

Hua Hsia Chinese School

Introduction

Hua Hsia Chinese School was founded in April 2011 by four mothers who had been taking their children to a Chinese school hosted by the Taiwanese Cultural Centre in London. When, after only two months, the school stopped providing classes to under 8 year olds, Katja Ting, who was Chair of the Parents and Teachers Association at the Centre took responsibility for finding an alternative solution. Along with one of the teachers and two parents, they set about finding another venue to enable their children to continue learning the Mandarin language and celebrate their cultural identity.

At first Hua Hsia was set up at Holy Trinity Primary School in Hampstead London, but now has its main office in Barnet. Its purpose is to promote the Chinese culture and language and, as well as providing Mandarin classes, it offers a range of cultural activity sessions such as dancing, cooking, origami and maths through abacus classes. It provides classes for a total of 250 children and young people of all ages, from six months old to aged 19.

The school also provides teacher training focusing on e-learning, has language classes for adults and organises holiday clubs during the Easter and summer holidays. An exciting new project with Goldsmith's University develops language skills through digital storytelling: students are supported to make their own film in the target language, i.e. Mandarin. They exchange and share their work with a partner school in Taiwan where students are learning English.

Hua Hsia started off as a charity but is currently incorporated as a company limited by shares. It operates as a social enterprise and has a turnover of around £130,000.

How the Supplementary Schools' programme began

When Katja started looking for a suitable venue, she located a number of schools to approach and took her two children, aged 5 and 9, to help her to decide which would be most suitable. She had a personal contact who was a governor at Holy Trinity Primary School and introduced her to the Headteacher. The school offered to provide space for Hua Hsia to run its classes every Sunday for a fee.

On its first day 32 children aged 5 to 8 years attended classes. Families paid £40 per term for the weekly provision, and volunteers (all parents of the children) supported the delivery of the programme by doing various tasks which ranged from opening up the premises and switching on the heating to setting up and managing the financial accounts, in addition to teaching the cultural and Mandarin language classes themselves.

The programme supported the children of friends and relatives and, over five years, steadily grew to around 80 children. As the children grew older, the programme developed so it could continue to support them, as some were now 13 years of age.

Although Hua Hsia registered as a charity soon after it was founded, members of the committee began to feel that the constitution that they had written was too restrictive and they could no longer commit the time that was necessary to run the school on a voluntary basis. They therefore took the decision at the 2007 annual general meeting to deregister from the Charity Commission and close down the organisation, unless someone wanted to continue to run it.

Katja, feeling a sense of obligation and responsibility towards the School, took over the organisation and registered it as a company limited by shares. She did not have much knowledge about other options available for the company's legal structure but knew that the charity structure was too restrictive. Incorporating as a private company seemed to be the quickest and easiest way to continue operating.

The parents of the School's students had such faith in Katja, that 80% of them paid their annual fees in advance. This allowed the school enough cash to pay for rent and staff to cover the roles that had been carried out voluntarily before. Hua Hsia is still registered as a private company but operates as a social enterprise, with its profits being reinvested back into the business to pay for costs such as equipment and other resources.

In 2011, Katja left her full time job as an accountant to focus full time on the school. Since then, she has driven the organisation forward to support 250 children and young people, an increase of over 300%.

Getting the mainstream schools on board

Katja has not had to do a great deal to generate interest in the work of Hua Hsia. Its reputation has spread rapidly through word-of-mouth and since January 2012, the school has had a new lease of life after featuring in the BBC Documentary, *Meet Britain's Chinese Tiger Mums*. Supplementary schools from as far as Manchester and Eastbourne have contacted Katja for advice on how to run their school successfully or start up a new school.

The number of parents interested in Mandarin classes for their children increased following the Beijing Olympics in 2008. China's position as one of the world's economic leaders makes learning its languages additionally attractive, particularly Mandarin, which is the world's most spoken language with over a billion speakers.

Parents have done much of the publicity work for Hua Hsia by approaching the Headteacher of their children's mainstream schools to request Mandarin provision. Katja is then contacted directly by the mainstream school. At a meeting, she outlines the support Hua Hsia can provide on an after-school or weekend basis. The mainstream school either funds the provision itself or makes it available to its parents at a fee.

Katja likes to offer some additional activities, such as a China Day or origami and calligraphy classes, free of charge, to strengthen the partnership although in most cases, Hua Hsia School acts as a tenant and has little interaction with the mainstream school.

The programme

Hua Hsia's supplementary education programme operates in the London Borough of Camden where the school is based, and in Tower Hamlets, Islington and Barnet where they deliver Chinese language classes and cultural activities in three primary schools, one secondary school and three libraries.

Classes take place during the weekend and after school hours during the week. Although classes mainly focus on Mandarin language, Hua Hsia also delivers a range of activities to celebrate Chinese culture, some of which are delivered in partnership with Community Focus, a multi-arts centre based in Barnet. These include calligraphy, Chinese paper cutting, Chinese Dancing, Martial Art and Chinese cookery.

Fourteen teachers with a wide range of teaching and non-teaching qualifications from the UK and their own native countries run these sessions. Katja said: "It's important that we get the right people, and that's why all teachers have a probationary period and I carry out session evaluations to ensure that they have the right passion and commitment to teaching. Our teachers have many qualifications, including master's and degree qualifications in Education, Applied Languages, Chinese Literature and Teaching English as a Foreign Language but, actually, none of that matters if they do not genuinely love teaching children."

Hua Hsia uses a commercial software package to monitor progress and levels of attainment in language learning. The school therefore has good evidence of results which helps with promoting the service to parents and mainstream schools.

Initially, all the school's students came from Chinese backgrounds, but now, around 60% of have no Chinese heritage. Hua Hsia School has achieved a Gold Award from the National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education.

Finances

Over 95% of Hua Hsia's income comes directly from parents who generally pay £500 per year per student. As the school is based in a relatively affluent area of London, most parents can afford to pay, although around 30% of students come from lower income families and cannot pay this level of fees. For those students, Hua Hsia operates a scheme to make places available at a reduced cost. To be eligible, families are required to provide written evidence of their financial situation. Applications are assessed on a case by case basis with up to 50% of the fees being cut, and sometimes more if those students are particularly excelling in their studies.

Katja tries hard to ensure that those that want the classes are not put-off by the fees. In some instances, parents of students have come to work with the school, for example as a receptionist, with their hourly rate directly put towards the fees for the classes.

The school receives around \$2,000 from the Taiwanese Government (the Overseas Compatriot Affairs Commission) due to Katja's previous links with them before coming to England. Hua Hsia also delivers after-school classes for four mainstream schools which each contribute £3,000.

Financial Year	Income	Expenditure
2009-10	£92,453	£94,713
2010-11	£92,416	£90,598
2011-12	£127,140	£117,489

The school's main expenditure is on staffing (70%). Katja feels that it is important to ensure that salaries for teachers are competitive; they are deliberately higher than in many other supplementary schools in order to attract high quality candidates when they advertise for new positions, which they mainly do through their newsletter.

Much of the rest of the expenditure goes towards rent and comprehensive insurance.

What next for Hua Hsia Chinese School?

Katja is conscious that the success of Hua Hsia is down to the commitment and quality of all those involved. She thinks the trust that she has with the parents is crucial and spends a lot of time ensuring that they are kept up-to-date with what the school is doing so that they feel involved and engaged.

However, as Head of the School, much of the drive and strategic direction also comes from her. She is keen to look at how to increase a sense of ownership and responsibility for the organisation amongst its staff, some of whom have been there for over ten years.

The change in legal status from a charity to a private company limited by shares has created additional challenges. Whilst governance has been easier to manage, its current status means Hua Hsia cannot apply for grant funding from most trusts and foundations. Exploring alternative governance options is something that Katja sees as a priority; particularly as branching out into more disadvantaged areas is part of their longer term strategy. Hua Hsia

would like to expand its work and reach more children and young people from families that cannot afford to pay the school's standard fees.

Mindful of her intention to retire in the next few years, Katja is keen to research various organisational structures to understand which will best serve the school, enable its continuity once she leaves and secure its sustainability for many years to come.

Given the level of interest there has been for setting up Chinese language schools across the country, Katja is considering social investment and franchising but needs to research this further and involve other staff in the process: "For 12 years, this school has been my dream. I have great ambitions for it, but for it to be successful it has to be the dream of others. As a school we have never been afraid to try new things and to be innovative – this is what makes us unique. However, in moving forward I have to make sure that the decisions that we make over the next few months are the right ones, so that Hua Hsia can continue its purpose of promoting the Chinese language and culture to all those that love it and want it."

<http://huahsia-chinese.co.uk/>