

# Hwa Chong students get taste of Beijing

First batch of students at school's satellite campus learning more about China and how to be independent

By Tracy Quek, China Correspondent

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BEIJING - THE 'cool' aspects of studying in Beijing: Exploring cultural and historical spots, trips to other Chinese cities and making new friends.

And the challenging part: Speaking Mandarin like a local and fending for themselves without help from their parents, including buying their own meals at weekends and learning how to budget their allowances.

The pioneer batch of Singapore's Hwa Chong Institution students gave their take on life at their school's first satellite campus in Beijing at its official opening yesterday. Mr Gan Kim Yong, Minister of State for Education and Manpower, officiated at the opening.

The 75 boys - in Secondary 3 and 4 - have spent the past month in Beijing deepening their grasp of China's history, culture, politics, literature and geography through classes taught by Chinese teachers and studying alongside local students.

The Hwa Chong-Beijing satellite campus is the first of its kind for a Singapore school and is part of the Singapore Education Ministry's Future Schools programme. Under the scheme, five schools, including Hwa Chong, were selected in May to spearhead the widespread use of information technology in schools.

The campus also ties in with the ministry and Hwa Chong's efforts to allow more students to participate in extended immersion stays overseas while being able to continue with their Singapore curriculum.

The independent school's Beijing campus comprises several classrooms and meeting rooms. It occupies a small wing at Beijing's The Second High School, one of the city's top high schools. Hwa Chong students are free to use the high school's modern facilities, including an indoor swimming pool, laboratories and music, art and dance rooms.

The students are here on different programmes that all have a strong China focus - bicultural studies, humanities, science and maths. Their stay at the campus range from one to six months.

Six teachers who are here from the Singapore campus in Bukit Timah make sure students are on track with the English, maths, science and humanities curricula back home.

In addition, the boys get online lessons for English and physics via a tie-up with US-based Stanford University's Education Programme for Gifted Youth.

Hwa Chong Institution principal Ang Wee Hiong said the school chose to base its first satellite campus in Beijing because the city is 'China's economic, cultural and political hub'.

'We are grooming Singapore's future leaders, and it is good that they get to see China. They will also be interacting with some of the brightest young Chinese students. These connections will help in future,' he told The Straits Times at the ceremony yesterday.

The school plans to open more satellite campuses in China, possibly in Shanghai and Xi'an, as well as in the United States and India, he said.

As part of their immersion, students wear the same blue-and-white tracksuit uniforms as the local students, collaborate on research projects with them, go on home stays at the weekends and take part in co-curricular activities such as wushu.

They also go on excursions around Beijing, and to other cities such as Xi'an and Tianjin. A total of 360 students will be able to attend Hwa Chong's satellite campus between now and next May.

Here on a two-month bicultural studies programme, 15-year-old Zong Xian said the best part about being here is learning how to be independent, while the toughest bit is interacting with local students because 'they are all studying for exams now'.

Mr Cao Baoyi, principal of The Second High School, said the Singapore students struck him as very well-behaved, diligent and enthusiastic.

'This interaction is very valuable to our teachers as they can learn from their Singapore counterparts. Our students also benefit from interacting with bright young students from Singapore,' he said.

photo gallery



Master Aw Wen Hao conducting a briefing for our guests



Minister of State Mr Gan Kim Yong interacting with our BSP students



Yang Yang explaining what he was doing at that time to our Guest of Honour



A group photograph