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UK-Ukraine School Partnerships Programme



YGG Pontybrenin in Swansea and Tir-y-berth Primary School in Caerphilly, are among four schools from Wales selected to take part in the UK-Ukraine School Partnerships Programme, a British Council initiative funded by the UK Government.

The programme has connected 100 schools - 50 in the UK and 50 in Ukraine - using a shared love of reading to foster cultural understanding, build resilience and support emotional wellbeing. And the Welsh schools haven't just joined the programme - they're leading it. Last month, pupils from YGG Pontybrenin were invited to 10 Downing Street to personally deliver

letters of hope and solidarity to their partner school - Kryvyi Rih Gymnasium No. 28. The letters, written by Year 6 pupils, were messages of friendship and encouragement, sharing the children's hope for peace and a brighter future.

Sophie Dark, Year 6 teacher and co-ordinator of their project said: "The visit to Downing Street was unforgettable - I felt like an imposter being there, but it was an incredible opportunity. The kids were starstruck. The MP for Swansea, Tonia Antoniazzi, was there, as well as the Minister for Europe and the British Ambassador to Ukraine.

"A Ukrainian youth organisation based in London led a brilliant workshop, showcasing traditional costumes and explaining the unique styles from different regions. The children made flower crowns, cross-stitched their initials - and even joined in with some Ukrainian dancing. I never imagined I'd be





dancing in Downing Street! And to top it all off, we even saw Larry the Cat!

"The visit made everything feel real for the pupils. They've been learning about Ukraine, reading stories, writing letters - but going to Downing Street helped them understand that what they're doing matters. It's about real people, real relationships."

Their partner school, Kryvyi Rih Gymnasium No. 28, is located in Kryvyi Rih, a city in central Ukraine, and their exchange project is based around the picture book *Colours*. Through the book, the students have been learning the vocabulary in Welsh, English, and Ukrainian, with plans to turn this vocabulary into animations to support long-term learning. The project has also included themed weeks where pupils exchanged videos, presentations, and questions on topics such as their country, pets, and favourite things - encouraging meaningful connections and cross-cultural learning.

The schools also meet regularly online to deepen their connection.

Sophie said: "Before this, our pupils knew about the war in Ukraine - they knew about it through Newsround and TikTok. But now they can relate - they see the same faces and share similar pets and hobbies. But during our video exchanges they also hear air raid sirens in the background of videos. They know the situation is real. I reassure them that the Ukrainian children are as safe as possible, but this project gives both sides hope - it shows that there is life beyond the conflict and gives our students a sense that they're helping and making a meaningful difference."

She continued: "For us, this is not a one-off project, this is the start of something bigger. Our pupils now see themselves as part of a global story. They know they have the power to make change. It's about making them more informed - not two-dimensional thinkers, but three-dimensional."

Meanwhile, Tir-y-berth Primary School decided to take part in a bid to encourage their pupils to develop a greater love of reading. They have partnered with Lutsk Lyceum No. 1 in Ukraine and through the project their Year 5 and 6 pupils are jointly reading

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, with chapters divided between schools.

The schools have exchanged pen portraits, recorded videos teaching each other Welsh and Ukrainian greetings and now meet regularly online for joint sessions.

Speaking about the project, teacher David Farmer said: "We've partnered with a school that's very different from ours as they have over 1,000 pupils. So far, we've shared lots of pictures and videos of our schools and children, which was lovely, and the Ukrainian pupils have been so enthusiastic, especially about Harry Potter!"

"We wanted to give reading a real-world purpose and let our pupils connect with a different culture. We also wanted our pupils to understand what children in other countries are going through and to help support them in a meaningful way."

Teachers from both Welsh schools met their Ukrainian counterparts in person earlier this year during a British Council visit to Poland, where they exchanged ideas about using reading to support wellbeing and build resilience. Many Ukrainian schools continue to face disruption due to the ongoing conflict, and pupils are often learning in challenging conditions.

David said: "The experience so far has been humbling - This is our first international project and our pupils have never done anything like this before. It's helping them see beyond their own community, and they're taking real pride in sharing their culture and language. It's also been incredibly rewarding - not just for the children, but for us as teachers. It's opened our eyes to how enriching and powerful these connections can be."

David concluded: "We're planning a big celebration in September. Svetlana, my counterpart in Ukraine and I have talked about keeping the partnership going long-term - even if one of us moves on. We've become good friends and chat about more than just school now. We hope the relationship continues between both schools for years to come."

The UK-Ukraine School partnership was launched to mark the 100-year agreement between the UK and



Ukraine and has drawn over 750 applications from UK schools since opening in January. Around 3,000 pupils and 100 teachers are currently involved in the programme.

Speaking about its importance and impact in Wales, Ruth Cocks, Director, British Council Wales said: "There is a very special relationship between Wales and Ukraine with a long history of solidarity between our nation and the people of Ukraine. Wales is a Nation of Sanctuary and we've welcomed young Ukrainians fleeing the conflict into our homes and schools. So, I'm delighted that Welsh schools have partnered with Ukrainian schools through this new initiative and can make important new connections with young people in Ukraine- even in the most challenging times.

"The Welsh schools have not only embraced the partnership, but are leading with empathy, creativity, and a genuine desire to learn and connect. Through books, letters, and shared experiences, pupils are building meaningful relationships that will stay with them for years to come and will equip pupils with the tools to shape a brighter future. It's a powerful reminder of the role international partnerships in education can play in fostering understanding and hope."

The UK-Ukraine School Partnerships Programme is part of the broader UK-Ukraine 100-Year Partnership,

a long-term commitment to deepening cooperation in education, defence, trade, and community ties. In a world gripped by conflict and uncertainty, cultural and educational exchange is a powerful force for peace and understanding. For 90 years, the British Council has worked globally to promote mutual understanding through arts, culture, education, and the English language—including with conflict-affected or fragile states, where it plays a vital role in reaching long-term security and stability, grounded in mutual respect and collaboration.

To find out more about the programme visit: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/school-resources/uk-ukraine-partnerships>

To find out more about British Council Wales' work in Wales, visit <https://wales.britishcouncil.org/en> or follow on X, Facebook, or Instagram.



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