

Letter from Maria Gavrilova:

I am writing to share a heartfelt and sad update.

Azbuka has operated for 25 years, as a nursery, Saturday language school, club, and then as a full-time bilingual primary school. We have all shared a common belief—that each person, child, family and community is deeply unique, and that schools, as spaces to learn, develop, explore, share, communicate, and grow together, cannot exist as cloned and identical structures.

Since 2014, a few other communities have followed to start their own bilingual programmes in this country, the movement which is still in its infancy compared to many others around the world but is growing and developing. As a member of England's bilingual education network, we have been witnessing again and again the huge benefits bilingual schools bring to children, families, communities. The bilingual school model is now recognised within the English education system.

We have lived through many, often very serious, challenges. But none has been as devastating to the life of Azbuka – and to all independent schools – as the introduction of VAT by the current government. Schools that never received any financial support from the state, while bringing unique and most valuable diversity to education and the country in general, are now being forced to close in increasing numbers every week.

In addition to the worsening economic situation when people are forced to move away from the city and the country, or unable to pay their fees, the government has embarked on a tragic and very harmful path towards eliminating the long-established culture of educational diversity in England.

Introducing VAT on private schools is undermining what used to be a growing and thriving ecosystem of very special, distinctive, and diverse educational models, schools, pre-schools, and nurseries in this country.

In addition to the increased business rates, additional employer costs, and the removal of charitable status from many schools, independent schools have faced an almost weekly stream of new legislation, additional requirements, increasing demands, and never-ending government rules and regulations, all without receiving anything in return.

The result is that after a quarter of a century of growth and development, and after considering all options for the past many months, Azbuka in its current form has no choice but to join the growing number of schools and nurseries that will be forced to shut their doors from this September.

We would like to thank all the families, teachers, patrons, trustees, partners and supporters of the Azbuka Foundation for your encouragement and commitment over the years. Your support has been invaluable to both our community and multilingual education in this country.

While this chapter is coming to a close, we look forward to growing and flourishing in new ways in the future, including plans for a new multilingual school for the city.

To stay connected with the Azbuka community and hear about future multilingual education projects, please follow Azbuka Club on Facebook and Instagram.

Maria Gavrilova, Head teacher and founder,

On behalf of the Governors of Azbuka foundation