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Raising the achievement of students for whom English is an additional language: Belle Vue Girls' School

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Brief description

Students learning English as an additional language at Belle Vue Girls' School achieve extremely well in Urdu and Arabic because the school ensures these languages are used to help students develop their thinking and literacy skills, which enables them to succeed in their examinations.

Overview – the school's message

'[Belle Vue Girls' School](#) is a lively, happy and successful school with a strong commitment to learning and high quality education. Our partnership with parents is vital and our staff know our learners and families well. Our mission and purpose is "Educating the women of tomorrow." We provide opportunities for all to study at least one additional language. We offer five languages within the core language curriculum including Urdu and Arabic.

Opportunities to take qualifications in other home languages spoken are also encouraged. We value our students' abilities and talents and appreciate that every child is an individual. Our emphasis is on personalising language learning with a wide range of qualifications.

Expectations are high. We insist on excellence and hard work from all members of the school community. Outstanding classroom practice with active teaching and learning strategies is key to our success, with an additional focus on effective international links. We are really proud of what our students and staff achieved in GCSE languages in 2011.'



Mary Copeland, Headteacher

The good practice in detail

'This is an outstanding school. Students are proud of their school, and unanimously describe it as brilliant. The school's specialist status in modern languages has been used expertly to raise standards across the school and to broaden students' horizons,' states Ofsted in its last [inspection report](#). If you were to spend a day in the company of the staff and students in the languages faculty you would soon find out why 58% of all students in Year 11 gained a GCSE A* to C grade in at least one language in 2011.

Every student in Year 11 was entered for at least one language at GCSE in 2011. In Urdu 59% gained at least a grade C and in Arabic 57%. Very few students speak Urdu at home because for the large majority their heritage languages are Punjabi and Mirpuri. Many students are now in the second or third generation to be born in the UK so for them English is their first language. Many have had no previous formal study of written Urdu and the Arabic learnt at the Mosque is very different from modern spoken Arabic.

A highly relevant curriculum and first-class teaching

All students are assessed at the beginning of Year 7 to establish their starting points in literacy in each of the languages offered. For many it is a very low starting point indeed. This assessment enables students to be placed on the most suitable language course for them at the appropriate level. Some with previous knowledge can be fast tracked and thus take up a second language in Year 10, whilst others will need the full four years up to Year 10 to ensure they get the best possible grade. There are a range of different curriculum pathways students can follow from beginner up to A level. Crucially the languages of Urdu and Arabic are offered from Year 7 in the mainstream curriculum alongside European languages and with the same time allocation as French or Spanish. This ensures that there is sufficient time available for students to achieve a good grade. The students can see that all languages are accorded equal status and theirs is not pushed to the margins of a quick after school or lunch time session.

Teaching is of the highest quality. The school recruits well qualified and highly committed teachers of Urdu and Arabic who are well versed in modern language teaching methodology and up to date technology to bring language learning to life.



Teachers not only know their languages very well but are passionate advocates which impacts on the students who are equally enthusiastic. While the topics studied link closely to examination requirements, teachers ensure that the curriculum is highly relevant by drawing on contemporary issues such as world health and environmental pollution. In the sixth form students are able to negotiate which topics they study and this ensures there is a good match to students' interests and career aspirations. Many hope to apply their bilingual skills in their chosen vocation, be that as teacher, doctor or scientist. Students speak very highly of their Urdu and Arabic lessons which they variously describe as 'fun' and 'excellent.' According to one sixth former, 'Teachers understand you and your needs. They support you. Every lesson is different. They are moulded to meet our individual needs.'

Students know how well they are doing and are accustomed not only to assessing and marking each other's work but giving feedback to the teachers to tell



them what went well and how they could improve or develop the lesson for next time. Lessons are well paced and there are a wide range of activities on offer. Students' enthusiasm for the games played and competitions against each other show how much they enjoy their lessons. The written feedback they give to their teachers is nearly always positive: 'Fantastic. I couldn't think of anything to write to say how the lesson could have been improved.'

The curriculum is enhanced by trips and visits that allow students to practise their language skills, such as during the two week residential trip to Egypt where students had to speak Arabic in everyday situations to get by. One student who went on the trip said: 'It helped us realise there's a world beyond Bradford. We have learnt to be more open-minded and understanding of differences.'

Good resources and accommodation

Finding up to date modern and relevant resources has always been a challenge for Urdu and Arabic teachers, but not at Belle Vue where teachers have designed their own Arabic website [Arabalicious](#). In lessons you will be more likely to find students using MP3 players or computers to blog or complete work online than out of date books or faded black and white worksheets.



Enter a languages classroom and you will think you have arrived in Pakistan or Morocco! The target language is used by teachers and students alike and the visual displays on the walls are stunning. Such is the level of expertise that

teachers are now sharing their practice with others nationally.

Meeting aspirations and raising self-esteem

None of this happens by accident or chance, of course. The leadership of languages and the commitment of the headteacher and her senior leaders ensure that there is the right ethos for the study for languages. Every language is valued equally and the school has recognised that their students' ability to speak another language, far from being a barrier to acquiring good English skills, actually enhances their literacy skills and cognitive thinking. It also contributes significantly to their self-esteem which in turn ensures they want to do well. Even those not continuing Urdu or Arabic to A level still want to develop their skills by using their own free time to support younger students learning the languages. Other students wanting to go on to study medicine or dentistry, for example, continue their language study to A level, hoping they will be able to use their language skills in their future careers. This is typical of the attitude and high expectations which students inherit from the school.

The school's background



Belle Vue Girls' School is an 11-18 specialist school for languages, applied learning and science. It is of above average size and situated in the North West of Bradford. Almost all students are from Asian heritage families (predominantly Pakistani Mirpuri). Over twenty different languages are spoken at home. Four fifths of the students speak English is an additional language. The students

live in some of the most socially deprived areas of the country.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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