

## Chinese teaching at Robin Hood Primary School – Simone Haughey



I became a language teacher at Robin School Primary School in Birmingham in 2006. I was asked in the job interview to teach French but would I consider learning Chinese. So I started learning Chinese in my local language centre and teaching it simultaneously in Year 2. At first my knowledge of Chinese was two weeks ahead of the children but eventually that gap got bigger. Where gaps in my knowledge appeared, the internet and YouTube came to my rescue. I also

have a fabulous personal learning network of language teachers on twitter that assist me with any language teaching and learning advice I need. I also like to keep up-to-date with my CPD through language shows and conferences.

Year 2 loved learning Chinese and amazed me each week with their enthusiasm and aptitude. I have a working display wall where I would display anything Chinese that the children would find in their daily lives or any work or research they did in their own time. I also maintain a languages blog that I use to display the children's work, or references for the children to work on at home, or anything fascinating I find out about Chinese or China. I have found this has worked well to keep Chinese and China never far away from the children's minds.

In 2010 appointed a new Headteacher, Richard Hunter. He was all about promoting Chinese links and had already forged a strong link with a primary school in Beijing. I was now teaching Chinese in Years 2 and 4 with the idea that Chinese would eventually be rolled out across the school.

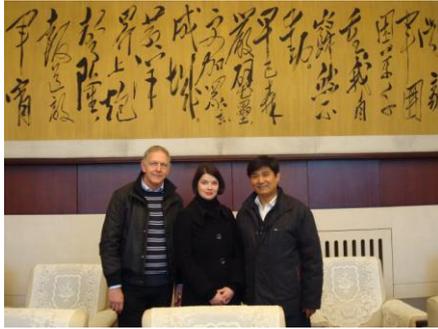


Richard asked me to visit Beijing No. 2 Experimental Primary School with him. I enjoyed learning and teaching Chinese but I didn't fully 'get it' until I went to China and experienced their phenomenal culture and delicious food and traditions. I ran out of superlatives for what was an experience of a lifetime.

Beijing No.2 Experimental Primary School has 2,700 pupils, and we were asked to greet all the pupils and teachers, first thing on Monday morning. It was an experience I'll never

forget. We observed lessons across the school's three campuses, for example a literacy lesson explaining the word and character for snow that was poetic and romantic and I was in tears listening to the beautiful voices at a choir rehearsal.





The warmth and lengths our hosts went to was amazing, showing us around Beijing, all the main sights and even private tour of chairman Mao tomb rooms.

Richard Hunter is internationally minded and thanks to him, Robin Hood Primary School has been maintaining a successful international link which needs a lot of diplomacy, constant communication, dedication and an enthusiasm to extend these elements across the whole school. Richard has created a special relationship between people, schools and nations.



We have had a further four successful teacher excursions to Beijing No.2 Experimental Primary School. We have been lucky to have had the trips reciprocated and had 5 teachers from Beijing No. 2 Experimental Primary School visit to Birmingham this year.

My own style of language teaching is using songs, games, technology and I strive to get the children as enthusiastic about languages as possible. Chinese lends itself to exciting projects like creating our own Terracotta Army out of clay and Mandarin is a fascinating language and the children loved learning the calligraphy. I use a lot of international understanding and this is made more real and contextual as the children can see me in China.



We have found that networking with schools in the UK that teach Mandarin, has developed more context for our pupils. We successfully held a show case of children's performances for 5 different schools for Chinese New Year. Hawes Side Primary Academy in Blackpool now also teaches Mandarin and joins our visits to China. They are partnered with us in this special school to school international relationship. The whole school ethos of Chinese language learning means that it is rolling out across school as my level of Chinese improves, as well as class teachers that are learning Mandarin at the language centre and opportunities for members of staff to visit Beijing. We also regularly send receive letters between children as pen pals and celebrate Chinese New Year across the school too. The teachers returning from Beijing share their experiences with the children and the impact from these excursions has created a knowledge and understanding of another culture the children may never have had.