also share teachers within a MAT, especially when those schools are also within MEP. The participation of multiple schools within a MAT has become an increasing feature of the MEP portfolio and given the shared ethos and the relatively short distances normally involved for schools within a MAT within MEP, some level of resource sharing can often be an efficient solution. Schools within a MAT have also been incorporated into the programme's Hub and Partner model designed to facilitate knowledge and resource sharing between schools.

9.4 Training and teacher development

- The expansion of schools teaching Mandarin has expanded the number of opportunities for teacher training. More than half of 32 schools responding to the question in this year's survey say that teachers have trained or are currently training at their school within MEP.
- 13 PGCE Mandarin students were enrolled in study at UCL Institute of Education in 2023/24 and several of these train within MEP schools and may well go on to work in one post graduation.
- Support for in-service teacher training by UCL IOE through MEP, alongside considerable resources development and a variety of networking opportunities are also widely valued by teachers, especially newly qualified ones.

"I want to stress that support from the MEP team is the greatest [success] factor overall." **Teacher, MEP (2024)**

"I taught in the private sector for 22 years and felt quite isolated as a Mandarin teacher. It is wonderful to now be part of the MEP with the support and community it provides." **Teacher, MEP (2024)**

"The quality of resources and advice has been outstanding, as has the networking opportunities offered by the various training days and courses put on by IoE." **School Leader, MEP (2024)**

- Among 46 teachers responding to the staff survey, 80% agree or strongly agree with the statement, *'Through MEP my confidence as a teacher has improved'*, while 85% agree or strongly agree with the statement, *'Through MEP I have become more confident in delivering a rigorous model for teaching Mandarin.'*
- 80% of these teachers say they are satisfied or very satisfied with, *'Support to teachers and teaching practice'* and 85% with, *'Teaching and learning resources available.'*

9.5 Extra-curriculum activities

- The intensive study in China is by far the most high-profile extra-curriculum activity within MEP and its post-Covid reinstatement as an in-person experience is widely seen by staff to have re-energised the programme.
- The focus of the intensive study in China is the development of pupils' language ability and confidence by allowing them to experience China through various cultural activities, to undertake intensive study and to practise their acquired language skills in a native speaker environment

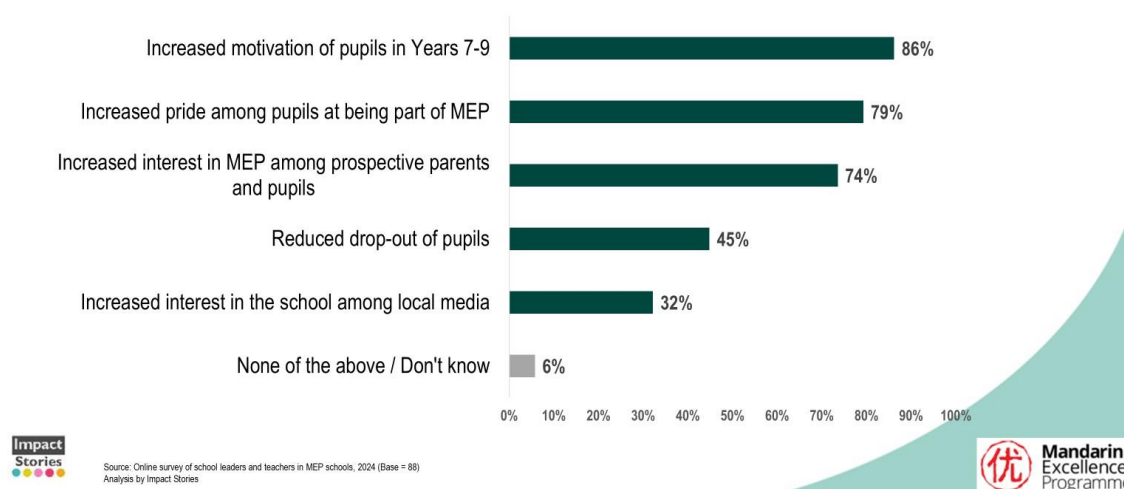
- Intensive study is understandably a huge focus and high point of the programme for many participating pupils, while among staff in MEP schools it is very widely seen to have contributed to a boost in motivation, to an increased pride among pupils in being part of MEP and to increased interest in pupils and parents entering the school in Year 7 (Chart 5).

“The buzz has been incredible.” School Leader, MEP (2024)

“.....huge impact on motivation and self-esteem.” Teacher, MEP (2024)

Chart 5: The resumption of in-person intensive study is widely believed to have had a positive impact on MEP

Has the resumption of the in-person Intensive Study in China had any particular positive impacts on MEP in your school? Please tick ANY that apply



- 1,187 Year 9 pupils and 158 teachers from 61 MEP schools participated in the first full-scale intensive study in China post-Covid held in July 2024.
- Eight schools with Year 9 pupils which could have participated in the intensive study chose not to do so. Some of these schools had already decided to leave the programme. Others cite the compressed timescale for planning and organizing. One school was unable to participate because their sole Mandarin teacher had conflicting personal commitments during that time.
- An estimated 82% of all Year 9 pupils within the 61 MEP schools who could have participated in the intensive study did so.
- Teachers report various reasons why some children chose not to participate. In some cases it was cost, although costs for disadvantaged pupils were almost wholly reimbursed through the programme and most schools made a significant effort to ensure that disadvantaged pupils had equal access by covering even the incidental costs incurred by families. More commonly the reasons cited were conflicting family commitments out of school, anxiety on the part of parents (more typically than of children) or concerns about health or wellbeing, for example where children have special needs or restrictive dietary requirements.

- Feedback on the intensive study has been compiled in a separate report.
- In summary, pupils and teachers who did take part were overwhelmingly positive about the structure, organisation and impacts of the intensive study. Among participating pupils, mean score likelihood to recommend on an 11 point (0-10) scale was 8.3 with a Net Promoter Score (NPS) of 41%, well ahead of scores recorded for virtual intensive study held in prior years during the Covid pandemic.
- Among teacher participants mean score likelihood to recommend was 9.2 with an NPS of 77%.

“It was a truly wonderful, life changing experience for our students.”

School Leader, MEP (2024)

“The trip was the first time many students [had] travelled abroad and gave all students a chance to use their language skills in context, see what China is like, and improve their global mindset and understanding of China's importance in the world, including career opportunities.” **Teacher, MEP (2024)**

- The intensive study was very widely perceived to be fun, engaging and well organised and to have had a particularly large impact on cultural understanding and real world language acquisition.
- On reflection, school leaders and teachers in participating schools point to a variety of direct and indirect impacts of intensive study.

“A huge boost to students' motivation and engagement as well as their language skills. Also, a high profile event which brings credit to the school and all those involved in the programme (British Council, IoE, CLEC etc)”

School Leader, MEP (2024)

“Almost every single student who went to China last year has changed their mindset.....now they all want to go back to China to study and work there. A few parents told me that the trip has changed their children completely. They are more positive and eager to study hard.” **Teacher, MEP (2024)**

“More motivated, deeper understanding of the culture, broadened horizons, better life skills.” **Teacher, MEP (2024)**

“Lots of interest from students and parents. Students who attended have gained knowledge and confidence.” **School Leader, MEP (2024)**

- In addition to the intensive study in China, individual schools and sometimes groups of local schools undertake a variety of more local cultural enrichment activities. The MEP design also includes a campus-based intensive study in the UK for pupils at the end of Year 10 which is organised around a tourism project. This time gives pupils the opportunity to meet fellow learners, to reinforce their learning to date and look at future study paths and opportunities with Mandarin.

“Organised activities between Hub schools as well as other cultural and festival related activities help engage students in Mandarin learning.”

Teacher, MEP (2024)

9.6 Hub and partner support

- Peer support within the programme is built on a Hub and Partner School model in which more experienced schools are paired with a small number of less experienced schools in order to provide mentorship and share experience and resources.
- Previous evaluation reports have identified the Hub and Partner model as a relative weakness of MEP with some schools having had little or no contact with their peer school(s) largely as a result of time and resource constraints.
- In 2023/2024, there is evidence that the effectiveness of the model, especially for new MEP schools has improved. Almost half (48%) of teachers responding to the survey describe the collaboration between their school and its Hub/Partner school(s) as being strong or very strong, with only 11% describing it as being weak or very weak.
- A number of teachers speak very positively about their relationship with peer schools and mention support from hub schools as being an important contributor to the success of MEP at their school.

“Resources from MEP, teacher training, support from hub school, chances to attend activities such as speaking competition broaden students horizons.” **Teacher, MEP (2024)**

“Support from Hub schools and teaching assistant from CLEC.” **Teacher, MEP (2024)**

9.7 Satisfaction with programme design

- The perception among a large majority of participating teachers and school leaders continues to be that MEP is a well-conceived and well-rounded programme which has the benefit of funding and strong support from UCL IOE and the British Council. As discussed, the reintroduction of in-person intensive study has given a further boost to the programme during 2023/2024.

“The programme as designed is outstanding.” **School Leader, MEP (2024)**

“MEP is an excellent program that has greatly benefited many of our students. Parents are highly pleased with both the program and their children’s performance.” **Teacher, MEP (2024)**

- Forty of forty-six (87%) teacher respondents to the 2024 MEP online survey say they are ‘Satisfied’ or ‘Very Satisfied’ with the, ‘Overall programme structure’ and 83% with the ‘Learning pathway from Y7 to Y11.’

9.8 Satisfaction with support in KS5

- The extension of MEP into KS5 is new and in 2023/2024 only ten schools were formally part of the sixth form extension programme, although more general support was potentially available to any school offering Mandarin in KS5.
- Previous evaluations have identified both a level of uncertainty among schools around what offer to make in KS5 and a degree of anxiety among teachers, especially newly qualified teachers, about extending their practice into KS5. Many teachers have been looking for a relatively greater level of support in KS5 than in KS4
- The extension programme has largely resolved the pathway discussion by focusing on A -Level, HSK4 and IB qualifications. The revised A-Level which aims to be more suitable for non-native speakers is available from September 2024, while HSK4 and IB are potentially suitable as an adjunct subject for MEP alumni focusing on other A-Levels.
- Among 28 teacher respondents to the 2023/2024 survey, 14 (50%) said that they are satisfied or very satisfied with ‘MEP support to Mandarin teaching in KS5’ while 7 (25%) say they are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with this support.

“Very pleased with the support we have gained for KS5 teaching.”
Teacher, MEP (2024)

- Teachers who are dissatisfied often remain uncertain about appropriate pathways with some remaining critical of the A-level (possibly before becoming familiar with the new curriculum) and the availability of suitable textbooks and curriculum resources. Others want more support with HSK and IB and on occasions are critical of the level of bureaucracy involved in applying for the standalone IB qualification.

“Support seems more focused on A-Level (understandably) than it does for HSK or IB.” **Teacher, MEP (2024)**

“It's tough because it's such a jump, even to HSK 4. We'd like to offer A Level but it's too difficult and there seems to be little support for planning HSK4. We're intending to deliver it as a 4th option next year, for the first time, as some of our students are very motivated towards studying it.”

School Leader, MEP (2024)

- Others argue that it is very difficult to recruit pupils into Mandarin study in KS5 and aspire to have a programme which mirrors that available in KS3 and KS4 with, for example, more classroom time, more resources and networking events and possibly an intensive study in China.

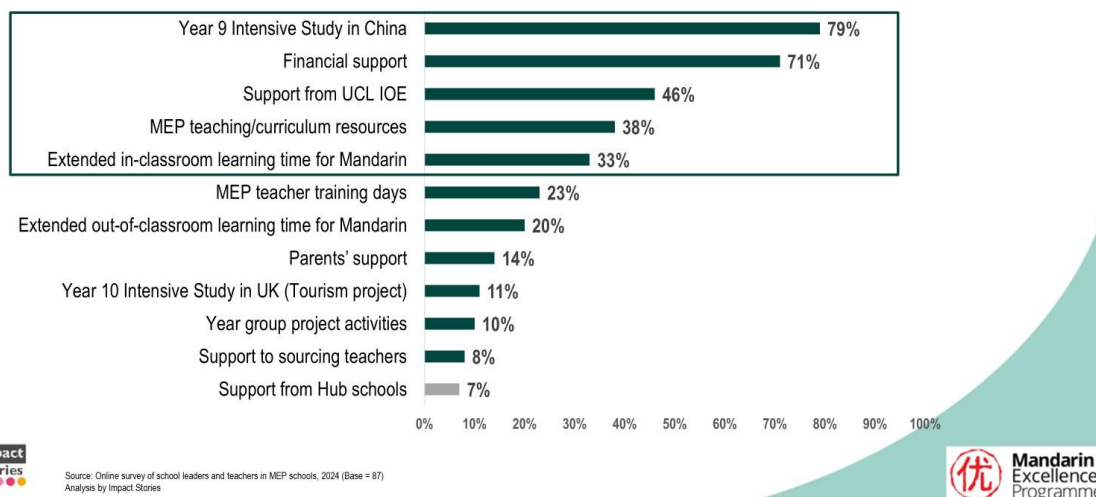
9.9 Drivers of programme success

- Feedback from teachers and school leaders suggests that there has been some change from previous years in what are perceived to be the key drivers of success for MEP (Chart 6).

Chart 6: Intensive study in China and financial support are now identified as key success drivers for MEP

Which are the most important elements contributing to the success of MEP?

Please select up to THREE



- Perspectives on success drivers do vary between teachers and school leaders but in-person intensive study is now the element of MEP most commonly recognised by both groups as a key success driver followed by financial support. These two factors now stand out ahead of any others.
- The varied impacts of the in-person study in terms of excitement, motivation and self-confidence and the enhanced profile it brings to the programme within schools have been discussed above. Having worked for four years without the possibility of in-person intensive study in China, teachers and school leaders now have a greater appreciation of its unique role and impact within the programme.
- Most teachers also see a very clear impact on the cultural understanding, engagement and language skills of those pupils who have participated, with the potential to support increased GCSE attainment and possibly an enhanced level of interest in pursuing Chinese into KS5.

“Students are more confident in Mandarin especially in speaking.....boosts students' enthusiasm for learning Mandarin outside the classroom.” **Teacher, MEP (2024)**

“They were even more motivated in learning Chinese before the trip and the motivation has been sustained after the trip. They got first-hand experience visiting China and it has inspired their future vision. This has also encouraged many students to think about carry on studying Chinese beyond GCSE.” **Teacher, MEP (2024)**

- Financial support is the second most frequently identified driver of success. In challenging financial circumstances staff are conscious of the importance of the MEP grant funding not only in facilitating teacher employment but also in ensuring that pupils have access to the extra-curricular enrichment activities which they believe make MEP uniquely impactful.
- This year's survey results show an increased appreciation among staff of the contribution to MEP's success of support from UCL IOE and the provision of teaching resources. This may reflect an increase in the number of schools drawing on support and resources as they extend Mandarin teaching into KS5. A large number of schools have also had direct engagement with UCL IOE and with the British Council in preparation for intensive study in China. The bank of resources through MEP has developed and become richer over time and this element of resource provision is now increasingly recognised by school leaders as much as by teachers.

"The support and co-ordination from the UCL IOE is a fundamental foundation to the success of the school's MEP work." **School Leader, MEP (2024)**

"UCL support plays a crucial role by providing high-quality teaching resources, organising teacher training days, and hosting conferences that enhance teaching practices and keep staff updated on the best methodologies." **Teacher, MEP (2024)**

- Since inception, the extended learning hours both within and outside the curriculum have consistently been identified by teachers as central to MEP's delivery of enhanced learning outcomes for pupils. In conversation with teachers, it is clear that this is still very much the case but the responses summarised in Chart 6 suggest that the intensive learning aspects of MEP have to some extent become regarded as a given among participating schools relative to the refreshed intensive study element.

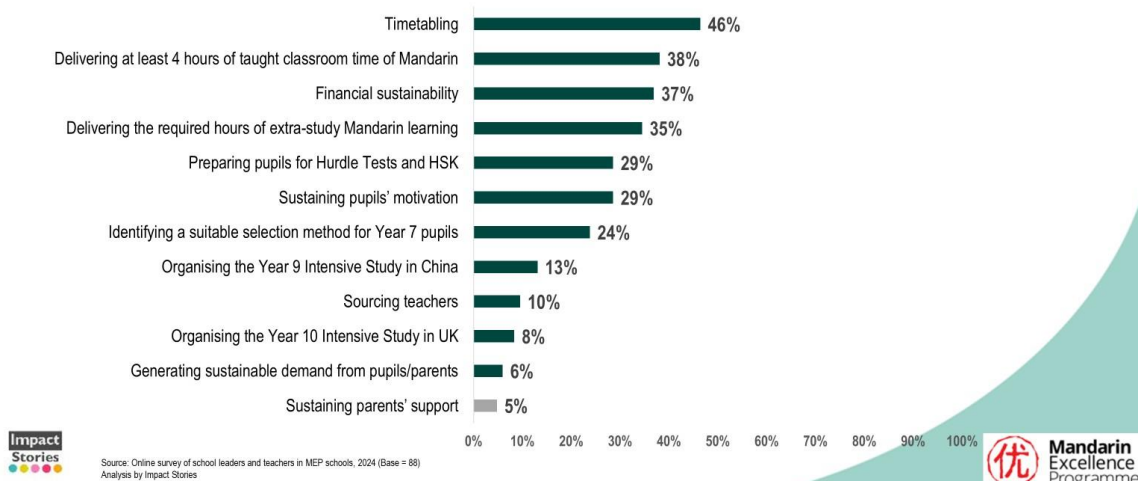
9.10 Challenges to MEP

- The key challenges to effective delivery of MEP identified by teachers and school leaders in 2023/2024 are shown in Chart 7. The main challenges identified are familiar from previous evaluation reports but there have been some important changes in their perceived relative importance.
- As schools emerged from the Covid pandemic, sustaining pupils' motivation had emerged as the most significant challenge for MEP as a programme requiring an above average commitment of pupil time. The reinstatement of in-person intensive study and the boost to motivation which it has provided appears to have helped to lessen the motivational challenge in many schools.

Chart 7: Timetabling is most commonly identified as a challenge to delivery of MEP

What are the most difficult challenges to delivering MEP at your school?

Please select no more than FIVE



- Timetabling and accommodating at least four hours of teaching within the curriculum has always been the main practical challenge to MEP delivery in schools. Schools have adopted a wide variety of approaches often involving early morning, lunchtime or early evening sessions and/or time taken from optional subjects or pastoral time.
- The stable core of schools within the portfolio has evidently found ways of making the timetable work but it remains a point of strain for schools new to MEP and is still a reason why some schools leave the programme.

“Accommodating the 4 hours of classroom time has been our biggest challenge as it means that students have to miss other lessons to complete this. We timetable 3 hours a fortnight so that students miss one other lesson and then deliver the 4th lesson after school which means that the Mandarin teacher has 3 hours teaching after school each week. We are at the point now where we feel that Mandarin is dictating the whole KS3 curriculum.” School Leader, MEP (2024)

“We adapted the timetable but it was not sustainable.” School Leader, MEP (2024)

- School leaders are also aware of the implications of timetabling changes on staff time and are conscious of their obligation to be fair to their Mandarin teachers. The need to resource adequately for extra teaching hours is of course one reason why grant funding through MEP is seen to be so necessary.

“We have additional after school lessons and compensate staff with additional free periods during the school day.” School Leader, MEP (2024)

“School has funded an extra member of staff to cover the extra hours taught.” School Leader, MEP (2024)

- School Leaders also had a particular focus on financial stability in 2023/2024 in part because of the uncertainty which existed for much of the year around continuity of MEP funding.
- Throughout the programme's life, a number of teachers and schools have expressed concern over the extra workload required (for both teachers and pupils) in preparing for end-of-year hurdle tests and some have questioned whether preparing for hurdle tests is the best use of classroom time.
- Through the 2023/2024 survey 7 of 46 teachers responding (15%) said they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with Hurdle Tests as a tool for assessing pupils' progress with all the other respondents (85%) expressing satisfaction.
- Those teachers who are dissatisfied are therefore in the minority but some do feel that too much attention and effort within the programme is placed on the hurdle tests as opposed to what they see as the core task of preparing for GCSE.

“Provide GCSE exam training during MEP meetings rather than hurdle test and HSK all the time.” **Teacher, MEP (2024)**

- A particular concern in 2023/2024 was that the level of the Year 8 Hurdle Test was too challenging and potentially demotivating.

“The Year 8 MEP Hurdle Test is extremely challenging. K3 hurdle tests should be more accessible, as students are still young and adapting from primary to secondary school. The test should serve as encouragement for them to stay in the MEP program through KS4 rather than acting as a barrier. Currently, the difficulty of the Year 8 test seems to discourage students from continuing.” **Teacher, MEP (2024)**

- There also remains a difference of opinion within the MEP teaching community as to whether the use of HSK3 as a hurdle test in Year 10 is a help or a hindrance to progress towards GCSE.
- Analysis for the 2023/2024 evaluation report showed that at a school level there is a correlation between performance in HSK3 in Year 10 and GCSE attainment in Year 11. The identification of HSK4 as one of the focus pathways in KS5 also reinforces the value of exposure to the HSK vocabulary and curriculum. Many teachers, especially the more experienced ones, appear to incorporate preparation for HSK3 relatively seamlessly into their teaching practice and see it as a fairly natural progression for pupils towards GCSE.
- A minority of teachers continue to see HSK3 as a distraction and possibly a barrier to progression, viewing it as a separate syllabus and vocabulary set running almost in parallel, rather than in line with, preparation for GCSE.

“If we focus on HSK3, then we'll have limited time to do [the] GCSE course. Can't win.” **Teacher, MEP (2024)**

“The gap between Y9 hurdle test and HSK3 is too big.” **Teacher, MEP (2024)**

10. Impact

10.1 Increase in the number of schools offering Mandarin on the curriculum

- Supporting schools to introduce Mandarin Chinese onto the curriculum and therefore widening the opportunity for young people to access high quality Mandarin teaching was a primary aim of MEP at launch.
- There is no comprehensive database of which schools do offer Mandarin on the curriculum but the DfE publishes school level data on the number of GCSE entries in Chinese which can serve as a proxy and allow comparisons to be made between the situation in 2023/2024 and the period immediately prior to the start of MEP.
- A complication in the published data is that many schools act as examination centres for small numbers of private GCSE candidates rather than teaching the subject on the curriculum. Private candidates, who sit GCSEs based on out-of-school knowledge (e.g. through first language proficiency, home schooling or private tutoring), are represented in GCSE data across all subjects but make up an especially large proportion of candidates for GCSE Chinese.
- It is impossible to identify exactly which schools are acting solely in the capacity of examination centres for private candidates in GCSE Chinese but the rule of thumb adopted for this analysis is that any school with five or fewer GCSE candidates is unlikely to be offering the language on the curriculum purely for reasons of cost and efficiency.
- The first MEP cohort took GCSEs in academic year 2020/2021 and so a useful comparison point would be the number of schools offering GCSE Mandarin in the prior year 2019/2020. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, no data for 2019/2020 is published. Therefore the best available comparison is between schools offering GCSE Chinese in 2018/2019 and 2023/2024.
- On this basis, the DfE's published data summarised in Table 4 shows that just under 300 schools (296) had 6 or more candidates in GCSE Chinese in 2023/2024 and therefore were likely to be teaching the language on the curriculum. This marked a near trebling in the total number of schools believed to be offering the subject between 2018/2019 and 2023/2024.
- This increase has been large in both the state and independent sectors, although proportional to the total number of schools in each sector it still appears that the language is more commonly offered on the curriculum within the independent sector.
- 58 schools out of the total MEP portfolio of 80 had a GCSE cohort in 2023/2024. [The remainder, which joined in 2020/2021 or later, had not yet brought through a student cohort to Year 11].
- These 58 MEP schools represent 20% (one in five) of all schools in England offering Mandarin on the curriculum and 31% of all state schools offering the subject.

- Of these 58 MEP schools, 33 (57%) did not have 5 or more GCSE candidates in 2018/2019 and can therefore be interpreted as having introduced Mandarin onto the curriculum within MEP.

Table 4: Growth in the number of schools in England believed to be offering Mandarin on the curriculum

School type	2018/2019	2023/2024	Change
<u>Independent Schools</u>	<u>42</u>	<u>111</u>	<u>69</u>
MEP 2023/2024 schools	25	58	33
Other state schools	42	127	85
<u>Total state schools</u>	<u>67</u>	<u>185</u>	<u>118</u>
Total schools	109	296	187

Notes: Data relates to schools recorded with more than 5 GCSE candidates in the year and therefore excludes schools which are teaching the language on the curriculum but have not yet brought through pupils to GCSE

MEP schools are 58 out of a total 2023/2024 portfolio of 80 with an MEP GCSE cohort in 2023/2024. This analysis does not take account of MEP schools which have joined and then left the programme but continue to offer Mandarin on the curriculum or schools within the MEP portfolio which have introduced the subject but not yet brought through a pupil cohort to Year 11

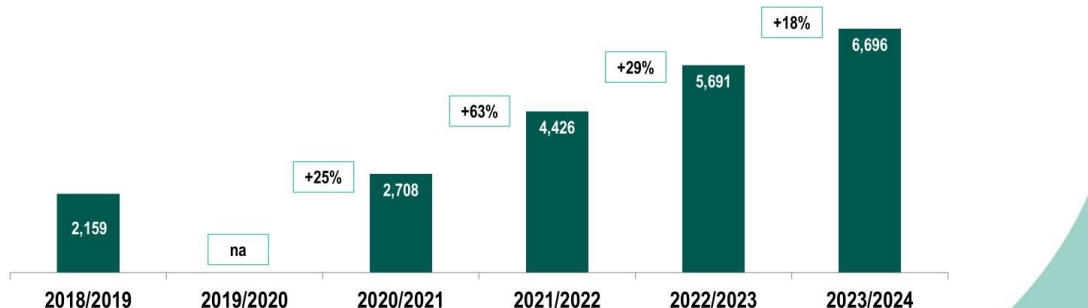
Source: DfE (2024); Analysis by Impact Stories

10.2 Growth in the number of Chinese GCSEs

- Again, analysis of GCSE data is the best proxy available for change in the number of pupils studying Chinese in the country.
- Headline data published by DfE records a total of 6,691 Chinese GCSEs taken at all schools in England by pupils reaching the end of Key Stage 4 (KS4) in 2023/2024, an increase of 18% over the year and a more than threefold increase relative to 2018/2019 (Chart 8).
- Growth in the total number of GCSEs taken by pupils reaching the end of KS4 has come in both the state and independent sectors in line with the growth in the number of schools offering the subject. In 2023/2024, 30% of Chinese GCSEs were taken in the independent sector, even though the sector accounts for approximately 7% of secondary school children in England.

Chart 8: Strong headline growth in the number of pupils taking GCSE Chinese in England

Number of pupils taking GCSE Chinese in all schools (state and independent) in England
By academic year (end of KS4)



Source: DfE (2024)



Notes: Published data for schools refers to GCSEs taken by pupils completing KS4 in the relevant academic year even if they took the exam in an earlier academic year
Data includes pupils taking both Mandarin speaking and Cantonese speaking variants of GCSE Chinese
Data includes private candidates registered as taking the examination at a school even if they did not study the language on the curriculum



- Over the four academic years from 2020/2021 to 2023/2024 a total of 3,282 students took GCSE through MEP with the number increasing from 323 in 15 first cohort MEP schools in 2020/2021 to 1,138 in 58 MEP schools with Year 11 pupils (the typical endpoint of KS4) in 2023/2024.²
- MEP's share of all Chinese GCSEs taken in schools in England therefore rose from 12% in 2020/2021 to 19% in 2022/2023 before falling back slightly to 17% in 2023/2024.

10.3 Growth in the number pupils studying Mandarin on the curriculum

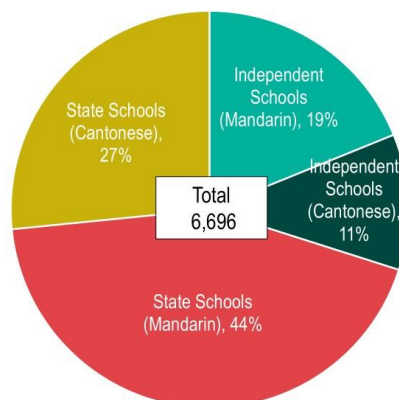
- It was noted in last year's report that this headline data underestimates to a large extent the real contribution of MEP to growth in the number of pupils actually learning Mandarin on the curriculum in schools, and especially to the number of pupils without Chinese heritage and prior exposure to the language learning Mandarin on the curriculum.
- The headline data published by DfE combines data for candidates sitting both the Cantonese speaking variant and the Mandarin speaking variant of GCSE Chinese. It also includes entries by many private candidates who reached the end of KS4 in the relevant academic year even if they sat the GCSE in earlier years (most commonly as a result of home language fluency)
- The Cantonese speaking variant of GCSE Chinese is only available through Pearson Edexcel. Almost half of all Chinese GCSE candidates sit the Edexcel examination with the other half sitting the AQA equivalent. [About 100 students within the national total sit Cambridge IGCSE Chinese and almost all of these are in the independent sector].

² NB: One first cohort MEP school enters students for GCSE at the end of Year 9

- Unpublished data from Pearson Edexcel show that more than 2,500 GCSEs, nearly three quarters of all Edexcel Chinese GCSEs reported in 2023/2024, were the Cantonese speaking variant. Therefore, 38% of all the Chinese GCSEs reported in the 2023/2024 headline data were Cantonese (Chart 9).

Chart 9: Nearly four in ten GCSE Chinese exams in 2023/2024 were the Cantonese-speaking variant

Share of total GCSE Chinese entries in schools in England by sector and speaking variant (2023/2024)



Source: DfE (2024). Analysis and estimation by Impact Stories

Notes: These data includes both Mandarin-speaking and Cantonese-speaking variants of GCSE Chinese and includes early entries taken in advance of the end of KS4

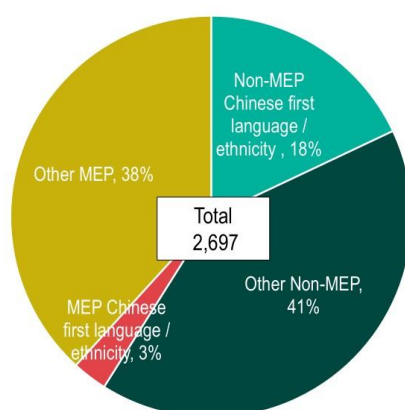


- Since no mainstream school in England is believed to teach Cantonese on the curriculum, it is reasonable to assume that the vast majority of these GCSEs were taken by young people with a background in the language and typically, Chinese heritage.
- Further, 65% of all GCSEs taken by candidates at state schools which entered 5 or fewer candidates in 2023/2024 (and therefore assumed to be taken by private candidates) were the Cantonese speaking variant and a high share of these exams were taken by candidates in advance of the academic year in which they reached the end of KS4, again indicating accelerated exposure to the language.
- The rapid increase in the headline number of students taking GCSE Chinese in the last five years therefore reflects to a significant extent immigration of families from China and in particular immigration following the introduction of a new visa route for holders of British National (Overseas) status from Hong Kong in January 2021. The vast majority of pupils moving from Hong Kong are likely to be first language Cantonese speakers rather than Mandarin speakers and where they have taken GCSE Chinese most likely to have taken the Cantonese speaking variant.
- Within schools in the 2023/2024 data which entered more than five GCSE candidates and therefore can be assumed to be teaching Mandarin on the curriculum rather than simply acting as an examination centre, a total of 4,685 GCSEs were taken, of which three quarters (66%) were taken in state schools.

- However, it is estimated that even within these schools teaching Mandarin on the curriculum, approximately 31% of GCSEs taken were the Cantonese variant. This result appears counter-intuitive but is explained by private candidates taking exams at these schools (alongside students who have studied Mandarin on the curriculum) and by Cantonese heritage students who do study Mandarin on the curriculum but choose to take the Cantonese speaking exam variant.
- Further, some of the Mandarin GCSEs taken at these schools will also be taken by private candidates who are sitting the exam alongside pupils who have studied on the curriculum.
- It is not possible to identify these private candidates accurately but the best estimate of the number of GCSE candidates who have actually studied Mandarin on the curriculum can be made by excluding from the total candidates who took the Cantonese speaking variant (almost all of whom are of Chinese heritage) along with early entrants who sat the exam in advance of the end of KS4.

Chart 10: MEP accounts for four in ten Mandarin speaking Chinese GCSEs taken in state schools

Share of GCSE Mandarin-speaking Chinese entries in state schools in England taken in academic year 2023/2024



Source: DfE (2024). Analysis and estimation by Impact Stories

Notes: These data relates to the Mandarin-speaking variant of GCS Chinese only and excludes early entries taken in advance of the end of KS4



- The resulting data shown in Chart 10 identifies 2,697 Mandarin-speaking GCSEs taken at state schools in calendar year 2023/2024 by candidates likely to have been studying Mandarin on the curriculum.
- MEP contributed 41% of this total number of Mandarin-speaking GCSEs.
- 21% of these Mandarin GCSEs were believed to have been taken by candidates with Chinese heritage/first language, meaning that MEP contributed 48%, or very nearly half, of Mandarin-speaking GCSEs taken at state schools by candidates without Chinese heritage/first language.

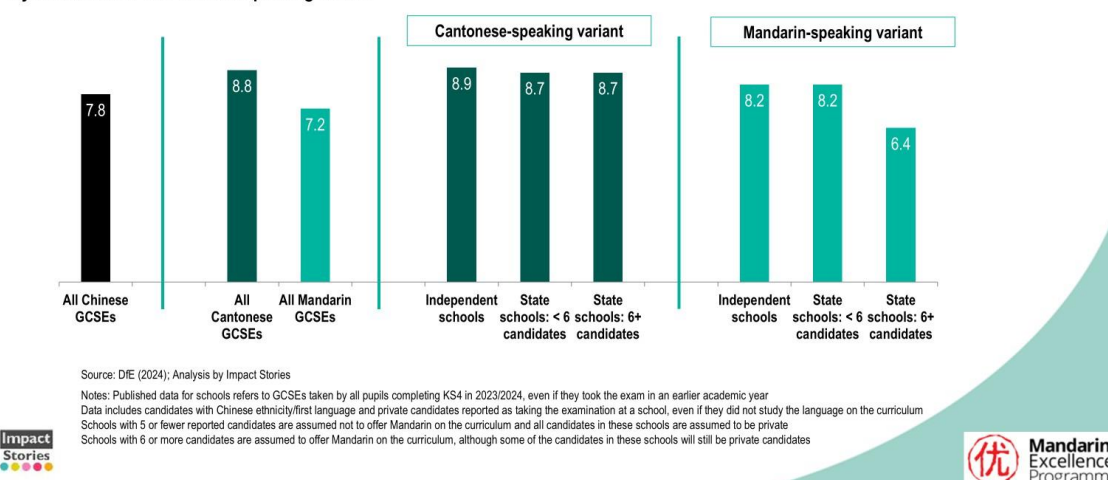
10.4 GCSE attainment by MEP students

- The attainment of participating pupils in GCSE Chinese is the core measure of MEP learning outcomes.
- The success of MEP in boosting learning outcomes at GCSE level has to be understood in the wider context of the profile of candidates discussed above and the very large differences in mean attainment in GCSE Chinese by speaking variant and school sector (Chart 11).

Chart 11: Mean attainment in GCSE Chinese varies markedly by sector and speaking variant

Mean grade achieved in GCSE Chinese (2023/2024)

By school sector and Chinese speaking variant



- Mean attainment for candidates taking the Cantonese-speaking variant (8.8) is significantly higher than for those taking the Mandarin-speaking variant (7.2) and shows almost no difference by the school context in which the candidate sits the exam. Indeed, the data show that a large majority of candidates who sit the Cantonese-speaking variant achieve the highest grade 9, reinforcing the earlier observation that almost all candidates sitting this variant have Chinese heritage and typically, first language proficiency.
- Mean attainment of candidates who sit the Mandarin-speaking variant in either the independent sector or in state schools reporting 5 or fewer candidates and assumed to be private candidates is significantly higher (8.2) than that of candidates in schools reporting 6+ candidates (6.4) who are assumed to be learning Mandarin on the curriculum.
- As far as the data allows it to be known, Table 5 summarises GCSE attainment for pupils studying within MEP compared to pupils at other state schools likely to be studying Mandarin on the curriculum and sitting the exam at the end of KS4 (Year 11).

Table 5: GCSE Mandarin Chinese (2023/2024): Comparative MEP results

Candidates for GCSE Chinese (Mandarin-speaking variant only) sitting the exam in the 2023/2024 academic year	GCSE pupils	Achieving Grade 5+	Achieving Grade 8+	Mean GCSE grade
All candidates	2,697	81.0%	40.8%	6.5
State school pupils in England (ex MEP)	1,590	80.5%	41.4%	6.6
MEP Pupils	1,107	81.8%	39.8%	6.5
Candidates without Chinese heritage/first language	2,136	76.5%	29.6%	6.1
State school pupils in England (ex MEP)	1,105	72.9%	23.2%	5.8
MEP Pupils	1,031	80.4%	36.5%	6.4
MEP Pupils (First cohort schools)	283	85.9%	52.3%	7.0
MEP Pupils (Cohort 2-4 schools)	748	78.3%	30.5%	6.1

Notes: The data differs from headline data for schools published by DfE for GCSE Chinese; Data in this table includes only candidates for the Mandarin speaking variant and only for those who take the exam in the academic year 2023/2024 (excludes early entrants)

MEP data excludes one school which enters candidates for GCSE at the end of Year 9

Source: DfE (2023); Analysis by Impact Stories

- At an overall level the results within and outside MEP are very similar. But when allowance is made for candidates with Chinese heritage/first language, the headline results for pupils studying within MEP are statistically significantly higher than for those for pupils in state schools studying outside the programme.
 - Mean attainment within MEP is 6.4 vs 5.8 outside MEP
 - Share achieving grade 5+ within MEP is 80.4% vs 72.9% outside MEP
- The increase in attainment within MEP is especially large at the top end of the grade distribution. The proportion of non Chinese heritage/first language pupils achieving grades 8 or 9 is 36.5% within MEP vs 23.2% outside MEP.

10.5 GCSE attainment by MEP school cohort

- MEP candidates for GCSE in 2023/2024 were drawn from the first four school cohorts joining the programme in 2016/2017 (School Cohort 1), 2017/2018 (School Cohort 2), 2018/2019 (School Cohort 3) and 2019/2020 (School Cohort 4).
- Pupils in first cohort schools continue to show higher attainment than pupils in subsequent cohorts, especially at the top end of the grade distribution (Table 5).
- Excluding pupils with Chinese heritage/first language, 52.3% of pupils in MEP first cohort schools attained Grades 8 or 9 and 85.9% Grade 5 or above. In subsequent cohort schools this share was lower at 30.5% and 78.3% respectively but was still well ahead of pupils studying outside the programme.
- First cohort schools had previous experience of teaching Mandarin (and, indeed, were recruited as Hub schools for this reason), whereas many schools in subsequent cohorts have introduced the subject on to the curriculum for the first time through MEP. First cohort schools often have more Mandarin teaching staff and staff who are, on average, more experienced than those teaching in later school cohorts.

10.6 The distribution of attainment at GCSE within MEP

- The highest performing school within the MEP portfolio had 24 GCSE candidates in 2023/2024 with an average grade of 8.8. Four further schools had candidates achieving an average grade of 8.0 or above.
- Across the 57 schools entering candidates at the end of Year 11, 52 (91%) had an average grade of 5.0 or above.
- The school at the bottom of the distribution entered 26 candidates in 2023/2024 and these candidates achieved an average grade of 3.5. This represented a significant increase on the average grade of 2.9 achieved by candidates at the same school in 2022/2023.
- Importantly, these school level average grades take no account of factors including school type (selective/non-selective) and share of pupils eligible for Free School Meals which are known to impact average attainment. The school at the bottom of the distribution is in a catchment area with a very high level of economic deprivation.

10.7 The relative attainment of MEP pupils at GCSE within their school

- A minority of MEP schools which offered Mandarin on the curriculum prior to the start of the programme continue to run dual stream (MEP and non-MEP) Mandarin classes within their school. Typically, these schools joined MEP within Cohort 1 or Cohort 2 as schools already experienced in Mandarin Chinese teaching.
- These dual stream schools are instructive because they provide some degree of like for like comparison of the impact of MEP's key features such as the intensive learning and extra-curriculum activities within the same school setting and with the same Mandarin teachers.
- In 2023/2024 it is known that 204 pupils sat Mandarin variant Chinese GCSE at approximately 12 MEP schools but outside MEP. Some of these pupils may have been private candidates but many will have been studying Mandarin in a less intensive format than MEP.
- The average attainment of these non-MEP pupils in 2023/2024 was 6.2. This compares with average attainment of 6.5 for all MEP pupils.
- In reality, this result underestimates the attainment boost through MEP because the schools offering dual stream are almost all experienced, high performing schools with average attainment well above the portfolio average of 6.5. However, school level comparative data is unavailable for 2023/2024.

10.8 The independent impact of MEP on GCSE attainment

- Building on analysis first run in 2022, multivariate modeling of the 2023/2024 GCSE data was undertaken to test the hypothesis that participation in MEP itself, independent of other modellable factors, is contributing to an increase in average GCSE attainment.
- For example, being a girl vs a boy, qualifying vs not qualifying for Free School Meals (deprivation pupil premium), attending a selective vs non-selective school and selection into the programme of more academically able pupils are among the factors that have been shown through previous analysis to have a statistically significant impact on average attainment at GCSE, independently of MEP.
- Multivariate analysis takes account of these other factors to quantify the statistical effect of participation in MEP in isolation.
- Building on the improved understanding of the profile of candidates for GCSE Chinese discussed above, the dataset used for the multivariate analysis in 2023/2024 was different to that used in previous evaluations in order to focus it better on the set of pupils likely actually to be studying Mandarin on the curriculum without the benefit of first language fluency. This is the set of pupils whose attainment MEP was designed to influence.

- The dataset used was just over 2,000 pupils who sat the Mandarin variant of GCSE Chinese (MEP and non-MEP) in state schools in England in 2023/2024. Data was confined to pupils who sat the examination during the 2023/2024 academic year at the end of KS4 and excluded candidates from schools with 5 or fewer entrants (assumed to be private candidates) and those with known first language fluency in Mandarin. Pupils were included if they were recorded as having Chinese ethnicity but not known to have first language fluency.
- The model excluded the records of 26 pupils from the one first-cohort MEP school which has a relatively unique, immersive approach to the learning of Mandarin Chinese and enters candidates for GCSE at the end of Year 9 (rather than Year 11).
- The model used standard linear regression. The dependent variable was GCSE attainment in 2023/2024 introduced as a numerical scale between 0 (Grade 0) and 9 (Grade 9). The first model introduced participation in MEP as a single variable without allowing for the differential impact of schools in different cohorts. A second model introduced variables for pupils in first and subsequent cohort MEP schools identified separately.
- The full list of variables identified within the first, general model as being statistically significant at a confidence level ($P < 0.05$) of 95% or greater are shown in the Appendix, Table 1. The R^2 value for the model is 0.52 which means that 52% of the variance in attainment in GCSE Chinese is explained by the independent variables within the model.
- The coefficient estimates shown in Appendix Table 1 can broadly be interpreted as the average change in GCSE attainment uniquely attributable to that variable, taking into account all other modelled factors.
- The key finding of the first model (Table 6) is that participation in MEP makes a unique, independent contribution to attainment in GCSE Mandarin Chinese of 0.55. i.e. on average, a pupil within MEP will achieve just over half a grade point higher than an otherwise identical pupil studying Mandarin Chinese in an otherwise identical state school outside the programme. This result is consistent with the overall impact of MEP identified in 2022/2023.
- The second model (Table 6) separated out candidates in Cohort 1 MEP schools from candidates in schools joining MEP in the three subsequent cohorts which reached Year 11 in 2023/2024. The results of this model confirm the findings of previous analysis that the independent impact of MEP is statistically significant in both Cohort 1 and subsequent Cohort schools but is higher (0.87) in Cohort 1 schools than in these other Cohorts (0.42).
- The relatively greater boost to GCSE attainment in Cohort 1 schools, which approaches one whole grade point on average, is expected because as explained above, these schools typically have more Mandarin teachers, have longer experience of the subject on the curriculum and have teachers who, on average, have longer experience teaching the subject.

Table 6: Summary modelled impact of participation in MEP on average attainment in GCSE Mandarin variant Chinese

Modelled Coefficient	Estimate (Impact on average GCSE attainment)	std.error	Significance (Confidence Level)
Model 1			
MEP overall	0.55	0.06	99.9%
Model 2			
Cohort 1 MEP school	0.87	0.09	99.9%
Cohort 2-4 MEP schools	0.42	0.07	99.9%

Base: c2,000 pupil records, State school candidates for Mandarin variant GCSE Chinese in England sitting the examination during academic year 2023/2024.

Data excludes candidates at schools with 5 or fewer candidates and those identified as having Mandarin first language fluency.

Source: DfE (2024); Analysis by Impact Stories

- The results of the model also largely confirm the impact on attainment of other variables identified through previous evaluations (Appendix, Table 1):
 - Chinese ethnicity, even where first language fluency is not known, has the largest individual impact on attainment, equivalent to nearly two whole grade points (1.81). This result reinforces the importance of assessing the impact of MEP against pupils who are genuinely learning the language in a similar context.
 - Other non white-British ethnicity also has a small but significant impact on attainment of 0.18 grade points. The reasons are speculative but may possibly include closer cultural affinity to Chinese, a positive impact of already speaking other languages or higher motivation of international families. There may also be some effects from misrecording of ethnicity data which is known to be partial and at times inaccurate within the NPD.
 - Average student attainment at GCSE across English/Maths/Science also has a large effect of 0.96 (measured per 1 point increase in the E/M/S average score on a scale of 0-9). This variable is a proxy for the general academic ability of students taking GCSE Mandarin Chinese and is introduced into the model to control for selection bias of more academically able students within a school into MEP.
 - Attending a selective school has a small positive impact on average attainment of 0.18.

- Several characteristics have a negative impact on attainment, most notably being in receipt of free school meals (-0.21) and being a boy (-0.61) rather than a girl.

10.9 HSK3 Attainment

- HSK3 results in 2023/2024 are available for 1,129 Year 10 pupils from 61 MEP schools.
- A score of 60% is generally taken to be a pass in HSK3 and this score was exceeded by 45% of pupils (Table 7). This 45% was consistent with HSK3 results in prior year 2022/2023 among the Year 10 MEP cohort which sat GCSEs in 2023/2024.

Table 7: Summary attainment in HSK3 by MEP pupils in Year 10

HSK3 (Year 10)	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024
% achieving 60%+	44%	39%	46%	45%
Number of pupils	709	1,038	865	1,129
Number of schools	32	53	44	61

Source: UCL IOE Programme data (2024); Analysis by Impact Stories

- HSK3 is not directly aligned to progression towards GCSE but analysis undertaken last year does suggest that at a school level there is a correlation between the two with schools achieving a higher average score in HSK3 also likely to achieve a higher average score in GCSE.
- Results in HSK3 suggest that GCSE results in 2024/2025 should be broadly in line with those achieved in 2023/2024.

10.10 Wider impacts of MEP

- Staff teaching within MEP often caution against measuring the impact of MEP purely through exam results, believing that the programme provides a level of cultural awareness and enrichment to young people and helps to expand their horizons, global understanding and preparedness for life in the 21st century which goes well beyond pure language skills.

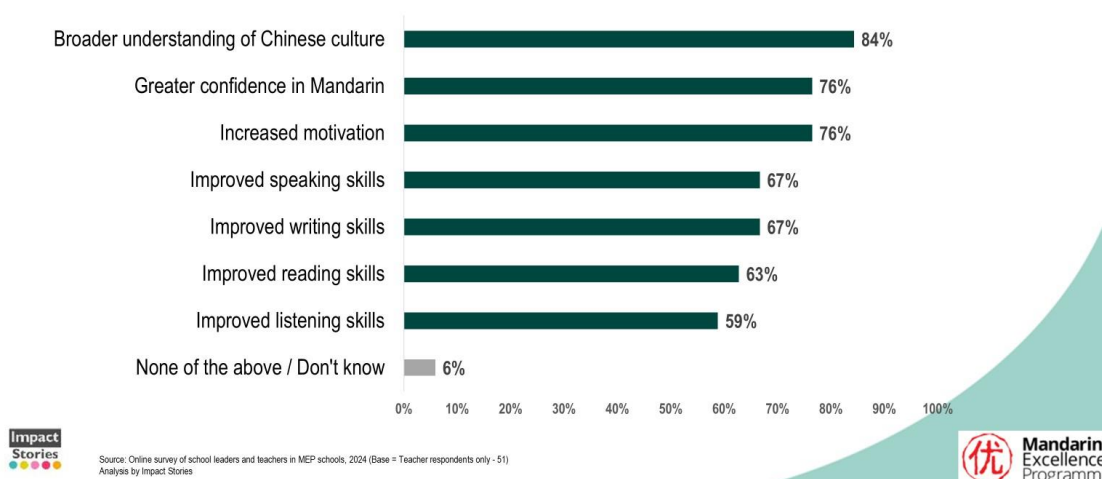
“MEP has opened up life-changing opportunities for students, giving them access to a language once seen as exclusive to private education. It has broadened their horizons.....Through language learning, cultural exchange, and global experiences, MEP helps students develop as open-minded, internationally-minded citizens equipped for the future.” **Teacher, MEP (2024)**

“It is a unique curriculum that offers so much to pupils and opens opportunities for a wider global perspective.” **School Leader, MEP (2024)**

- When asked to reflect on the differential impact of MEP on pupils learning Mandarin, they see that impact in a wide range of areas but especially in terms of a broader understanding of Chinese culture, increased confidence in Mandarin and increased motivation (Chart 12).

Chart 12: Teachers see a strong impact of MEP In building cultural understanding, confidence and motivation

In your experience, what are the main differences between pupils studying Mandarin Chinese within MEP versus pupils in the same year group studying outside MEP? Please tick ANY that apply



- An especially important impact of MEP is seen to be on the motivation and aspirations of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. As the results from multivariate modeling show, on average pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds will achieve lower grades in GCSE and schools with a high share of disadvantaged children will typically have lower average scores for their GCSE cohort. But staff in those schools often argue that the actual impact on children from disadvantaged backgrounds is greater than on those from more privileged ones.

“It has been extraordinary! Our teacher is amazing. Her teaching is inspirational. The opportunities it offers our disadvantaged students in [] is quite extraordinary. The programme is a rare gem in the DFE crown. It is one of the very rare initiatives that I have seen in my 30 years of teaching that is really innovative and looking at the future. One of our parents told me it made her feel as if her child is at a private school getting all those extra opportunities you hear about.” **School Leader, MEP (2024)**

“.....the trip to China is a once in a lifetime opportunity, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.” **School Leader, MEP (2024)**

- MEP engenders a degree of belonging and pride in pupils as result of their association with a high profile and high achieving programme. Among 758 Year 9 pupils responding to a survey following the Intensive Study in China in July 2024, 88% agreed or agreed strongly with the statement, *“I am proud to be a student in the Mandarin Excellence Programme.”*

- Many MEP schools have also used the programme as a platform on which to provide at least some exposure and insight into Chinese culture within the school more widely. Many MEP schools now hold events and celebrations for Chinese New Year, for example

“At my school, all Year 7 students have the opportunity to learn Mandarin through a carousel-style program. This ensures that every student gains some knowledge of the language and an awareness of Chinese culture. Additionally, Chinese cultural activities are celebrated as whole-school events, fostering a broader appreciation of the language and traditions.”
School Teacher, MEP (2024)

- Some teachers also believe that pupils within MEP help to set an example and act as role models to other pupils in the school outside the programme.

“Yes, seeing the Mandarin students' hard work for achievement makes them [other pupils] aware that you can achieve something perceived as difficult by hard work.” **Teacher, MEP (2024)**

10.11 Impact of MEP in KS5 and Universities

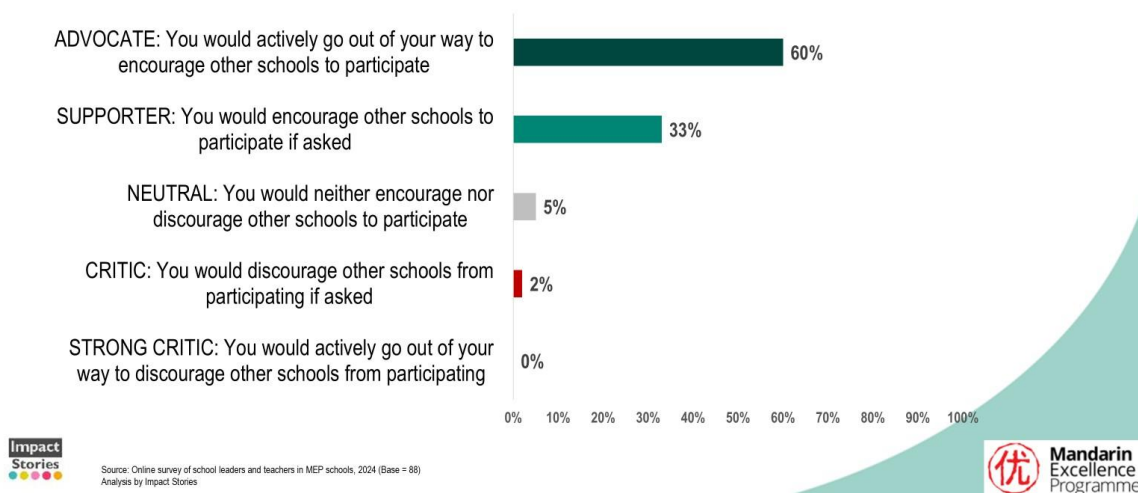
- No systematic tracking nor analysis of attainment of MEP KS4 alumni in KS5 has been undertaken.
- Through the staff survey, six schools report that students who have studied through MEP have already gone on to pursue Chinese studies (although not necessarily a pure Chinese language degree) at university.

10.12 Advocacy from participating schools

- As has been the case since inception, MEP continues to be very highly regarded by school leaders and teachers in the schools which are delivering the programme.
- Among the 88 respondents to the 2024 staff survey in MEP schools, 60% describe themselves as *‘Positive Advocates’* and a further 33% *‘Supporters’* of the Programme (Chart 13). In total 93% of responding staff say they would encourage other schools to join the programme.

Chart 13: A large majority of MEP staff are positive advocates or supporters of the programme

Which one of these phrases best describes the way you would now speak about MEP?



- Many respondents are effusive in their praise and support for the programme, its impact on children studying Mandarin and often on the school more generally. Some experienced school leaders describe it as the best school programme they have ever been involved in.

“In my many years in education, this programme is the best I've been involved with. The DfE funding directly supports the goal of improving Mandarin provision in England and has led to the subject flourishing in our school. The impact is tangible, both in terms of student learning and in the hard measures such as hurdle test results and retention rates. I doubt there are many other government programmes which can demonstrate such a clear impact between funding and outcomes.” **School Leader, MEP (2024)**

“The MEP is a superb provision and is a jewel within our crown as a school. It is often highly commended by pupils, parents and external visitors - including in our most recent Ofsted where it was described as phenomenal by inspectors.” **School Leader, MEP (2024)**

- Among the very small number of MEP staff who have reservations about recommending the programme to other schools, the key reason cited is the challenge of timetabling intensive study within the curriculum

“We love the programme but our challenge is covering the 8 hours a fortnight at KS3, so I would recommend with that caveat.” **School Leader, MEP (2024)**

10.13 Impact on teacher supply and teacher development

- The programme in schools continues to be supported by the UCL IOE PGCE course in Mandarin. In 2023/2024 13 trainee teachers were enrolled on the Mandarin PGCE at UCL Institute of Education. UCL IOE also offers an upskilling programme to enable teachers of other MFLs to teach Mandarin in KS3.
- MEP also provides opportunities for teachers who are in training or in early career to develop their practice in an environment which receives strong support from UCL IOE.
- Just over half of all MEP schools providing a response to the online survey in 2024 reported that teachers had trained or are currently training to teach Mandarin at the school while the school has been part of MEP.
- The support to teachers through MEP is also continuing to contribute to the skills and confidence of the next generation of teachers.
- Feedback through the survey from 46 teachers found that 80% agree or agree strongly with the statement: *“Through MEP my confidence as a teacher has improved”* and 85% with the statement, *“Through MEP I have become more confident in delivering a rigorous model for teaching Mandarin.”* These results are at or above the levels reported in 2023.

11. Sustainability

11.1 Sustainability in KS3 and KS4

- The 2023/2024 MEP portfolio was 80 schools in total and analysis earlier in this report identified at least 33 schools from a total of 58 who entered candidates for GCSE in 2023/2024 who have used the programme to introduce Mandarin onto the curriculum.
- A majority of MEP school leaders are strongly committed to maintaining Mandarin on the curriculum because they view it as extremely important for the future life chances of their pupils.

“I am committed to Mandarin..... It’s my job to prepare students for their global future, this is a big part of that.” School Leader, MEP (2024)

- 85% of teacher respondents and 86% of school leader respondents to the staff survey said that they feel Confident or Very Confident in their school’s ability, ‘to offer high quality Mandarin teaching and learning on the curriculum over the long term.’

“With the support of UCL IOE CI, we have built a robust system and continue to have the means to review our curriculum to support the evolving students’ needs..” Teacher, MEP (2024)

“The selection progress, the structure for delivering Mandarin teaching and the timetable are all in place. I get plenty of support from both IOE and my school.” Teacher, MEP (2024)

- Schools which lack confidence in their ability to sustain the subject over the longer term almost always identify concerns around staff retention and recruitment. Earlier analysis identified the high share of MEP schools with only one qualified Mandarin teacher and school leaders frequently highlight the risk of their (over)reliance on the skills and commitment of key staff.

“The only limiting factor is whether our fantastic Mandarin teacher remains at the school” School Leader, MEP (2024)

“Maintaining the high quality teaching staff to deliver our courses is vital. If we lose one of our staff I would be concerned about how we will replace them.” School Leader, MEP (2024)

“We have a well-established locally based teacher of Chinese and we are building capacity via the upskilling programme so that we are not entirely reliant on one person.” School Leader, MEP (2024)

- 2023/2024 was a year during which there was uncertainty about the continuity of funding through MEP. Many school leaders expressed anxiety over the implications of any cutback in funding and concerns over the difficulty of planning for the future in the absence of certainty.

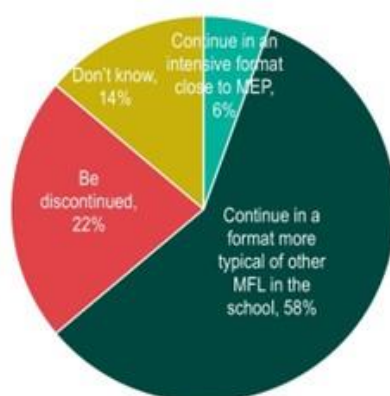
- As has been observed in previous evaluation reports, while most MEP schools are committed to maintaining Mandarin on the curriculum, a majority also say that they would be likely to revert to a less intensive curriculum model more typical of other MFLs if programme funding were to be withdrawn (Chart 14).

“We would not be able to afford to continue in an intensive format without the funding, as our school’s financial situation is poor.” School Leader, MEP (2024)

“We would still teach Chinese but it would be a more basic curriculum without all of the amazing offer that we have now which really sets the programme apart. There is no way we could offer the China trip, or even some of the UK-based activities if we did not receive the funding.” School Leader, MEP (2024)

Chart 14: In the absence of extra funding a majority of schools would revert to a less intensive curriculum

If funding for MEP were to cease, what is the most likely scenario for Mandarin teaching and learning in your school?
School Leader respondents



Source: Online survey of school leaders and teachers in MEP schools, 2024 (Base: School Leader respondents only - 30)
Analysis by Impact Stories



- More than a third of school leaders responding to the survey say either that they do not know what would happen in the absence of continued funding or expect to have to discontinue teaching Mandarin altogether. Invariably, these school leaders point to the wider financial challenges facing schools and the likely difficulty of being able to continue to fund teachers.

“Staffing costs could not be absorbed to mitigate for the loss of grant.” School Leader, MEP (2024)

“We are a tiny school of 300 students, so long term we would not be able to to continue.” School Leader, MEP (2024)

11.2 Sustainability in KS5

- The success of MEP in bringing through a generation of young learners to GCSE Mandarin at the end of KS4 is creating a focus within a growing number of schools on pathways in KS5 and beyond into university.
- Some of these issues are starting to be addressed through the sixth form extension to MEP established from 2023/2024 onwards but pathways and structures in KS5 in many MEP schools are still in their infancy and subject to change.
- Even with the introduction of the updated A-Level syllabus, most schools accept that only small numbers of pupils will choose A-level Mandarin. A high share of those who do are still likely to be first language speakers.
- Therefore pathways for Mandarin as an adjunct subject are especially important for schools both to widen access to higher level Mandarin and also to make the KS5 offer financially viable in terms of teacher/pupil ratios.
- Schools are currently exploring both HSK4 and IB as an intermediate level offer but neither is considered ideal. HSK4 does mark a natural progression from the HSK3 hurdle test sat in Year 10 but it is not included in the UCAS tariff system for UK universities, although it is increasingly widely understood and valued by universities as part of student's wider university applications. The lack of UCAS points is sometimes a deterrent for pupils.
- IB qualifications do earn UCAS points but many teachers are unfamiliar with the IB syllabus and examination and some have found the level of bureaucracy and administration involved in being accredited through IB a barrier.

“We need a curriculum offer at KS5 that is a natural progression from GCSE and that is not dominated by native speakers (A level) and that has UCAS recognition.” **School Leader, MEP (2024)**

- Schools can also find resourcing for KS5 a particular challenge because many of the teachers supporting MEP in KS3 and KS4 are in early-stage career and often lack experience and sometimes confidence teaching at a higher level.

“I also hope to have some training on how to start A-level teaching.....I need basic knowledge on how to start KS5 A-level teaching....”

Teacher, MEP (2024)

- If the platform of Mandarin learning developed through MEP is to be built on it is likely that the level of support to KS5 will need to be increased in future.
- CPD for teachers and curriculum resources are particular areas of need.

12. Appendix: Details of Statistical Modelling

Appendix Table 1: Statistically significant coefficients of regression Model 1

Modelled Coefficient (Pupil/School characteristic)	Impact on average attainment	std.error	Significance (Confidence Level)
Ethnic Chinese	1.81	0.15	99.9%
Average attainment in English/Maths/Science	0.96	0.02	99.9%
Pupil within MEP	0.55	0.06	99.9%
Other non-white ethnicity	0.24	0.06	99.9%
School is selective	0.18	0.08	95.0%
Student qualifies for Free School Meals	-0.21	0.09	95.0%
Male student	-0.61	0.06	99.0%
(Intercept)	-0.55	0.18	99.9%

The R² value of Model 1 was 0.522; the model explained 52.2% of the variance in GCSE results.

Appendix Table 2: Statistically significant coefficients of regression Model 2

Modelled Coefficient (Pupil/School characteristic)	Impact on average attainment	std.error	Significance (Confidence Level)
Ethnic Chinese	1.79	0.15	99.9%
Average attainment in English/Maths/Science	0.95	0.02	99.9%
MEP pupil within a Cohort 1 school	0.87	0.09	99.9%
MEP pupil within a Cohort 2-4 school	0.42	0.07	99.9%
School is selective	0.20	0.08	95.0%
Other non-white ethnicity	0.19	0.06	99.0%
Student qualifies for Free School Meals	-0.18	0.09	95.0%
Male student	-0.64	0.06	99.9%
(Intercept)	-0.46	0.18	99.0%

The R² value of Model 1 was 0.522; the model explained 52.2% of the variance in GCSE results

Notes: Limitations to regression modelling

- The attainment of individual pupils within the GCSE population is not completely independent. Rather, an individual pupil's attainment is to some extent a reflection of the average attainment of the school which that pupil attends; the grade distribution of all pupils is therefore at least partly clustered. To test for this, in 2022 the linear regression model was rerun to allow for clustering effects but the significance and order of magnitude of the coefficients did not change to the extent that it affected the conclusions.
- The dependent variable used, GCSE attainment as a 0-9 scale, is not strictly a linear variable. The grade distribution is actually fitted to some extent (by the exam board) so that the 'distance' between each grade point (e.g. 5 to 6 or 8 to 9) is not exactly the same as measured by a pupil's raw test scores. However, it is a reasonable proxy and provides results which are easy to understand.
- It is also possible that the effects of participating in MEP are more pronounced at different points of the grade distribution. The coefficient from the linear regression effectively averages out any differential effects over the distribution to assume that the impact on attainment between, for example, grades 5 and 6 is exactly the same as it is between grades 8 and 9. These differential effects were also tested in 2022 through logistical regression and found to be relatively small.