

PRESS RELEASE

6 December 2017

Students from Beths Grammar School showcase their Mandarin skills for Education Minister

Students from Beths Grammar School in Bexley, Kent showed off their Mandarin skills in front of the School Standards Minister, Nick Gibb MP during a visit to London last week.

As one of the first schools to participate in the Department for Education's Mandarin Excellence Programme, the students joined 13 other schools from across England to celebrate the programme's first year – with the Minister praising the students for their excellent results.

The intensive language programme - which is being delivered by the UCL Institute of Education in partnership with the British Council - was introduced in September 2016 and aims to see more than 5,000 students in England on track towards fluency in Mandarin by 2020.

Results from the first year of the programme show that the majority of students are making excellent progress so far - with the majority achieving marks of over 80 percent in reading, writing, listening and speaking tests.

Students at the event – which took place in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office headquarters in central London - participated in a number of activities to showcase their Mandarin skills and to help them continue their learning. This included a giant game of Chinese whispers, where the students were split into groups and had to communicate a message in Mandarin to help them practise their Mandarin speaking. The students were also invited to contribute to scrolls which included the words and characters they had learnt through their time on the Mandarin Excellence Programme.

Richard Blyghton, Headteacher, said: It was an interesting end to an exciting year of learning Mandarin. Our students have worked very hard with intensive language lessons and their level of fluency amazes everyone who sees it.”

Among the guests at the event was a delegation from China which was visiting the UK as part of the UK-China People to People dialogue to celebrate the cultural, educational and social links with China.

Through the Mandarin Excellence Programme, secondary school students study Mandarin for an average of eight hours a week – a significant increase on the time students currently spend on the subject.

School Standards Minister Nick Gibb said: “Mandarin Chinese is the most spoken language in the world, so this programme plays a crucial role in helping these students achieve the fluency they need to succeed in an increasingly global economy.

“The level of fluency in Mandarin achieved by these dedicated students after the first year demonstrates the commitment of the students and teachers involved in the programme.

“Young people fluent in Mandarin will be at a significant advantage when competing for jobs with their peers from around the world, and will help us to build a Britain that is fit for the future and ready to compete.”

Katharine Carruthers, Director of the UCL Institute Of Education (IOE) Confucius Institute, said: “The students who took part in the programme of events at the Foreign Office had the opportunity to participate in what must surely have been the country’s largest ever Chinese lesson.

“They met government ministers from both the UK and China and talked enthusiastically about their progress in the language, their enjoyment of lessons and the forthcoming visit to China in July 2018.

“They all felt this was a great opportunity to see the Foreign Office, to meet students from other schools and to realise that they are participating in a prestigious national DfE programme which is considered of significant importance to both the UK and China.”

Mark Herbert, Head of Schools Programmes at the British Council said: “Mandarin Chinese is one of the languages that matters most to the UK’s future – and its importance is only likely to increase as the country repositions itself on the world stage. Not only is learning Mandarin a fascinating process which creates a connection to the rich and varied Chinese culture but is also a language spoken by over a billion people worldwide.

“If the UK is to remain globally competitive in the years ahead, we need many more young people being given the chance to master Mandarin.”

State schools in England can apply to join the Mandarin Excellence Programme from 2018 with funding available to support successful delivery.

More information about the programme and how to get involved can be found here: <http://ci.ioe.ac.uk/mandarin-excellence-programme/>

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

For more information about the school's involvement in the programme, please contact Lina Li at Beths Grammar School.

Please contact Jayne Roberts at the Department for Education in regards to queries on the policy - Jayne.roberts@education.gov.uk

For more information about the Mandarin Excellence Programme, please contact Kristen McNicoll in the British Council press office (Kristen.mcnicoll@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. britishcouncil.org

About the UCL Institute of Education

The UCL Institute of Education is a world-leader specialising in education and the social sciences. Founded in 1902, the Institute currently has more than 7,000 students and 800 staff. In the 2014, 2015 and 2016 QS World University Rankings, the Institute was ranked number one for education worldwide. It was shortlisted in the 'University of the Year' category of the 2014 Times Higher Education (THE) awards. In January 2014, the Institute was recognised by Ofsted for its 'outstanding' initial teacher training across primary, secondary and further education. In the most recent Research Excellence Framework, 94 per cent of its research was judged to be world class. On 2 December 2014, the Institute became a single-faculty school of UCL, called the UCL Institute of Education. www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe