

Visits to Azbuka
March 27th 2025 and June 18th 2025
Governor's Report

Azbuka is an independent school with a unique bilingual Russian-English curriculum that serves the educational, academic, cultural, linguistic and social needs of Russian - multilingual and multicultural children and families living in London.

The school's ethos is underpinned by the following principles:

- to enable children to grow, learn, achieve and thrive in a safe, Russian-English educational environment, secure in their bicultural identity, enjoying a broad culture-rich creative and academically stimulating curriculum and achieving their full potential as unique individuals, caring friends and responsible citizens;
- to prepare children for life and work in the modern world where multilingual and multicultural communicative competence and social skills are as valid as individual academic achievements;
- to embed the ethos of charity, community and environment in the life and work of school;
- to bring Russian culture and value of languages for children to the wider community in London;
- to provide a new and effective bilingual education model, which is embedded in the cultural and linguistic profile of the family and community and applicable to all children and families, regardless of languages spoken and cultures involved.

During my visits at Azbuka on March 27th 2025 and June 18th, 2025, I observed the implementation of these principles in educational practice. In my report, I highlight three key pedagogic areas that reflect these principles:

- a holistic approach to children's learning and well-being that nurtures all aspects of children's development;
- a rigorous and ambitious curriculum that ensures children's development of subject knowledge and abilities in Russian and English;
- a culturally rich learning environment that fosters a sense of belonging, promotes intercultural communication, and nurtures global citizenship.

1. A holistic approach to children's learning and well-being

A holistic approach to children's learning and well-being nurtures all aspects of children's development: cognitive, social, emotional, physical and spiritual. These aspects are not seen in isolation but as interconnected and essential for children's development. A holistic approach values children's diverse identities, cultures, and lived experiences, affirming who they are and where they come from. It encourages curiosity, creativity, critical thinking and effective communication while enhancing empathy, resilience, and self-awareness. It helps children develop a sense of wonder, respect for all life, and an understanding of their place in the world as global and empathetic citizens. By seeing learning as a dynamic, integrated process teachers create learning environments where children can thrive intellectually, socially, emotionally, physically and spiritually. The school's emphasis on a holistic approach to children's learning and well-being is delivered

through a comprehensive PSHE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic) education and it is threaded through the entire curriculum and school life.

I joined the Year 2-Year 3 PSHE class that focused on the topic of ‘facing your fears’. This class was taught bilingually by the two class teachers, Miss Nadia and Miss Tanya. The teachers worked together on planning and delivering the lesson. Miss Nadia introduced the topic in English by sharing two images of a ferries wheel and a spider. She asked the children how they felt about riding the ferries wheel and seeing a spider. She also asked speculative questions: ‘*will your fears stay the same?*’, ‘*will they change when you become an adult?*’. Spurred by the images and teacher’s questions, the children became animated and were very keen to contribute. They confidently raised their hands and shared their feelings and personal experiences on the topic.

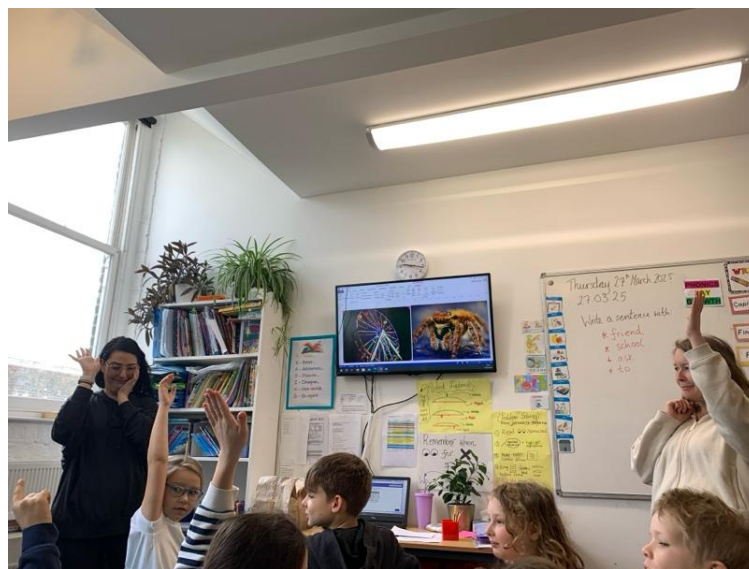


Image 1: Children and teachers expressing their opinions and feelings about facing their fears in English

Building on children’s lived experiences related to the topic, Miss Tanya took the floor and introduced a picture book on facing your fears in Russian. She guided the children through the picture book focusing on the images and asking children to predict what the book would be about. The children contributed their ideas in Russian while one child chose to respond in English. Miss Tanya acknowledged and accepted this contribution as equally valid, reinforcing the normalcy of bilingual language use within the classroom. Both teachers modelled this inclusive stance by acting as bilingual role models. For instance, Miss Tanya translated an explanation from Russian to English while Miss Nadia asked the children to summarise the story of the Russian picture book in English. With self-assurance, one child explained: ‘*it’s about a chameleon that changed colours whenever it was scared. He was scared of the dark, heights, to be alone, dogs*’. Through such purposeful moments of moving flexibly between Russian and English, the teachers scaffolded understanding, extended vocabulary, and deepened children’s conceptual engagement. Rather than treating the two languages as separate or compartmentalised, this bilingual pedagogical approach affirmed that both Russian and English held equal value within the learning space. It demonstrated how **bilingual practices can promote inclusion, identity affirmation, and cognitive flexibility, supporting children’s learning and participation in meaningful ways.**



Image 2: Using images to predict what the story is about in Russian

Following the reading of the story, the children were encouraged to reflect on and identify their own fears, allowing them to make personal connections between the storyline and real-world experiences. This reflective activity deepened their emotional engagement with the topic and provided opportunities for self-expression and emotional awareness. Each child was given a piece of paper and a pencil to write and illustrate one of their fears in English. They were then invited to place their papers into the “green fear monster” box, symbolically “feeding” their fears to the monster. **This imaginative and symbolic gesture offered a safe and supportive way for children to externalise and manage their emotions, fostering emotional resilience within the group.**

During an ICT lesson with Year 4–5 children, I observed a session focused on online safety, specifically on identifying phishing attempts. The lesson began with a whole-class discussion in which the teacher introduced the concept of phishing as a strategy used to obtain personal information through deception. The children demonstrated a solid prior understanding of the dangers of sharing personal information online and eagerly contributed examples of phishing scams they had encountered or heard about.

Working in small groups, the children then examined a series of scenarios to determine whether each represented an instance of phishing. This activity encouraged **critical thinking, collaboration, and debate as they had to justify their decisions.** In one pair, a child who was new to English was supported by a peer with stronger language proficiency. The peer translated the instructions and scenarios into Russian, enabling the newcomer to participate fully by contributing responses in their stronger language (Russian). This inclusive practice not only facilitated curricular knowledge and understanding but also affirmed the child’s emergent bilingual identity and supported their engagement in small group and whole class dialogue.

The lesson concluded with a whole class sharing activity, where each group presented their evaluations to the class. The children discussed each example collectively, explaining how to identify and appropriately respond to phishing attempts. **They articulated their reasoning**

clearly and confidently, demonstrating both their grasp of online safety principles and their ability to communicate and collaborate effectively.

Topic of internet safety was further explored through children's posters that were prominently displayed on one of the school walls in the main hall. The posters revealed the children's heightened awareness of the dangers involved in internet use and how to best protect themselves as active and informed global citizens.



Image 3: Children's posters to celebrate Safer Internet Day 2025 in the main hall

2. A rigorous and ambitious curriculum

Azbuka has developed a rigorous and ambitious curriculum designed to strengthen children's oracy and literacy in Russian, English, and Spanish (taught as a Modern Foreign Language from Y3). The curriculum combines elements from the English National Curriculum with an innovative Russian mathematics curriculum. Learning is rooted in active and experiential learning which emphasises linguistic and cultural bridging. The school's small class sizes ensure a closely knit, inclusive and supportive school community. This structure creates the conditions for **individualised attention, reciprocal learning, and learner agency**, where children are encouraged to take initiative, reflect on their learning, and learn from one another.

For this report, I present two illustrative examples of literacy teaching drawn from different age groups and languages: one from a Reception Russian literacy class and another from a Y4-Y5 English literacy class. These examples illustrate how teaching at Azbuka supports children's language and literacy development and cross-curricular connections in both languages from early years to upper primary. They demonstrate how teachers employ age-appropriate, inclusive, and interactive pedagogical strategies to nurture children's reading, writing, and oral language skills. Together, these examples exemplify how the school's bilingual approach fosters continuity, confidence, curiosity and competence across languages and stages of learning.

In the Reception class, I observed children gently introduced to the Russian alphabet through a phonetic approach designed to help them connect letters with their corresponding sounds—an essential foundation for early literacy development. Miss Natasha began by introducing the capital and lowercase forms of the letter Be [Б, б], using a rhyming picture book to make the learning engaging and memorable. The children were encouraged to brainstorm words beginning with the letter Be, activating their prior knowledge and fostering active participation and phonemic awareness. Next, the children engaged in a letter hunt activity, searching for the letter Be on building blocks, making learning tactile and exploratory.



Image 4: Engaging in a letter hunt activity

To reinforce learning, the class watched a short, animated video in Russian that highlighted words containing the target letter. Miss Natasha modelled the process of decoding sounds into words, demonstrating combinations such as ' $B + A = BA$ ' and providing familiar examples like '*babushka*'. This explicit modelling further supported children in understanding the relationship between sounds and letters and **developing phonological awareness**. The children then practiced air writing the letter before practicing writing the letter in their worksheets. The session was rounded off with a dice game in which children took turns rolling the dice and saying a new word starting with Be, thereby **integrating play, oracy and phonics**.

In the Year 4-Year 5 English literacy class, the children engaged in shared reading of the chapter book *The Nowhere Emporium*. The learning objectives included the development of a range of reading comprehension and writing skills, such as making inferences, predicting, explaining, retrieving information, and providing textual evidence. These skills were explicitly modelled and practised during the lesson and reinforced through homework activities. Evidence of this integrated approach is illustrated in the English homework sheet

for Week 5 and the responses of one child (see images 5-6 below). They demonstrate how reading tasks were designed to consolidate comprehension, expand vocabulary, encourage critical thinking, and support independent written expression.

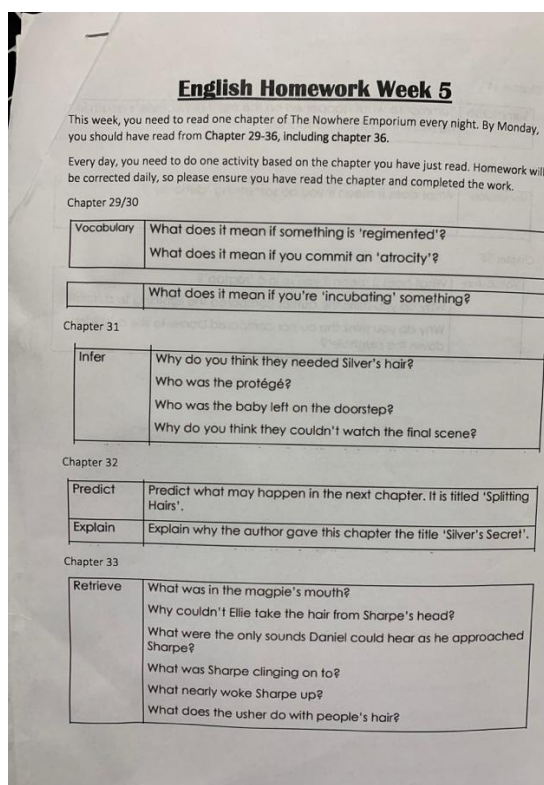


Image 5: English literacy homework

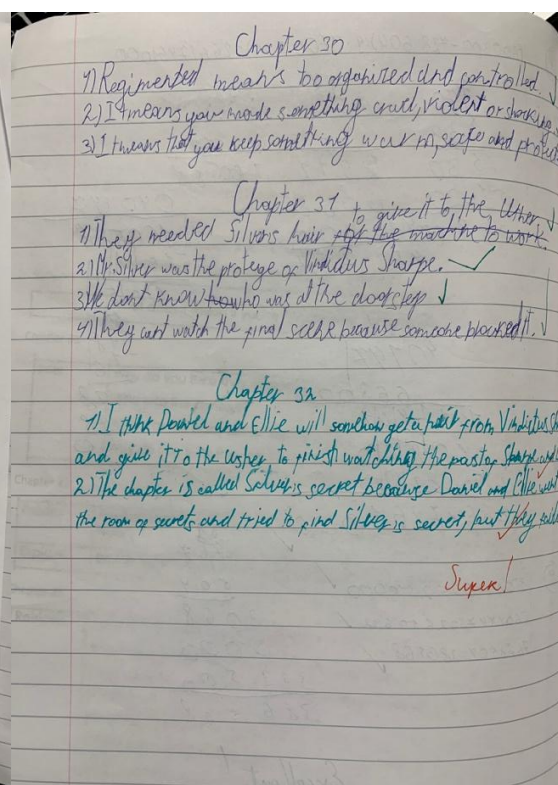


Image 6: A child's responses

During the lesson, Miss Shona began by reading aloud a chapter from *The Nowhere Emporium*. She paused at key moments to explore unfamiliar vocabulary with the class, asking, 'What does "oblivious" mean?' and providing examples of how the word could be used in different contexts. This approach not only supported vocabulary learning but also encouraged children to develop inferencing strategies.

The teacher then invited the children to take turns reading aloud. As the children read fluently, Miss Shona asked comprehension questions such as, 'How is Daniel feeling, and what is your evidence?' She guided the children to unpack expressions like 'the scared-pounding of his heart', reinforcing contextualised understanding.

Following the reading, Miss Shona transitioned to a writing activity focused on the diary genre which the children had been practising. Together they discussed the key features of diary writing and examined examples of emotive language. Using a model text and a vocabulary list, children were supported to craft their own diary entries. Miss Shawna modelled the writing process on the whiteboard, prompting reflective discussion through questions such as, 'How can you create suspense in your diary entry?' This **modelling supported children's understanding of genre conventions and developing their authorial voice while fostering creativity and ownership of their writing.**



Image 7: Modelling writing as process on the whiteboard

Miss Shona used one of the illustrations from the book to help the children enter the imaginary world of the main character, Daniel, and visualise what the *Wonder Room* might look like for their diary entry. This visual stimulus supported the children in adopting the character's perspective and triggered discussions about the possible sights, sounds, smells, and emotions Daniel might have encountered upon entering the room. Miss Shona further scaffolded the writing process by drawing the children's attention to formal aspects of written expression, such as using descriptive and sensory language to evoke the setting and structuring the diary entry into coherent paragraphs. **Through guided support, children were encouraged to develop their literacy skills, imagination and creativity in an integrated way.**

Azbuka's bilingual environment not only strengthens literacy skills in each language but also enables children to make meaningful cross-linguistic and cultural connections, fostering metalinguistic awareness and a deeper appreciation of language as a tool for expression and understanding. Ultimately, literacy learning at Azbuka is understood as a **dynamic, holistic, and identity-affirming process that supports children's cognitive, social, emotional, physical and spiritual growth across all stages of their learning journey.**

3. A culturally rich learning environment

A culturally rich learning environment at Azbuka encompasses far more than language instruction; it reflects a holistic and intentional integration of linguistic, cultural, and experiential learning across the curriculum. Firmly anchored in the school's bilingual (Russian-English) foundation, it values and celebrates the cultural identities of all children while cultivating the values of shared, global citizenship. This environment includes:

- **Navigating multiple cultural frameworks:** Learning takes place in both Russian and English, with Spanish introduced from Year 3, allowing children to fluidly navigate multiple languages and cultural frameworks with confidence and flexibility. For example, in upper primary, children studied the Tudor period, producing elaborate displays that demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of this key era in British history (see Image 8 below). In lower primary (Year 1), pupils were introduced to the renowned

Russian poet, playwright, and novelist Alexander Pushkin. They researched his life, read and discussed a selection of his poems, and then chose a favourite poem to copy and illustrate, combining literacy, visual arts, and cultural appreciation. Through such cultural experiences children gained insight into both Russian and British literary and historical traditions.



Image 8: Multimodal displays of children's knowledge and understanding of the Tudor period

- **Cross-curricular integration:** Learning across subjects such as literature, visual arts, history, music, dance, circus arts, and cultural celebrations is purposefully interconnected, drawing inspiration from both Russian and British cultural traditions. This approach enables children to relate to what they learn in personal, meaningful, and creative ways. One example of this integration is the school wide annual bilingual project which exemplifies how subjects, languages and cultures come together to deepen learning. In response to this year's topic on poetry, Year 1 children, for instance, combined their exploration of dinosaurs (science) with Russian literature (poetry) and visual arts by researching their favourite dinosaur, composing an original poem about it, and creating accompanying illustrations. The project culminated in an oral performance during the school's Poetry Day assembly, where pupils presented their poems to their peers, teachers, and families.
- **Community engagement:** Azbuka places great emphasis on the active involvement of families and the wider community in children's learning. Parents and community members are regularly invited to share their cultural knowledge, traditions, and expertise, helping to enrich the curriculum and strengthen the relationship between home and school. One particularly successful initiative has been the introduction of a lending library in nursery, which encourages parents to read regularly with their children at home. This intergenerational activity fosters a shared love of reading and reinforces the idea that learning is a collaborative and continuous process that extends beyond the classroom walls. The school also extends its mission beyond its own pupil body by offering after-school clubs in Russian, such as chess, science and music clubs, which are open to children from the wider community. This outreach initiative reflects Azbuka's inclusive ethos and its role as a cultural and educational hub, promoting Russian language and culture learning through a Content and Language Integrated Learning approach.

- **Global awareness:** Through stories, projects, and classroom discussions, children develop intercultural competence and empathy, and an informed understanding of the world around them. Children are encouraged to explore different cultures, perspectives and global issues, and foster the values of global citizenship, including respect, openness and a sense of shared responsibility. These values are manifested through engaging with real-world issues such as raising awareness of online safety and taking responsible action to protect themselves and others in digital spaces discussed earlier in this report. In this way, developing awareness of global issues is not only about understanding the world but also about acting thoughtfully and ethically within it.

Altogether, Azbuka's culturally rich environment nurtures **children's multiple identities, and intercultural awareness, ensuring that all children grow as confident bilinguals/multilinguals who appreciate both their own cultural heritages and those of others.**

Dr Vally Lytra
6/10/2025