

# Why teach Japanese in secondary schools?



This booklet contains information about the practicalities and benefits of teaching Japanese at several of the UK's top Japanese-teaching secondary schools. All information has been provided by the schools named below and compiled by the Japan Foundation London. You can also find further detailed case studies on the Japan Foundation website: [www.jpf.org.uk/language/listofschools.php#case1](http://www.jpf.org.uk/language/listofschools.php#case1)

- Bexley Grammar school
- Bury St Edmunds County Upper School
- Dartford Grammar school
- Hendon School
- St Bernard's Catholic Grammar School

## Learning Japanese at Bexley Grammar School

Stephen Elphick - *Headteacher*



### Background:

Bexley Grammar School was awarded Language College status in 2002. Despite taking on specialisms in Science and Maths and Leading Edge, our Language Specialism has always been at the heart of our school and has increasingly defined our ethos and culture. All students take two modern foreign languages to GCSE level, a very unusual requirement in a UK school and yet a highly successful one. Students can choose from French, German, Spanish, Italian, Chinese, Japanese and Russian. The introduction of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) was a natural next step which we have run alongside A levels for well over a decade, providing access to Japanese in both pathways.

Four years ago the school committed to going fully IB in the Sixth Form which we will do from September 2017, securing all seven of these languages at Standard and/or Higher level.

**Rationale:**

Our school ethos is encapsulated in the three words: intellect, empathy and courage, taken from the IB profile of a successful learner. Some aspects of learning Japanese are a challenge and it takes courage to commit to the challenge and intellect to persevere and succeed. The school is committed to an international approach to learning and the opportunity to be able to learn about a culture so different from those of our European neighbours is one that we have seized with enthusiasm and empathy.

**Partnerships:**

In 2015 we formed a partnership with Kawagoe High School (Mie Prefecture) which is a state school and has an International Relationship Department. Our aim is to strengthen and further the relationship between us over the coming years.

We also have recently made a new link with Keio Shonan-Fujisawa Junior and Senior High School (Kanagawa Prefecture) with a view to setting up an exchange programme.

We have an excellent working relationship with the Japan Foundation which has generously funded a number of local projects. The Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation has also offset the costs of a biannual trip to Japan. There are a number of organisations from which funding is available to promote Japanese culture and language.

We also benefit from our strong connections as a British Council International School.

**Staffing:**

We currently have one full time Japanese teacher who is a native speaker with many years of experience teaching in the UK. We have also been fortunate to attract a Japanese language assistant (who is also a native speaker) with the support, again, of the Japan Foundation.

**Curriculum:**

Japanese is offered as a second language in Year 8 and is currently offered at GCSE, A level and on the IBDP. Recruitment in Year 8 varies but peaks at about twenty students. GCSE and KS5 groups tend to be in single figures. Those involved are very committed and gain fresh perspectives on cultural expectations as well as language structures.

Beyond the curriculum our Japanese teacher works tirelessly to create opportunities for students learning the language. She runs a weekly Japanese club and a weekly Anime club which have been popular among lower school students and has also sourced funding for a range of cultural activities. We have had visits from a Japanese Manga artist and Japanese

musicians deliver a workshop. The annual day trips to the Embassy of Japan and British Museum involve cultural workshops and a visit to a Japanese restaurant.

We have also helped several BGS graduates to successfully apply for the JET programme to work as English Language assistants in Japan.

### **Outcomes:**

The students who learn Japanese undoubtedly have a unique experience and gain an immersive insight into the culture of a country with the third largest economy in the world. The impact for the school, alongside the teaching of Mandarin, is an energising of language learning, a resolve to continue to teach two languages to every student to GCSE standard and a further step in our quest to develop internationally-minded students with genuine empathy for other cultures. Students also gain significant opportunities for exciting and innovative overseas study programmes and apprenticeship opportunities when they pursue Japanese language learning into the Sixth Form.

## **Japanese at Bury St Edmunds County Upper School**

**Mr R. A. Kemp** - *Assistant Headteacher*



### **Background:**

Teaching Japanese has been a feature of life at County Upper School since the 1970s. What began as an extension activity for Sixth Form students and part of the General Studies programme soon became available to all students through 'twilight' (before and after school) classes. Through the dedication of one colleague in particular, we have offered Japanese language classes to our students for nearly 40 years. They remain popular.

There is no obligation for those attending these extra-curricular classes to sit a qualification, but the majority choose to take GCSE Japanese when they feel ready. Since 2010, some students turned off by the European languages we offer have achieved the EBacc qualification through sitting Japanese at GCSE. Each year, a small but dedicated number of students also choose to take AS and A2 Japanese, which is timetabled within the school day.

On average one student a year has gone to read Japanese at University with one or two more taking Japanese as a 'minor' or 'extension' subject.

When County Upper School became part of an *All-Through Trust* three years ago, Japanese was introduced at Key Stage 2 and it is hoped that the pupils' interest in the language will continue so that they will join the twilight classes when they reach Year Nine. Pupils from one of the Middle phase schools within our Trust have become involved in exchange activities and Japanese is one of the languages offered to prospective students on *Able and Talented* taster days.

In extending the curriculum, the Science Faculty has taken advantage of the opportunities offered by the *Clifton Scientific Trust* and up to eight Sixth Form students a year take part in their Anglo-Japanese Workshops. A spin off from this is a specific science link with a Super Science High School in Takamatsu, who visit us during Science and Engineering Week each year. Several weeks of the geography curriculum in Year Nine are also dedicated to a case study of Japan, both its human and physical aspects.

The School's *Japanese Exchange Programme* first ran in 1985, and has been an annual fixture since 1989. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s the trip to Japan was three weeks long and as many as eight or nine Japanese schools visited County Upper in return. Since 2009 funding has become a critical factor and the exchange programme has retrenched to 13 days in Japan (open to all students, not just those learning Japanese) and hosting not more than five visiting schools a year. For those students involved however, the fortnight in Japan and experience of hosting Japanese partners are still hugely formative in their education. Youngsters often return transformed, such is the boost to their self-confidence and cultural awareness.

For those schools considering taking up teaching Japanese, the **key elements** to getting started seem to be:

- a) a teacher with basic knowledge of the language keen to improve by keeping one step ahead of the students.
- b) support for an exchange, with staff available and willing to become involved.
- c) some dedicated funding. The economic profile of our catchment area is such that we would be negligent in our aim for inclusivity if we tried to charge a realistic cost for our activities. Thus we rely heavily on access grants from a variety of funding bodies.

Whilst it is an ongoing challenge to overcome these obstacles, offering Japanese in the heart of rural Suffolk certainly gives our school a 'unique selling point', and parents and students have been known to cite the Japanese Exchange Programme, and the culture within our school which it embeds, as a factor when choosing our Upper School.



# Enjoy learning languages: Japanese at Dartford Grammar School

John Oakes - *Headteacher*



## Background:

Dartford Grammar School became one of the first two language colleges in the country in 1995, at that time, offering the traditional European Languages. The following year the International Baccalaureate Diploma was introduced into the sixth form, teaching French, Spanish and German as the language element. Japanese was introduced in 1998 and was immediately popular. In contrast European language learning was unpopular, difficult and in rapid decline in UK schools (until the 'reluctant' rediscovery of languages triggered by the introduction of the Ebacc). Boys in particular did not enjoy learning the European languages and some of ours were choosing to leave the school at 16 rather than take the IB Diploma with the compulsory language element. Something had to be done. This figure has now fallen from 25% to 16% in the last eight years.

Eight years ago I was invited to attend a Headteacher study tour to China by the British Council. My motivation was to explore another way to revitalise the learning of languages in the school. On my return the Governing Body agreed to appoint a Mandarin teacher and to introduce Mandarin into Year 8. Japanese was still very popular and successful but it was under threat from the emergence of Mandarin from behind the bamboo curtain. Everyone was talking Mandarin, few were talking Japanese. Governors debated whether we should go 100% Mandarin as the compulsory language in Year 7. In 2013 I visited Japan for the first time to gauge for myself the significance of Japanese learning and the Japanese culture on our students. It was a visit of real significance for our school and on my return the Governing Body agreed to invest further in Japanese and to make it a compulsory language for half of Year 7, 90 pupils, in September 2015. Japanese and Mandarin now have equal status and easily surpass the European Languages for interest and success. They have also lowered the language retention barrier for the sixth form. Significantly, success in the Oriental Languages has helped the profile of the European languages.

## Rationale:

As an IB World School, our mission statement is simple, 'A learning community developing international citizens'. We take every opportunity to present languages as the core of our

international curriculum, emphasising communication and respect for other cultures. Our students enjoy Japanese (and Mandarin) as the characters used to construct sentences generate far more interest than the conjugation of verbs. There are no cognates but the satisfaction gained from sentence construction appears to compensate for the necessary repetition. Japanese culture is very different to anything experienced in Europe and our students gain a great deal of personal fulfilment from this exposure. They enjoy being different from their friends.

### **Partnerships:**

In 2017 we will celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of partnership with two schools in Wakayama city. We are fortunate as our partner schools, one state and one independent, are like-minded schools and our annual exchange will endure. There is no doubt that the commitment and practical support of the Cultural Homestay Europe organisation ([www.culturalhomestay.com](http://www.culturalhomestay.com)) and Mr Yasuhiro Yabuzoe, Principal of Wakayama College of Foreign Studies are central to our relationship. They smooth the logistics of the exchange programme and I recommend them highly. We have an excellent relationship with the enthusiasts of the Japan Foundation and we benefit from the connections of the British Council. The opportunities presented by the new secondary school *Sakura Network* are an exciting direction for schools who value Japanese learning and culture. Participation in the Sakura Network could support class-based conversation classes, cultural enrichment activities, and community and parent Japanese classes in schools. Perhaps most significantly it will give a forum for all teachers of Japanese to share resources, successes and concerns.

### **Staffing:**

There are now 4 full time Japanese teachers in the school. Two are also able to teach Key Stage 3 French and another Key Stage 3 Mandarin. As the bulge of pupil numbers moves through the school, it is likely these teachers will focus exclusively on Japanese. We have had no trouble recruiting high quality, enthusiastic and UK trained Japanese teachers so far but we are aware that this cannot be taken for granted. There is always at least one Japanese trainee teacher working with the department throughout the year. We have recently interviewed three excellent candidates for one teacher training vacancy.

### **Curriculum:**

In September 2015 there were 90 beginner Japanese and 90 beginner Mandarin learners in Year 7, starting a five year journey towards a GCSE. There are three, 50 minute periods per week in each year. In Year 8 students are required to choose a second GCSE language from the usual list (and including Latin). The rationale for offering the Oriental Languages as the first choice was to engender an enjoyment of language learning to offset the stifling nature of learning in the traditional languages. By 2020 there will be 450 Key Stage 3 and 4

Japanese and Mandarin learners and approximately 80 post 16 students studying each of these languages at Level 3. The IB course covers three levels, a beginners course, a standard level course (3 x 50 minute lessons, for students who have some prior exposure) and a higher level course (5 x 50 minutes, equivalent to A level)

We are resolute in offering two compulsory GCSE languages to all boys. The enjoyment our boys feel for Japanese and Mandarin has had a real impact on their appreciation of the benefits of learning languages in general. There is a full programme of enrichment opportunities ranging from cultural experiences to careers fairs and speaking competitions. We are now at the beginning of a journey to establish stronger links with UK / Japanese businesses with the aim of offering meaningful work experience in the UK or Japan.

**There are 3 Outcomes:**

1. The primary objective to use Japanese (and Mandarin) to revitalise language learning has been successful. Year 7 pupils and their parents talk with great energy about Japanese and Mandarin and feel that it makes them stand out as being 'different'; they feel good about themselves. Based on this success we have changed the way we teach the European languages in Year 8 through the introduction of themes and language based, cross-disciplinary creativity weeks.
2. Has the development of Japanese helped our students to become 'international citizens'? Yes, once again, without reservation. We cannot understand, appreciate or influence others if we remain ignorant of them.
3. Using the Ofsted measure of academic achievement the KS 2 – 4 VA (best 8) scores speak for themselves, in 2013 1016.5, 1027.2 in 2014 and 1035.6 in 2015. The KS2 – 4 Languages VA has increased from 1006.3 to 1007.9 over the same period but the problem of native speakers being entered for Language examinations is the usual issue. The 2015 Ebacc figure is 98%.

Since 2008 the school has adopted a phrase, 'enjoy doing well'. The development of Japanese and the introduction of Mandarin Chinese have certainly made a significant contribution towards this simple educational goal.

# Japanese at Hendon School

*Kylie Corso – Head of Japanese*



## **Background:**

Hendon School is an 11-18 academy school located in the borough of Barnet. The teaching and strength of the language faculty meant that Hendon became a Specialist Language College in 1996. It currently offers four modern foreign languages. In addition to Japanese, French, German and Spanish are taught. Hendon School is one of the UK's largest Japanese teaching centres at secondary level with Japanese firmly a part of the curriculum from year 7 through to year 13.

## **Rationale:**

Hendon School teaches four modern foreign languages as part of its curriculum. After we became a language college in 1996, Japanese was added to the curriculum from scratch in 1997. Japanese is a huge unknown to the students when they start studying it at Hendon School. Many of our pupils have had previous exposure to Japanese through comic books and animations. However, students come to realise quickly that there is a large cultural and language difference compared to the other languages taught at the school. For the first term of Year 7, our students study all the languages we offer on a carousel. They then study two languages until they make a decision about the language they would like to continue with into GCSE. A large proportion of students choose Japanese so they can further learn about the country, language and culture. There is also an opportunity for students to visit Japan as part of our exchange programme once they are in Year 10.

## **Partnerships:**

Hendon School has had a sister school relationship with Konan High School for 14 years. Konan High School is in Hamamatsu, about a four hour drive southwest from Tokyo. In October our Year 10 students visit the school. On a clear day views of Mt Fuji can be seen from the top floor of the school. During our exchange, students start off by spending a few days in Tokyo where they visit the sights, eat Japanese food and use their Japanese language skills. Our students then spend just over a week staying with a host family in Hamamatsu. On school days, students study and attend lessons at the high school. On the



weekend, they spend time with their host family visiting the sights of Hamamatsu, tasting more Japanese food and speaking more Japanese. Every March, the Konan students visit Hendon School and our students host them and show them around London. Over the years, about 250 students have enjoyed this amazing exchange experience.

In addition to this, the year 13 students have used their language skills to organise and book their own trip to Japan as part of their course for the A2 exam. Last year they travelled to Hiroshima, but in years past they have also visited Osaka.

### **Staffing:**

We currently employ four teachers of Japanese. For about half the year, a Japanese language assistant also joins us to give extra support to our students. All staff members have spent time in Japan and are enthusiastic about instilling a passion for the culture and for language learning.

### **Curriculum:**

During Year 7 students learn the hiragana characters. Students become aware that there are three types of scripts used in Japanese: hiragana, katakana and kanji. They gain a broad understanding of when each one is used, and that any word written in kanji can also be written in hiragana. Students are taught the numbers in kanji from the start and encouraged to use kanji as much as possible. They are also given other essential kanji such as teacher, Japan, Japanese, the days of the week and the kanji to use when writing the date. Topics covered in Year 7 are greetings and numbers, school, days of the week and months and pets.

By the beginning of Year 8, students are expected to be competent at reading and writing most hiragana. Later in the year katakana is introduced and students continue to be exposed to kanji as they appear in topics. Topics covered in Year 8 are origins, food and drink, family, school, leisure activities, time and transport.

During Year 9, hiragana is reinforced, katakana is further practised and more kanji is introduced. Topics covered are free time and social activities, adjectives and opinions, last weekend, the body, clothing and shopping.

All language skills, reading, writing, speaking and listening, are practised and assessed throughout KS3. This is to prepare students for their GCSE exams. At GCSE, students study topics under the GCSE topics of Media, Travel and Culture and Sport, Leisure and Work. Students sit the Edexcel exams at the end of Year 11.

A-level Japanese is also offered at Hendon School. Lessons are taught to enable students to develop and to master the key skills required for the Edexcel exam- reading comprehension, translation and writing.

During our Activities Week 2016, Year 7 and 8 students participated in a variety of 'Japantastic' activities. The theme of the week was Japan.

## Japanese at St Bernard's Catholic Grammar School

*Diana Seagrove - Head of Sixth Form*



### Background:

The teaching of Japanese started as a result of some of the sisters from St Bernard's going out to Japan to help establish a convent out there. Following on from this, here at St Bernard's we received a group of girls from the Japanese convent school in Uminohoshi each year. There were quite a number and were certainly a feature of St Bernard's. Japanese teaching began at St Bernard's within the curriculum in the mid-nineties. Over the years the number of students coming from Uminohoshi has dwindled, and this has been in part due to the changing laws concerning student visas. We now welcome one or two girls a year and they stay with us for 6 months.

### Partnerships:

At present, the only link we have is with Uminohoshi. We would always take the pupils to stay at Uminohoshi, so it is a kind of 2-way exchange, although an unusual one. We have plans to extend the current exchange, and possibly start a new one, although these plans are on hold for the time being since our Japanese teacher is on maternity leave. We have been in contact with an ex-St Bernard's pupil currently working in Japan about the possibility of establishing a new link. Some of our students have just returned from a visit and homestay with the pupils of those schools feature in the programme, it is very likely

that new relationships will come from the programme. For the meantime, at least, we would like to establish a pen pal programme, depending on the reaction after the visit.

**Staffing:**

We have one part-time member of staff.

**Curriculum:**

We have timetabled Japanese groups in Year 8, Year 9, Year 10 and Year 11.

### **Further information and Support**

If you would like more information about other schools that teach Japanese, there is a directory that includes all establishments known to the Japan Foundation that are teaching Japanese here: <http://www.jpf.org.uk/language/listofschools.php> the webpage also includes some further case studies.

### **Further information about support for schools:**

<http://www.jpf.org.uk/files/Japanese%20Step-By-Step.pdf>

**Information about funding for schools:** <http://www.jpf.org.uk/language/funding.php>

### **Free Resources for teaching Japanese:**

[http://www.jpf.org.uk/language/teaching\\_resources.php](http://www.jpf.org.uk/language/teaching_resources.php)

### **Japan Foundation London:**

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