FROM singing Wiggles hits in Mandarin to learning the language’s difficult symbols, a Colyton school is at the forefront of an Australian revolution in Chinese studies.

Students at Bennett Road Public School spend 30 minutes a week in a program that transforms classrooms into interactive Mandarin hubs, led by UWS Masters of Education (Honours) Chinese student volunteers.

The Research Oriented School Engaged Teacher-research Education (ROSETE) program aims to boost cultural awareness and understanding of modern China among Australian students.

Principal Matthew Plummer said students could not get enough of it.

“The best thing about having the UWS students come to our school is they make classes relevant to our students,” Mr Plummer said.

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East meets Western Sydney via Chinese language program

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The student volunteers combine curriculum content area knowledge to teach Mandarin through songs, games, stories and cartoon characters.

“Every one of our 507 students engage in this program,” Mr Plummer said.

“It’s very relevant to bring about a greater cultural awareness for the children ... and for them to become more aware they are part of the Asian community.

“We’ve got extra teachers and classes but with the school’s budget, there would be no way in the world we
could afford to be anywhere in the running to run a program like this.”

Student teacher Wang-qianli Xiong felt the program was not all about language teaching and learning.

“I think it’s more about cultural learning for Australian students to gain knowledge about Chinese culture and modern China,” she said. “It’s about idea exchange.”

School captain Emilee Beecham said it was interesting to learn about a culture and language that was so different from English. She said Mandarin had so many symbols that made it “a bit confusing” to learn, but she plans to continue it in high school.

Do your children study Mandarin? Discuss this on our Facebook page

AT A GLANCE

- Bennett Road Public is one of eight Mt Druitt-St Marys schools pioneering the ROSETE program, which “is the world’s first” according to director Michael Singh
- Professor Singh said the program had contributed to a 35 per cent rise in high school students learning Chinese in Western Sydney over the past three years
Student volunteer Wangqianli Xiong in the Bennett Road Public School classroom with Emilee Beecham.

Picture: PHIL ROGERS