

## Investment agency gets Sarah Bonnell students thinking about languages



Think London, as the official foreign direct investment agency for London, helps businesses from all over the world to set up in the UK capital. Use of languages and an understanding of different cultures are essential to their business. Around 50% of the Think London team speak languages other than English – either as foreign native speakers or as English speakers who have learned languages.

The agency first became a Business Language Champion in 2007, partnering with Blackheath Bluecoat School, and was keen to repeat the success of this collaboration with another school. Sarah Bonnell School is a Specialist Language College where over 70% of students speak a language other than English at home, largely Asian and African languages such as Bengali, Pashto, Yoruba and Twi. Eight languages are taught in the school's curriculum. Located close to the site of the 2012 Games, a key driver for investment in London, the school made an ideal partner.

### Using language skills and working with major brands

In April 2009, 31 students made the morning commute on the Jubilee line to Think London's spectacular offices in London's Canary Wharf. Students were first introduced to the business by Sam Davies – a speaker of Arabic, French and Spanish. He explained the day-to-day



work of Think London, telling students how his role as Business Development Manager involved using his languages and working with major brands like Facebook and Google.

As an icebreaker, students were asked to say what in their view makes London a great place for business. Eight staff members from across Think London's organisation then each took 4-5 students away for

#### Year group

Year 9

#### Group size

31

#### Location

Think London, Canary Wharf

#### Date

27 April 2009

interviews. Before the event, students had prepared CVs in a language they were studying. They would now each have the chance to put themselves forward for the Business Development Manager job. In true 'Apprentice' style, one student from each group was hired and the rest fired – with the winning candidate from each group taking away a Parker pen in a presentation box.

Finally students got to learn about the 2012 Games and what it means to London – and their local community. They watched a promotional video for the Games, which gave them a bird's eye view of the construction site (a landmark which is visible from Think London's offices). Lucette



Demets, Business Development Manager for 2012, explained how jobs will be created and new business will come to London because of the Games. They learned how she had travelled to Beijing because of her Mandarin language skills, and how they could work or volunteer during the Games – greeting visitors or even working with overseas athletes. The event was rounded off by another video showing celebrations in London and Singapore when the city won the right to host the Games.

The experience came at a crucial time for students who were thinking about which language to continue with at school. Many are now opting for two, realising just how much language skills can help them get on. Seeing the Canary Wharf skyscrapers, in east London, and businesspeople in suits and ties probably made the biggest impression – a world just minutes away that most had never seen before.

### Opportunity to spend time with students

Working with a local school using the 2012 Games as a theme proved a perfect fit for Think London. Beyond this, the team simply enjoyed the visit and the opportunity to spend time with local students. Marketing Executive Luella Ben-Aziza added, "We were delighted to see the students' excitement and to realise the difference we'd made to their ambitions and choices. It was tremendously rewarding."

Head of Languages at Sarah Bonnell School, Sinead Earley, explained what it meant to her students: "Hearing their excited chatter over a picnic lunch in Canada Square after the event, it was clear just how much students had got from the day – learning about a wider world where languages can really help them get on."

## Find out more

For more information about Think London, visit their website [www.thinklondon.com](http://www.thinklondon.com)

For more on the Business Language Champions programme and Think London's wider activity, visit [www.rln-london.com/champions](http://www.rln-london.com/champions).

