

## **Benniu Senior High School**

Jiangsu Benniu Senior High School, one of the more dominant landmarks of Benniu town, is located at the west end of the main street. The school was established about 50 years ago and has subsequently been given key school status from local and provincial governments. It has developed a strong reputation of being a very good place to study. It was a founding school in the FEC program and has a leadership which is enthusiastic about the FEC program and having foreign teachers on staff.

There are about 3000 students coming from around the area and across the province and most of them board at the school. There is a small group of students from Tibet who study for three years at the school and on occasion have presented aspects of their culture. Always a treat!

### **School facilities**

The school has well established facilities for the foreign teachers to use. There is a separate Foreign Teachers office opposite the principal's office which is quiet and comfortable.

In this office teachers can work with small booths set up with a work chair and computer, along with a set of drawers. The computers are connected to the school network and allow FTP file transfer so resources created in the office can be accessed in any classroom in the school. The computers have Microsoft Windows in English. There is a printer in the office and a supply of paper can be obtained from the photo copy room on the floor below. There is a water dispenser, and air conditioning unit, and extra tables and seats for resource preparation or team discussions. There is a bookshelf with a variety of teaching resources and a small library of English novels and DVDs.

Photocopying machines and available for teacher use as well as a teacher's cafeteria and large running track. The classrooms are on 5 floors and the buildings are linked by crosswalks to keep dry in the wet season.

There is a Teachers dining room/cafeteria, a good place to meet and talk with the school staff and improve English and Chinese language and understanding of the local area and way of life.

### **Classrooms**

Each classroom has a blackboard and chalk, a computer connected with a big screen TV and a projector. The projector is useful for displaying text pages and students writing on the big screen. The TV is also able to show DVD's. There are also CD players available for teachers to use. The desks and chairs are wooden with stools, making group work practical and effective. There are usually two air conditioners and ceiling fans in each classroom. There is also the intercom for school announcements and eye exercises. The equipment in the classrooms makes using PowerPoint slides of great benefit and there are blinds on the windows to allow the light to be blocked out.

Over recent years these classrooms have been kept exclusively for the western teachers; however this may not always be the case when resources are stretched.



### **School Personnel**

At the school there are several levels of leadership. The Principal, and senior staff understand and can speak a very small amount of English. Among these people the head of the English speaks and understands very well and is very helpful and supportive. Her office is on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor opposite the elevators. The FEC Coordinator and their team are the people asked to look after the needs and welfare of the foreign staff. This is the person to contact if sickness or another issue requiring immediate attention occurs. They are the people who will deal with visas, medicals, and all requirements of that kind at the school. They are committed to making your experience as enjoyable as possible. This means communication between foreigners and management almost always must rely on the translation by Senior English teaching staff. This can be a time consuming and challenging experience but with humor, patience and grace has proven effective. Initial setting up issues, such as bank accounts, phone SIM cards, and initial information about the school and Benniu can be dealt with by the school through a translator. **Often changes will occur with very short notice, without any prior warning and negotiation allowed for. This is an aspect of Chinese management that takes some adjusting to. The staff work to include the foreigners' interests in as many decisions as they can however, sometimes there is not a way for requests to be accommodated for. This is not exclusive to Benniu; it is a part of working in China.**

### **English teachers**

This talented group becomes very important for linking up people and helping in Benniu, both because of their abilities in English but also because they generally are relied upon by the management to assist the foreign teachers. They are generally young, creative and energetic people who want to build relationships with foreign people. These contacts can be useful for translation and learning about the area, school and how things work and can be got in Benniu.

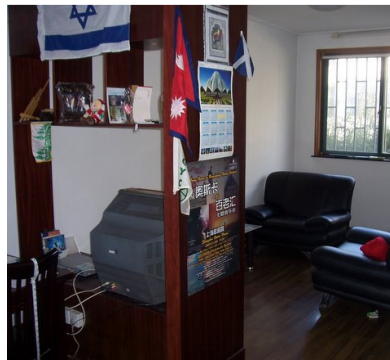
They can provide a lot of information about the learning and abilities of the students and are the people to approach with regard to problems with behavior and resources.

### **Extra important people at the school**

At the school there are staff to assist with repairs, maintenance and photocopying, cleaning and extra stuff. These are very accommodating people and greatly enhance the time in Benniu. Photocopying for resources and exams is available during school hours. They are attentive and the staff have a smattering of English that helps a lot.

### **Accommodation**

The school offers the western teachers comfortably sized apartments located opposite the school campus. The apartments all have a small kitchen with a two flame gas cooker, a microwave, water dispenser and a large dual fridge freezer. The kitchen may also include dishes and utensils collected by previous teachers. How many may vary in each apartment.



The living/dining room is quite big and has lots of storage in cupboards, a large dining table with six chairs. It also has two soft comfortable chairs to watch TV on. The bathroom includes both a bath and a shower and a western toilet. The water tank is the source of hot water for washing with. (There is no hot water tap in the kitchen).



There is a small office located off the living room facing to the south and a moderate sized bedroom with a double bed. **Note:** Chinese style bed mattresses are greatly harder than those in western homes; it takes some time to get use to them.

The bed is of a double size, and it has lights overhead and two bedside tables and drawers underneath as well. Both the office and the bedroom have a large amount of storage space.

Off the bedroom is a small balcony with a washing machine and clothes lines. Some bedding may be present. An air conditioning system in the bedroom and the living room cool down and heat the apartment.



#### **Phone in the apartment**

There are landline phones in the apartments. These are used from a card that can be purchased in the shops next to the school. These are called 96998 cards named from the code on them. The only cards available in Benniu we have found are of 10 or 20 RMB only. Cards of larger value may be able to be purchased from the large China Mobile shop at Wen Hua Gong. This is located at the large X intersection opposite the no 14 bus stop in the centre city of Changzhou. This intersection is also opposite the large park like square with a large fountain in it and a large department store on the alternate corner. There is an underground McDonalds located at one side of the park. The no 14 bus can be taken from the railway station from the stop where the bus from Benniu (No 57 or No 59) arrives at.

Phone cards for the landline in the apartment require a large number of coded numbers to be entered in before the telephone number. This can be a troublesome method but calls can be made and the phones have been checked and do work. The school is able to arrange repair of the phones if they do not work, however the school will not pay for calls either local or international.

#### **Internet in apartments**

Internet access can be arranged by the school and necessary wiring will be added. This is a cost the school will not pay for however, they provide internet access at the foreign teacher's office. Internet access works out at about 650RMB for a year subscription. The speed is variable but is usually quite strong given that Benniu is a rural town.

#### **What is in the apartments and what needs to be purchased?**

The things for use in the apartments are variable from one apartment to another. Plates, dishes and some pots are present, more in one than in another. Coat hangers, an iron and board, mops and a vacuum cleaner are there as well as a toaster and a large heater. Several large chopping boards and sharp knives and such things may also be included. Between the four apartments, the variety of items will show what needs to be purchased

and what perhaps can be divided out. Some bedding is present; however preference may dictate whether this is used. It is worth while allowing about 1500 RMB for those items to be purchased.



### **Gas**

The school will not pay for gas for the cooker but can arrange its delivery, around 100 RMB for each tank, perhaps four tanks for the year depending on how often it is used.

### **Water**

Water is bought in 18 liter tanks. The delivery place for the water is very close by opposite the school next to the travel agency. It costs 5 RMB for it delivered and 4 if you carry it home. The kitchen does not have an oven; they are rare in China but possibly can be purchased at large department stores. It does have a microwave oven.

### **Blankets and bedding**

As mentioned above some bedroom bedding is present; additional blankets can be purchased locally in Benniu in the market area or in the supermarkets.

### **Heating and Air conditioning**

The apartments have air conditioning units in both the bedroom and in the living room. In the winter these can be used for heating as well. No additional heat in the apartments is providing by the school.

### **Electricity**

The school will pay for electricity. It has mentioned that this is budgeted carefully, so teachers may be asked to pay for additional costs if this eventuates.

### **Television**

The television a variety of Chinese only channels; unfortunately the luxury of an English speaking CCTV channel is no longer available. It may be worth asking about availability.

### **Teaching at Benniu**

There are two types of classes taught at Benniu Senior High School; FEC and Non FEC classes. There are three year levels at the school. Senior 1, 2 and 3. These represent the last three years of schooling in China.

#### **Senior 1**

**FEC classes** are designed to cover the skills of Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking using a structured curriculum, textbook series and other resources. The students are examined once each Semester and a report is written about their progress for parents and the school to see. This is the program specific to Beijing WITT. Many of these students have expressed an interest in studying in Western countries in the future therefore studying English is an extremely important step in reaching this goal.

**Non FEC classes** are made up from the classes that have not entered into the FEC program and the teaching is arranged on the request and contractual agreement of the school and BJ WITT. These classes have been focused on conversation, and improving students confidence speaking English. They have been in both Senior 1 and 2. There is not an agreed upon text book for these students, however in the office there are lots of resources available to base lessons on.

The students in Senior 1 are around 15 -16 years and generally polite, keen and well behaved. The bulk of classes will likely be at this level. There is likely to be 14 or 15 classes split between teachers.

### **Senior 2**

This is the second year at High School. Classes for the FEC program are offered however new government requirements have increased the number and importance of internal exams at this level, so Senior 2 FEC has been squeezed out as a consequence. There may or may not be a FEC class in Senior 2.

Generally the level of English understanding in all these classes is of a high standard, however the level of speaking and students confidence to do so adequately is variable between classes and has been the area of the teaching the foreign teachers have worked on most.

### **Senior 3**

This is the last and arguably the most important year for the students. Senior 3 classes are unlikely to be included in the foreign teachers teaching schedule any more than a small amount. This is because the Senior 3 students and teachers are heavily committed to the University entrance exams sat in June each year. These are very important exams. Some Senior 3 students may approach the foreign teachers to practice spoken English and ask questions..

### **Daily Schedule**

There are 8 lessons each day, The first lesson begins at 7:30 in the Summer and 7:45 in the Winter. Each class is 45-50 minutes. Lunch is from 11:30am to 1:30 pm (maybe slightly longer in the Summer time).The lunch time is used for a sleeping time. The photocopying room is closed during lunchtime as are other departments, so it may be hard to find Chinese staff.

The foreign teachers usually are not expected to work on weekends, however on occasion the school will request lessons be taught at the weekend (enough notice and reasoning will usually be given when this happens). There may also be extra activities requested of the foreign teachers which allow the students to get an insight of western culture. These can prove very rewarding.

*It is true to say that Benniu is not always an easy or convenient place to live perhaps because of the small town features, however as with any experience in China, a positive, flexible and open minded approach and by asking lots of questions and for assistance, it will allow for a comfortable quiet lifestyle. It is a good place to study Chinese and master the basics. It is a place that will offer as much and more than what you put in to it!*