



Beths Grammar School students return from China trip on track towards Mandarin fluency

A group of Year 8 students from Beths Grammar School in Bexley have returned from a bespoke two-week intensive study visit to Xi'an in China as part of a flagship government language programme, delivered by the UCL Institute of Education in partnership with the British Council. The programme aims to get at least 5000 students in England on track towards fluency in Mandarin by 2020.

The students, all aged 12 and 13, are learning Mandarin as part of the Department for Education's Mandarin Excellence Programme.

More than 800 students from schools across England travelled to China as part of the programme, where they were hosted by universities in cities including Beijing, Chengdu and Shanghai and put their Mandarin skills into practice in a range of real-life situations from shopping to taking public transport.

The intensive study visit gave the group of 20 students from Beths Grammar School the opportunity to boost the language skills they have already gained since they started studying Mandarin in September 2017. Over the course of two weeks they attended 40 hours of Mandarin lessons at Xi'an participated in arts and cultural workshops, and worked on projects with Chinese counterparts at host schools.

Students also enjoyed Chinese cultural events such as Shadow Puppets and, alongside their studies, had the opportunity to visit attractions such as the Terracotta Army, Tang Paradise etc.

Headteacher at Beths Grammar School, Richard Blyghton said: "Beths Grammar School was among the first wave of MEP schools in 2016. Being a Confucius Classroom School too, we previously offered Mandarin Chinese as a mainstream language through the curriculum. The Mandarin Excellence Programme has transformed and greatly accelerated the progress of our students in mastering both their speaking and writing skills. Our students excel at the hurdle tests set by University College London. It has also provided our students and staff with a once in a lifetime experience by being able to take part in the excellent trip to China, working with lecturers and professors at Nottingham University and University experiences as a whole.

"The visit to China has further equipped our students with the necessary confidence not only to continue to enrich their command of Mandarin Chinese but the resilience required to succeed in life. They also had a fantastic experience and made many new friends."

As the first initiative of its kind, the Mandarin Excellence Programme gives students an unprecedented opportunity when it comes to language learning in England. Students take on an average of eight hours of Mandarin study every week in order to reach a proficient level of ability in a comparatively short time.

Mandarin is the most widely spoken language in the world and is recognised as a valuable skill for young people in the UK to acquire, with 77 per cent of British business leaders surveyed in 2018 saying that speaking Mandarin will give school leavers a career advantage. Meanwhile, research by the

British Council has found that Mandarin is the second most important foreign language for the UK's influence on the global stage.

Minister of State for School Standards Nick Gibb said: "This intensive study visit provided students from Beths Grammar School with a wonderful opportunity to enhance their Mandarin skills and experience first-hand the culture that shapes this incredibly important language.

"Young people fluent in Mandarin will be at a significant advantage when competing for jobs with their peers from around the world. That is why we introduced the Mandarin Excellence Programme, which is on track to have 5,000 students fluent in Mandarin by 2020. The enthusiasm and energy that both students and teachers are committing to this programme is inspiring and will help build a Britain that's fit for the future in an increasingly global economy."

ENDS

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For more information about Beths Grammar School's involvement in the programme, please contact: admin@beths.bexley.sch.uk

For more information about the Mandarin Excellence Programme, please contact Peter Hawkins in the British Council press office (peter.hawkins@britishcouncil.org).

About the British Council

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We work with over 100 countries in the fields of arts and culture, English language, education and civil society. Last year we reached over 65 million people directly and 731 million people overall including online, broadcasts and publications. We make a positive contribution to the countries we work with – changing lives by creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust. Founded in 1934 we are a UK charity governed by Royal Charter and a UK public body. We receive 15 per cent core funding grant from the UK government.

www.britishcouncil.org

About the UCL Institute of Education

The UCL Institute of Education is a world-leading centre for research and teaching in education and social science, ranked number one for education worldwide in the 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 QS World University Rankings. It was awarded the Queen's Anniversary Prize in 2016. In 2014, the IOE secured 'outstanding' grades from Ofsted on every criterion for its initial teacher training, across primary, secondary and further education programmes. In the most recent Research Excellence Framework assessment of university research, the IOE was top for 'research power' (GPA multiplied by the size of the entry) in education. Founded in 1902, the Institute currently has more than 8,000 students and 800 staff. In December 2014 it became a single-faculty school of UCL, called the UCL Institute of Education. www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe.

About UCL (University College London)

UCL was founded in 1826. We were the first English university established after Oxford and Cambridge, the first to open up university education to those previously excluded from it, and the first to provide systematic teaching of law, architecture and medicine. We are among the world's top universities, as reflected by performance in a range of international rankings and tables, and are committed to changing the world for the better.