



# Parents and the learning of Asian languages in schools

## Armidale High School, New South Wales

### The school and its language programme

Armidale High School is a co-ed government school in the small town of Armidale located in the Northern Tablelands. The school has an average ICSEA value. According to the ABS, the local population is predominantly Anglo-Saxon and Australian-born. A high proportion of families speak only English at home.

The school offers three languages: French, German and Japanese. After a 'taster' experience with all three languages in Year 7, every student completes a 100-hour language programme in either German or Japanese in Year 8. This learning can be extended into Years 9 and 10 and, subsequently, as part of Continuers' courses in Years 11 and 12. Senior secondary students also have the option of commencing study in one of the three languages at Beginner's level.

### What works and how?

Armidale has reinforced its commitment to parental engagement by employing a Parent and Community Liaison Officer. The school's website emphasises the importance of parental engagement to student learning and refers to the research on this topic.

Parental engagement activities at Armidale fall mainly into two categories. First, the school shares information with parents—mainly through its website and fortnightly newsletters—related to teaching and learning and how they can support their children's learning. Second, the school seeks to raise parental awareness of Japanese language and culture in the context of the school's partnership with a school in Japan.

Deborah Moore, Japanese language teacher at Armidale, highlighted an information-

sharing activity specific to Japanese, stating, *'At the beginning of each year I send out letters to parents informing them of what we are learning as well as a list of apps and websites their child will be using on our class set of iPads.'* She explains that this sharing activity is an attempt to increase the profile of Japanese at the school.

Armidale has a longstanding partnership with a high school in Nanto City (Toyama), Japan. A number of Japanese students—14 students and four supervisors in 2014—visit Armidale each year and stay with host families. The students spend their week attending classes at the school, demonstrating Japanese cooking, talking about Japanese culture to students and staff, performing Japanese dance and songs, and going on excursion. Deborah draws attention to components of this exchange programme that involve parents, such as pre-visit information sessions about Japanese language and culture and a 'Sayonara' party where they learn about Japan from the Japanese students.

Biannually, a number of Armidale students visit the partner school for a similar cultural exchange programme. In 2014, 17 students visited Japan. Parents are involved in preparing for the trip, learning about Japan and their children's homestay experiences in detail. While in Japan, Deborah was blogging live to keep parents informed about the trip, and she also set up a Facebook page, to share photos, updates and intercultural learnings with parents. These exchange-related activities have led to greater awareness about Japan in the school community.

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Deborah Moore,  
Japanese language teacher  
Armidale High School, NSW

### About AEF

The Asia Education Foundation provides teachers, education leaders and school communities with innovative programmes, curriculum resources and networks to support the achievement of Asia literacy for every young Australian.

AEF is a joint activity of Asialink at The University of Melbourne and Education Services Australia. It receives core funding from the Australian Government Department of Education and Training.

AEF leverages funding to support Asia literacy in Australian schools from a broad range of government, philanthropic and corporate partners in Australia and Asia.

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### Why it works

Informing parents about teaching and learning within the language programme as well as useful resources, such as apps and websites, enables and encourages parents to actively support their children's language learning (Gardner, Masgoret & Trembaly, 1999). At Armidale, these activities also appear to have helped build parent demand for Japanese language at school.

Inviting parents to attend cultural events or information sessions on the target language and culture can help promote greater cultural understanding and foster positive parental attitudes towards their child's language learning. For Armidale, the existence of a longstanding exchange programme with a school in Japan, which includes an immersive homestay component, enhances opportunities for intercultural learning and building demand for language learning among parents. This encourages parents to communicate positive attitudes about learning Japanese to their children, which is an important dimension of parental engagement (Gardner, Masgoret & Trembaly, 1999).

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### What Works 8

>> This illustration was taken from *What Works 8: Parents and the learning of Asian languages in schools*, which can be found on AEF's Web portal at: [www.asiaeducation.edu.au/whatworks8](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/whatworks8)

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