

Curriculum Models for Introducing/ Developing Secondary Mandarin

Background:

We asked our Confucius Classrooms to describe how they introduced and developed Chinese in their schools (see Case Studies). From their answers, we have drawn together some common themes which schools determined were vital to the successful introduction of Chinese.

Our Confucius Classrooms come from a wide range of schools and contexts; as such, analysing your own school's particular context is important when making any decisions affecting student choice within your school.

Rationale:

Headteachers noted both the broader implications and specific rationale for the introduction or development of Chinese in their schools.

Global Futures

On a broader level, Chinese was stated as an important choice to offer pupils, in response to the changing economic world, and the desire to create pupils who are able to respond to a global world. It was felt that exposure to Chinese, as a non-European language, gave pupils an even stronger understanding of global cultures and languages and, in many schools, this has also impacted across the curriculum, with cross-over in History, Geography, Economics inter alia.

Strengthening Languages

At a school-based level, many headteachers wished to increase existing Chinese language provision, from Chinese being studied informally as extra-curricular activities, to a core curriculum subject.

Building Links

For all schools, a key component to the rationale for development was the commitment to a long-term process. This was seen as being achieved through building links and partnerships both in the UK and China, and developing local teachers able to commit to long-term development of the subject in their school.

Partnerships:

Partner Schools

Schools all mentioned the importance of partner schools in China, both for the exchange of resources and materials, as well as for the provision/ sharing of teachers. These schools can also provide valuable opportunities for pupils to communicate with their peers in China throughout the year, and many schools also organise annual student exchanges.

Building Primary Networks

The development of a network amongst primary schools is also important, and many secondary schools provide taster lessons/other extracurricular activities for their primary schools, in order to better prepare Year 7 pupils.

Developing Local Teachers

As well as welcoming teachers from China, many schools with established Mandarin departments also welcome student teachers from the UK, in acknowledgement of the fact that the need to develop quality local teachers of Mandarin is paramount to the sustainability of Chinese in UK schools.

Collaborative Work

Working collaboratively by other providers of support, such as the UCL IOE Confucius Institute for Schools, local Confucius Institutes, The British Council and regional Chinese centres, has also helped provide valuable support for teachers and schools, in the form of teacher provision, teacher training, access to national competitions, visits to China for both staff and pupils, and access to authentic materials.

Staffing:

Initial Steps

Many schools begin their provision of Chinese in one of the following ways; through a local speaker of Chinese (who may/or not be a teacher), through an existing teacher in the school who learns Mandarin; through the support of a Chinese Language Assistant (or similar) from the British Council; through a Chinese teacher provided by a link school in China.

Local Teachers

Whatever the route into initial provision, for Chinese to be sustainable and have parity with other languages, it is important to employ a local, qualified teacher of Chinese. This is particularly evident as schools begin to take the language above Years 7-9 and into Years 10-11.

Support from Chinese Teachers/Assistants

Local teachers are often supported by teachers provided by the British Council, Hanban or partner schools, and by trainee Mandarin teachers.

Curriculum:

Parity and continuity

When placing Chinese as a core language, schools stated the importance of giving it parity with other languages. How each school implements this varies according to circumstances, however every school provides Chinese from Year 7 onwards, with the development of the language from an early stage seen as vital to the success of the subject.

Details of provision vary from

- termly taster sessions in Years 7 & 8,
- fortnightly 'taster' sessions in Year 7, followed by a choice to continue into Years 7 & 8
- enrichment days in Year 7, followed by a formalised curriculum in Year 8
- A build-up of 3 periods/fortnight in Years 7 & 8, to 7 periods in Year 9 for those who opt for Chinese

Extra Curricula Activities

Additionally, schools take advantage of learning opportunities such as the China Camps trip provided by the UCL IOE CI for Schools, the British Council Mandarin Speaking Competition, or student exchanges with partner schools.

Primary School Support

Schools also work hard with their primary schools, to help development at even earlier years, so as to strengthen Chinese regionally, demonstrating long term commitment.

High Results and Student Engagement

With such commitment, many schools report that the uptake of Chinese amongst students has been exceptionally successful, with students engaging with the language. In some schools Chinese is now the most successful language at GCSE, and all schools report positive results.

Developing Beyond KS4

Many schools are now developing Chinese beyond GCSE, with current provision including A Level, Pre U, or supporting pupils to take the Chinese HSK exam. As a result of studying at GCSE and higher, schools are now seeing pupils applying for Chinese courses at university.

Outcomes:

The challenges of learning Chinese, in many ways different from any other subject, has also been one of the great highlights for most schools who have committed to the subject. In particular, seeing students respond so positively, and successfully, to a subject which challenges and stretches them linguistically, intellectually and culturally has been extremely rewarding for the greater goals of schools. Seeing students who have moved out of their comfort zone and now wish to study Chinese or work in China, or who have a greater grasp of the nation and how it relates to the UK and the world in general, have been extremely positive outcomes.

In addition, schools have also seen students attracted by their provision of the language, which strengthens both the subject and the student body as a whole. The high performance of students in examinations has also demonstrated to schools the success of committing to the inclusion of Chinese as a core language subject, able to support the broader goals of any school.