

Research Article

The East London Classics Summer School 2024

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Abstract

This is a review of the activities and successes of the 4th East London Classics Summer School, which took place in Hackney from Monday 29th July to Friday 2nd August 2024. Specifically, it covers our typical teaching arrangement, lectures and trips, and it also acknowledges the generosity of those supporting our initiative.

Keywords: Latin, GCSE, summer, bursaries, teacher

We are delighted to report that the summer school 2024 (our 4th year!) was another great success, and that we were pleased to have received another cohort of dedicated students, of whom we are so proud. This year, we welcomed students from 12 different schools in the London area to an intensive GCSE Latin 5-day revision course in Hackney. We were so pleased to have been able to offer a record number of full and half bursaries this year, courtesy of the Classical Association, the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies, and Professor Mary Beard. We offered financial support to over 75% of our students. These students have Pupil Premium or Free School Meals eligibility, and/or are from single-parent families, and/or from families experiencing other financial difficulties. What was also very interesting was that 68% of our students are from non-white backgrounds, and over half spoke languages other than English at home with their families.

Over the course of the week, the summer school covered essential grammar from the GCSE specification in four language sessions a day in preparation for the all-important examination in 2025. Sessions were teacher-led, which then developed into tasks that encouraged group collaboration, as well as independent study to allow students to really get into the intricacies of the grammar in a GCSE unseen passage.

Of particular note this year was the ‘Golden Time’ lecture series, which invited university academics to our offices to speak to the students about an aspect of the Classical world. Our first lecture was delivered by William Lawrence, who spoke about the influence of ancient Greece and Rome in all aspects of our lives, and we were treated to a talk specifically on ‘Classical London’. This was the perfect way to start the week. Professor Alison Sharrock (Manchester) delivered a spectacular session on ‘eco-criticism’ and more specifically, Ovid’s beautiful story of Baucis and Philemon, which will be the students’ prescribed verse text

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next year. Dr Olivia Elder (Oxford) spoke about Messalina, emperor Claudius’ third wife, who features in the work of the historian Tacitus, the students’ prescribed prose author. We also invited Laura Thomson-Turnage, from the London Museum, who gave us a sneak preview of the gallery’s newest collection on the Romans. We were treated on the Thursday afternoon to a lecture by Professor Daniel Orrells at King’s College, London! Daniel spoke on the other set verse text, Virgil’s *Aeneid* I, which is the story of Rome’s legendary founder, Aeneas. This is a story of migration, of families, of people, of perseverance in the face of adversity. The students were given a taste of university life as we were taken on a tour of the college, which included exclusive terrace views of London in the sunshine and a visit to the college chapel, and we had a little party at the end to congratulate the students on their hard work throughout the week! The lecture series and the off-site trip are designed to encourage the students to consider Higher Education alongside more advanced classical routes. There are many opportunities out there and ELCSS tries to demonstrate to young people that these options are accessible to all who are keen. We are very grateful to all of our speakers who gave of their precious time and answered an array of questions, inspiring another group of keen budding Classicists (see [Figure 1](#)).

A surprise appearance from Professor Mary Beard at the end of the week congratulated our students on their outstanding work ethic and dedication over the five days. She also spoke about the importance of Classics in her life and its relevance to modernity, citing empire, race, gender, and power in her message. The students were on the edge of their seats as they listened to her weighty words, and we all felt incredibly motivated.

At the end of the week, the students, after a pizza lunch and a spot of table tennis, were presented with achievement certificates to recognise the progress they had made as well as bespoke valedictory reports detailing their strengths. Students and parents unanimously agreed that the summer school had been a very positive experience and, most notably, boosted their confidence in the subject. Some of our students also expressed the intention



Figure 1. Teachers of the ELCSS.

to continue with a classical subject at A Level and even university, which was fantastic to hear!

I really just want to thank you so much for all the time and effort put into our lessons and the lectures. I really enjoyed it and it's really helped improve my Latin! Student

Thank you to all the sponsors for the bursaries without which I wouldn't be here. It's been difficult but worth it. Definitely rewarding and certainly improved my Latin. Student

Thank you so much for all the help and support. I feel like my Latin confidence and ability has improved so much. I really enjoyed the environment and energy in the classroom and that heavily contributes to how much information I pick up so thank you very much. Student

He really enjoyed everything about the week very much so we're really grateful he had this opportunity. Please also thank the sponsor on our behalf. We couldn't have been able to do it otherwise. Parent

Thank you for sponsoring my students over the past few years! It's made a big difference. Best wishes and keep up the good work. Teacher

A heartfelt 'thank you' to all of our sponsors and supporters of ELCSS 2024.

We now look forward to welcoming students to our two-day Easter Revision course, which will take place on 7th and 8th April 2025. For further details, please visit our website: www.eastlondonclassicsummerschool.com and, if you have any questions at all, email us at eastlondoncss@gmail.com.