

## Report on Trip to Beijing December 2006

**On 22 November 2006, six of our Year 9 Mandarin students won the British Council National Mandarin Speaking Competition. Their prize was an all-expenses paid trip to Beijing, courtesy of HSBC Global Education Trust who sponsored the competition. Here their teacher, Ms Martin reports on the trip which took place in December 2006:**

We met at 10 o'clock at Heathrow airport; none of us could really believe that we had won the competition, that we had beaten all of the other schools in the country at the national Mandarin Speaking competition and that we were getting a free trip to Beijing as a result courtesy of HSBC, the competition's sponsor. Six year 9 girls from the Grey Coat Hospital (Mercy Welbeck, Alice Clark-Edwards, Sophie Hale, Imogen Williams, Emma Gray and Lara Semple-Kinshasa) were the group competition winners and it was they, along with 3 other winners of individual prizes from other schools, a representative from the British Council and myself, who went to China for a week.

The cold hit us as we stepped out of the airport in Beijing. China was experiencing its coldest spell of the year and we were in the middle of it. Cold was not enough to dampen our enthusiasm, though, and straight from the plane, we began our sightseeing odyssey. On the first day, we went to the exotic food market at Wangfujing in the centre of Beijing. Mercy even dared to eat some snake! After that, the restaurant that we went to seemed boring by comparison (it was lovely food, though).

This set the tone for the rest of the trip; fabulous new experiences and world famous sights followed by traditional food in lovely restaurants. We witnessed Sophie's dumpling-making ability at one restaurant and Lara's food-ordering ability at another. Over the week, we sampled ancient Chinese culture at the Forbidden City, the Temple of Heaven, the Great Wall of China and Yonghegong Lama temple. We also sampled modern Chinese culture at the Karaoke restaurant and the massive Hongqiao and Yaxiu markets. Alice sang a fantastic song and I discovered that Emma is truly the queen of bargaining!

Apart from the culture and the new experiences, the trip was very useful for developing the students' language. As you would expect, immersion in a new culture works wonders for learning. Imogen recognised Chinese characters from lessons on street signs across the city and everyone managed to practice the Mandarin that they had learnt in class in various different scenarios, from ordering food in restaurants to speaking with Chinese friends that the girls met at the student accommodation where we were staying. We also had formal lunches in honour of our trip at the Beijing headquarters of HSBC and the British Council where even more Mandarin was practised and the girls' ability, as demonstrated by their fantastic competition win, was celebrated.

After a week, we all returned to waiting parents at Heathrow, exhausted but happy, with memories of a fantastic trip to last us through the Christmas holiday and beyond.

Wei Martin  
Mandarin Teacher, Greycoat Hospital School