



# Rooty Hill High School, Western Sydney

[www.rootyhillhighschool.nsw.edu.au](http://www.rootyhillhighschool.nsw.edu.au)

## Innovation

Via an Asia Education Foundation (AEF) grant, Rooty Hill High School collaborated with its three partner primary schools to develop an Asia Literacy project to address the government's "Asian Century" focus. The purpose was to use the grant to build teacher and student understanding of Asian culture across the schools and improve the teaching of Mandarin in the middle years of schooling (the last two years of primary school and the first two years of high school in NSW). The \$35K grant was allocated to teacher release and the development of online classroom teaching materials. The latter also ensured sustainability of the work post the grant, when the materials were shared among 51 primary, secondary and tertiary teachers from all sectors.

From a relatively small initial grant from the Asia Education Foundation, three years on this has assisted Rooty Hill High School to shift its focus from doing an Asia Literacy 'project' to becoming now a much more inclusive and expansive program based on hosting the western Sydney region Confucius Classroom (sponsored by Hanban, the Chinese government's international program). The program now supports:

- ▶ An ongoing Outreach program with the partner primary schools.
- ▶ The study of Mandarin in the school: The school's Confucius Classroom is unusual in Australia, as none of the students at the school speak Mandarin as their first language.



- ▶ Chinese perspectives taught across the curriculum: Asia literacy and cultural immersion is now embedded in the classroom for 200 Year 7 students each year, is part of the school's community outreach program for 150 Year 8 students each year, and for the first time in 2014, the school had a Higher School Certificate (HSC) Mandarin class.
- ▶ Online partnerships with three sister schools.
- ▶ A Hanban sponsored teaching assistant who is a fully qualified teacher trained in China.
- ▶ A cultural excursion and exchange program to China for students, parents and teachers.

The commitment of the teaching staff and school leaders to innovation through this program has been critical in positioning the school in the educational, Chinese and wider community.



## Outcomes

Repositioning the students and school community of Rooty Hill High School to understand and demonstrate its capacity to build relationships with Asia has been a deliberate objective of the school's leadership team. It reflects both the school's view of its future and its student demography, with more than 40% of students having an Asian language background. The school believes Australia's business, political, economic, employment and tourist relationship with Asia is going to grow and this means that young people from western Sydney will need to develop a deeper understanding and willingness to engage with Asian communities. Towards this end, the school is noticing improvement across a range of outcome areas.

## Examples include

Improving	What might help you notice whether improvements are being made? Through... Evidence and approaches, such as
<b>Teacher quality and quality teaching</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Teachers are researching and implementing exemplary student learning units for the Australian Curriculum (e.g. using Chinese Myths and Legends in English, studying Chinese history, using Chinese case studies in senior courses)</li><li>Teachers have the confidence and capability to share these units with colleagues in and beyond the school.</li><li>Initial evaluations, benchmarked against the school's program requirements are very positive.</li><li>Access by teachers and students to online resources developed by the school, supplemented by online and more traditional resources provided by Hanban.</li><li>The publication in 2014 of a new text, Step Up With Chinese, for use across Australia for middle years students on which the Head Teacher LOTE was consulting writer. This text drew on resources developed by Rooty Hill High School in the original project, embedded the ACARA capabilities and the cross curriculum perspective: Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia.</li><li>Access to and application of culturally relevant social media tools in the classroom (e.g. Rooty Hill High School students access the fastest social media platform in China – Weibo and have online contact with students in three sister schools.). Teachers deliver the listening and speaking requirements of Mandarin using social media.</li><li>Recognition within the profession and wider educational communities (e.g. The Rooty Hill High School teacher who implemented the original Asia Education Foundation grant was appointed as the President of the Chinese Language Teachers Association in NSW).</li></ul>

continued





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<b>Student capabilities</b> Personal and social competencies; Intercultural understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Selected students participated in two-terms of cultural understanding prior to going on a 10-day trip to China in 2013. This process included twenty students eating lunch together once a week to be exposed to new foods, social and cultural customs. They practised conversing with adults and ordering food using Mandarin. This pre-trip process, not only improved the experience for students, but also provided parents, teachers and the students with a baseline from which they could see and hear improvements in their communication. The next exchange is planned for 2015.</li> <li>Students showing a willingness to 'have a go' and compare their performance with students within and beyond the school (e.g. All mainstream Year 7 students sit a test in Mandarin administered by Hanban). The Youth Chinese Test (YCT) is an international benchmarking test of proficiency in Chinese.</li> <li>Students have shown improvement in academic performance (e.g. of the students who sat the YCT test in 2013, 40% achieved a credit or above. The results have shown strong growth over the three years since the program was introduced.)</li> <li>All Year 7 students submitting a major project on Chinese culture demonstrating the Year 8 benchmarks in the ACARA capabilities of intercultural understanding and critical and creative thinking.</li> </ul>
<b>Student capabilities:</b> Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitoring the number and types of individual student development, for example:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A student who had not previously taken a visible leadership role volunteering to MC the launch of the Confucius Classroom, speaking in both English and Mandarin to an audience of official guests, many of whom were fluent in Mandarin.</li> <li>A student who had been socially shy prior to going on the Chinese excursion and exchange has just been elected as school vice captain. The election process includes candidate interviews and speeches to the student body. In the student's speech, he attributed his communication experiences in China and membership of the exchange party as key reasons for why he was able to overcome his shyness.</li> <li>Students in Years 7 – 9 volunteer to host Mandarin speaking and cultural groups when they visit the school. In particular, the students now act as mentors to Year 5 and 6 students participating in the Confucius Classroom Outreach program.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

continued



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<b>Student engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Observing greater student engagement with the academic and cultural cross curricular perspectives required in understanding Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As a result of the primary Outreach and Year 7 LOTE program, all students are demonstrating greater confidence in addressing course requirements related to studying aspects of Asian culture in Years 7 – 10.</li> <li>Over the three years of the program students, supported by the commitment of the teaching staff, have developed skills to enable them to transfer learning about Asia (and China in particular) across the range of courses they complete. Increasingly it is seen as the norm at the school to engage with Asian perspectives</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Family engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An increased frequency of unsolicited parent phone calls to the principal and deputy principal about enrolment at the school by families from Asian backgrounds and by parents interested giving feedback on the Outreach programs.</li> <li>Anecdotes from parents - Most of the parents of students who travelled on the school's Chinese immersion exchange commented to the trip's leader that "they could not wait to get up each morning and see her email updates and photos" of the trip.</li> </ul>
<b>Community engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitoring the impact of the Asia Literacy and Confucius Classroom programs on community engagement with the school: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A higher number of primary school age student families attending community outreach program events organised by the school including Harmony Day, information nights and assemblies.</li> <li>Students assisting community members, where previously they would not have been confident or capable of doing so (e.g. students told a teacher that because they could now understand Mandarin, they were able to help a Chinese woman on a train who needed assistance).</li> <li>Partnerships with Chinese community associations and not-for-profit organisations within the Chinese community in Sydney.</li> <li>Approaches by other not-for-profit and philanthropic organisations wishing to work with the school in innovative projects (e.g. Bright Spots School Connection with Social Ventures Australia.)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

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## Lessons learned

### ***Continuous research and evaluation builds teacher and student capacity:***

Our lessons learned have been about successfully leading for change, improvement and innovation. We have noticed that if we see each of our strategic partnerships as a process with which we undertake continuous action research, we can build the capacity of teachers and students to plan, implement and review (evaluate) their work. We have noticed that by embedding the Asia Literacy project in our school plans our teachers are now much more adept at evaluating using outcomes based evidence collection. They are able to notice how much we are doing in planning and allocating resources to the project, how well we are implementing the projects and what impact we are having across a broader range of academic, social and citizenship measures.

