

## **AZBUKA Russian-English Bilingual School opening Press Release**

*England's first Russian-English bilingual school has just launched, and will hold an open evening on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> November at its premises in Mortlake, west London*

Azbuka School has opened its doors to a first intake of children with a unique educational programme blending the languages and cultures of Britain and Russia. It is housed in a well equipped and newly restored, historic building close to Mortlake station, easily accessible across London.

The move represents the latest advance for the organisation, which has promoted Russian-English bilingual education since 2000 through a highly successful and oversubscribed nursery in London (the first Russian nursery to be Ofsted-registered), a Russian cultural centre and a popular Russian Saturday school with a curriculum specially designed for bilingual children.

**Maria Gavrilova, founder of Azbuka, head teacher and chairman of the Foundation** which manages the school, says: *"Our dreams of creating a full-time bilingual school were first conceived 15 years ago, and now they are finally becoming a reality. As an independent school we are able to integrate Britain's and Russia's educational traditions to offer the best of both worlds. Our teachers, who are all native English and Russian speakers and are experienced and qualified to teach in England, Russia and Europe, use the evidence of best practice in bilingual education to deliver a world-class education."*

Russian families are keen to integrate and absorb the British way of life. They see the immense advantages of a British education, widely accepted as one of the best in the world, but are eager to combine it with their own heritage, to preserve the language, culture and history of their homeland as well as the best of Russia's educational traditions.

Complementary education (through Saturday schools and after-school clubs) to promote bilingualism is well established in the UK. Comprehensive research into bilingual education systems in the US and Europe has shown that a school with a full-time bilingual and bicultural curriculum is essential for achieving balanced fluency in both languages and giving children a positive experience of their bicultural identity.

**Dr Charmian Kenner**, author, academic and a leading authority in the field of bilingualism, who is a trustee of Azbuka, says: *"I strongly believe in bilingual education. It offers a great advantage to children: it develops their thinking skills in both languages, keeps them in touch with family and heritage, and helps them grow up confident in their bicultural identities."*

In an increasingly mobile world, more and more people recognise that monolingual education does not meet the needs of many. Linguists, educationalists and sociologists argue that a one-size-fits-all model does not always work and say bilingual schools are better suited to meeting the linguistic, socio-emotional, cultural and academic needs of our changing society.

Azbuka embraces the strengths of education in both cultures. It adheres to the English curriculum and operates within UK's educational system and regulatory and legislative framework. It draws on the English tradition of "hands-on", active learning and an experimental approach to teaching and learning. At the same time, it embraces Russia's reputation for outstanding teaching in fundamental sciences, with maths offered to the first intake of reception children (aged 4-5 years). Russia's great traditions in music, literature and the creative arts are also prominent in the curriculum.

Azbuka has small classes, the latest educational resources and a team of dedicated professional teachers who are determined to create one of London's best schools. **Sue Judge, Azbuka's first English teacher**, says: *"Anyone who has spent years struggling to master a foreign language as an adult will appreciate the value of bilingualism and the considerable advantages that we are providing for our children. At Azbuka, they have the benefit of a stimulating curriculum and an excellent teacher-pupil ratio. In the longer term they will have the gift of bilingualism for life and the ability to communicate with native fluency in two of the most valuable languages in the world."*

The school is deeply sensitive and responsive to concerns about bilingual education. **One parent** said: *“When my child was young, and being from a Russian-only family, I was concerned about his ability to absorb the English language and culture, not Russian. Now, a few years later, I understand that I was wrong. I wish I had had a bilingual school then. A bilingual curriculum is definitely the best option for all types of families, provided it also has a strong academic curriculum as well.”*

More than 900 children have gone through the Azbuka nursery and Saturday school programme since the start of the millennium. All are from families deeply committed to maintaining their culture and education and supporting their children’s bilingualism in the best possible way. The children report hugely enjoying the creative educational programme while gaining top grades in their GCSEs and A levels (three years ahead of their peers) and preserving their Russian culture and bilingual identity.

Azbuka recognises the importance of preparing children for admission to secondary schools that are academically selective, including state and independent schools, Russian and international schools. It will provide extra-curricular support through preparation for the entrance exams of the most popular secondary schools to ensure our its students realise their full academic potential.

At the point of entry, Azbuka children tend to be either Russian-dominant or English-dominant and some converse fluently in two or more languages, but the great achievement of any well structured and implemented bilingual curriculum is that by the end of their primary school years they all are fluent in oral and written communication in both languages. They have considerable advantages over their monolingual peers in academic achievement, multicultural appreciation and creativity.

The Azbuka Russian-English bilingual school is governed by the Azbuka Foundation, a registered charity. The founding members are united by a belief in not-for-profit education. As a school operating independently of government, it is obliged to charge fees to help cover its costs. This income is supplemented by grants and charitable donations that support bilingual educational for all families, regardless of income.

The Foundation’s trustees are of both Russian and English origin and are all professionals from linguistic, financial and educational backgrounds. Its patrons and consultants include prominent figures such as Andrey Usachov, Russia’s foremost contemporary writer of children’s literature, the English historian Count Nikolai Tolstoy, and the former Head of Russian at Eton College, Peter Reznikov,

The advantages of bilingual education for all children are well documented in international research and practice. Apart from the obvious linguistic and cultural benefits, bilingual education and bilingualism are clearly associated with improvements in cognitive development (attention, problem-solving, metalinguistic awareness, multi-tasking ability and higher creative thinking).

The Azbuka Foundation runs the new bilingual primary primary school in Mortlake, a nursery and a Saturday school in Kew. It also operates a cultural centre and bilingual education resource which serves the wider community, open to academic research and providing information on the development of bilingual education in general.

**CONTACT DETAILS:**

**website:** [www.azbukafoundation.org](http://www.azbukafoundation.org)

**e-mail:** [azbuka.foundation@gmail.com](mailto:azbuka.foundation@gmail.com)

**Azbuka telephone number for journalists, parents:** 0781 0013042

**Azbuka School open day and presentation –**

*17 November, Tuesday, 7pm, Azbuka Russian-English Bilingual school and Nursery, Vernon Road, Mortlake, SW14 8NH*