

Is Chinese difficult to learn?

Chinese is traditionally one of the most difficult foreign languages for a European student to learn. A true beginner will spend about five times more time and effort to reach the advanced level of Chinese than to reach the same level of Spanish.

You may find Chinese pronunciation a little difficult in the beginning, but you will get used to it very quickly. Chinese grammar is actually very logical and quite simple. The Chinese writing system is the most difficult aspect of the language. Instead of the alphabet system, Chinese people, for more than 4,000 years, have used a pictographic system that consists of thousands of Chinese characters. Learning to write these characters by hand can take a very long time. Learning Chinese is now much easier because the language can be learned on computers. By inputting Chinese characters, you can practice speaking, listening, reading and writing at the same time.

The Mandarin Excellence Programme is designed to make your Chinese learning experience more efficient. In addition to what you do in lesson, computers can be used for homework exercises, quizzes and exams. In a few weeks, you will be able to write your first Chinese email, and by the end of the year, you will be able to write and speak confidently with our Chinese assistant.

What Chinese level can I reach if I start to learn Chinese at CWLC?

If you are a true beginner, our hope is that you will reach GCSE level Chinese in approximately four years. You will be able to speak and write in a graceful way with idiomatic phrases and understand Chinese news broadcasts and Chinese newspapers.

What textbooks are we using?

We have chosen to use Jinbu 1 & 2 Textbooks and Workbooks as our main resource, supplemented by GoChinese. In addition, we have self-made vocabulary and exercise booklets which work alongside the books.

Will we learn Mandarin or Cantonese?

You will be learning Mandarin or Putonghua, the standard Chinese language spoken by one billion people. Cantonese, by contrast, is one of the major dialects, spoken by the people of South China, Hong Kong and some overseas Chinese communities.

Are we using traditional Chinese characters or simplified characters?

Simplified-the new writing system-is used by people in mainland China and Singapore while the traditional or old writing system is used by people in Taiwan, Hong Kong and some overseas Chinese communities. In the first-year course, you will learn only simplified Chinese. For intermediate courses and above, you may choose to study either system or both systems. With advances in computer technology, the two writing systems are just a click away.

How can I read and write Chinese on a computer?

Generally speaking, a computer (PC or Mac) is Chinese ready if it is less than four years old. You don't need additional software. Just go to the control panel and add the Chinese input method. We can provide a leaflet to guide you through this process at home. There are also a lot of useful and free tools online, including English-Chinese and Chinese-English dictionaries.

What is the expectation on me if I want to be on the Mandarin Excellence Programme?

Students are expected to remain on the programme once enrolled throughout their time at CWLC. It will be your main foreign language. You may also pick up a second MFL (French/Spanish/German) in year 8/9 as a second foreign language but you will not be able to drop

Chinese. These are languages which can be successfully learnt to GCSE level when fast tracked over three years.

After completing your first year on the programme, you will continue to do three hours of guided study per week into Year 8, Year 9 and beyond (this will be 3 hours on the normal school timetable and 1 lesson during period 6 weekly). There will also be an average of four hours enrichment but included in this is:

- Building up to 2 hours of homework each week
- 1 Saturday school in a year (to be fully prepared for annual hurdle tests)
- 2 enrichment days (TBC – these could be trips / visits with the UK)
- 2 days Chinese summer school (which will be the last week of the holidays August 2020)

We are a hub MEP school and we support the delivery of the programme at two other schools in the West Midlands. We work collaboratively to deliver this culturally rich programme and devise intensive learning opportunities with colleagues in our cluster schools (Woodrush & Old Swinford Hospital). As of this year Pates grammar school in Cheltenham will also join our cluster.

Do I move into Year 8 of the programme automatically?

No, you have to sit 'Hurdle Tests' which are set by the IOE Confucious Institute. These will occur in listening, speaking, reading and writing and will be marked externally. We will then evaluate your performance and decide whether you need additional support when you move into the next year.

Will I have the chance to go to China?

In the summer of 2022 Year 8 students participating in the Mandarin Excellence Programme should take part in a two-week residential intensive study course in China. The intensive Chinese language study programme allows students to study and experience China whilst also practising their acquired language skills. Final dates for the course in 2022 are still to be confirmed.

How much will my trip to China cost?

The intensive learning courses are heavily subsidised by Hanban, meaning the majority of the costs of taking part in the study visits will already be covered. The cost of the airfare (currently around £800) will be subsidised (£350 per student) by the programme. The remaining costs will need to be covered by parents or guardians, or through other fundraising means.

Hanban will provide: Accommodation on or near the campus where the classes will take place - Three meals per day, in addition to refreshments - Costs associated with any Hanban organised cultural activities and visits - Internal travel costs faced in China for the duration of the intensive learning course. This includes travel to and from the Chinese airport, in addition to transportation that may be necessary to get students to and from classes

Your parents would need to pay for: the unsubsidised cost of the flight (currently, approx £450) - Chinese visa costs for students (currently £151) – travel to and from the airport, pocket money for snacks. Total cost currently estimated at £750. Last year, with the school's support, each student raised £150 to help reduce the cost of the trip.