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YOUR RELOCATION, OUR KNOW HOW



The benefits of a bilingual education and learning Mandarin

In educational innovation, as in many other fields, Europe tends to lag behind the United States. In America there are hundreds of schools where bilingualism in English and Mandarin, using immersive teaching techniques, is a key feature of their offering. Europe's first school providing immersive Mandarin is Kensington Wade prep school in west London.

Pupils follow a traditional British prep school curriculum and are rigorously prepared for entrance to top senior schools. In addition, lessons across all subjects are taught in both English and Mandarin, providing full immersion in the two languages and giving children complete spoken and written fluency in both.

The immediate and lifelong benefits of learning in two languages from a young age are numerous. When the two languages in question are also the two most important languages in the world, and the learning environment is also bi-cultural, the benefits are significantly extended.

Boosted cognitive development and memory

A large, and rapidly growing, body of research shows that learning a second language boosts brain capacity in areas such as creative thinking, pattern recognition and problem-solving as well as the ability to multi-task.

Bilingual people are more able to sort out relevant information from irrelevant information, meaning they can focus better and be more effective thinkers and decision-makers. They tend to make fewer emotionally charged and more critically analysed decisions.

Children who learn multiple languages have stronger memories and are more cognitively creative. Research indicates that bilingual people are usually better at remembering information such as names and directions than those who speak one language.

Wider cognitive benefits

Learning Mandarin has additional cognitive benefits because, unlike most other languages, Mandarin stimulates and activates the development of both sides of the brain (Wellcome Trust UK, 2003). This is especially true if children learn how to both read and write it. Mandarin writing develops shape recognition and spatial awareness as children need to make sure that each character is the same size, no matter how many strokes are required.

Children who study Mandarin learn to recognize the difference between the sound and substance particles of various characters to establish their meaning and pronunciation. This process stimulates the development of excellent problem-solving skills.

Psychologists also suggest that children are open to better and easier learning of Mandarin as it is a tonal language and they have the sensitivity to pick up nuances of tone and sound, making it easier for children to grasp its pronunciation. The tonal associations of Mandarin can also enhance musical ability.

Improved academic achievement

The brain of a bilingual person is regularly challenged to recognise, find meaning and communicate in multiple languages. This cognitive flexibility makes bilingual children more able to think critically and analyse complex information. Studies indicate that pupils who have a bilingual education show greater achievements than their monolingual peers, especially in maths, reading and vocabulary, and that they often do better at standardised tests than those who know one language. Young learners also develop greater linguistic awareness, a better understanding of their native language and increased self-esteem.

Enhanced social skills and perspectives

Bilingual pupils are adept at shifting their perspective and understanding the world from others' points of view. This interpersonal agility and openness encourages a more compassionate and considered approach to the world.



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Cultural understanding

Exposure to two languages helps develop an appreciation for differences in cultures. Bilingual people can engage with languages through stories, songs and other sources of information without requiring translation. They can also talk directly with locals or fellow travellers which all leads to more meaningful cultural understanding.

At Kensington Wade our classes are a great opportunity to teach children about diversity and promote equality which leads to greater tolerance as children become adults.

Learning Mandarin also opens a window into a fascinating history and culture and an immense store of literature and art. China is publishing more books than any other country and is making more and more contributions to scientific, technological and philosophical studies. The writings of Chinese policy makers, administrators, economists and business leaders are becoming increasingly mainstream.

Further language acquisition

Being bilingual from childhood, particularly where two languages are given equal prominence in an education setting, significantly enhances a person’s ability to acquire fluency in additional languages at any stage in life.

Economic opportunities

There is a growing need for a multilingual workforce and the ability to conduct business in more than one language is becoming more critical. Looking ahead to your child’s future career, bilingual people often hold higher positions and

earn better incomes than monolinguals in the same industry.

Having the ability to communicate with customers in more than one market is a clear advantage and opens doors for those who wish to move and work abroad.

Looking to the future

So, why do we think that Mandarin is a particularly important language to learn? After English, it is the most widely spoken language on earth and is becoming increasingly influential due to China’s growing economic, political and cultural power. We believe that knowing Mandarin will give pupils an extra edge in our increasingly global economy. Business leaders and international corporations are looking for people who can speak the language and operate successfully in a Chinese cultural context. Governments also need Mandarin specialists to deal with diplomatic affairs related to China.



Kensington Wade is an award-winning nursery and prep school in west London for children aged three to 11. **Huw May** joined as headmaster from Eaton House Belgravia in September 2023. The school follows a British curriculum delivered in both English and Mandarin. For further information, please visit www.kensingtonwade.com

