

BUSINESS LANGUAGE CHAMPIONS

a project supported by the DCSF through CILT



London investment agency makes students think about languages for their future

Background

Think London, as the official inward investment agency for London, helps businesses from all over the world to set up in London. Use of languages and an understanding of different cultures are an intrinsic part of their business, as they support foreign inward investors. Over half of their staff speak languages other than English – either as foreign native speakers or as English speakers who have learned languages.

Ideally placed, then, to share their experience with potential young language learners. With assistance from Comenius London, Think London were brought into contact with Blackheath Bluecoat Church of England School, led by Head of Modern Foreign Languages Malika Zaboumi. Malika wanted to change her students' view of languages to help them understand how they can help career development. The school offers French and Spanish – and German starting in 2006/07– and it was felt that the visit would bring the world of work and languages to life for them.

Working with Mary Palmer from Think London's European team, herself a French and Italian speaker, a visit to Think London's impressive Canary Wharf offices was organised.

Activities in the target languages

In February 2007, a group of 30 year 9 and 10 students of French, German and Spanish, accompanied by three teachers, arrived at the Think London offices in Canary Wharf for a morning visit. Through a presentation, they learned about Think London and its business functions, and of course the different languages they use. Mary Palmer spoke from her own experiences studying Italian and French, about her time in Italy and France, and how living abroad made her a better communicator.

The school devised activities for five Think London staff members to interact with small groups of students – including role-plays, and discussions. They played 'Guess Who?' in the target languages, had mock interviews for jobs such as hotel receptionists or Olympic Village stewards to show the students the significance of having language skills on their CV.

The group was shown a short film about the 2012 Games – and this along with a model of the site and a short presentation highlighted just how important this development was to young people growing up in East and South East London.

Making a difference

According to feedback from the school, the visit had a great impact on students' career planning – now seeing languages as part of this – and led to many of the students choosing a language for GCSE. Beyond this, students became noticeably more focused in language lessons. Importantly, the initiative enjoyed the backing and support of the senior management team – and Malika has been encouraged to continue the school's involvement with Think London, with the agency planning to visit the school in October 2007.

Speaking out for languages

Summarising the experience, Malika commented, "It was the best thing we'd ever done! The visit enabled learners for perhaps the first time to consider language skills as an asset."

And Think London clearly benefited too. As a new business in the area, it is so important to engage with the local community – who could very well become future employees. Business Development Manager Mary Palmer added, "Staff found it very rewarding indeed. This kind of activity is a great fit with Think London's international outlook. We'd encourage any business involved in languages and culture to do the same."



More information

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