

French International School

Rebecca Simpson learns more about the school's new Tseung Kwan O campus, due to open in 2018.



Artist's impression of the new French International School's Tseung Kwan O campus.

Last year, The Wall Street Journal reported Hong Kong as the hottest spot in the world for French expats. Over the past six years, Hong Kong has seen an influx of French professionals and their families to the city. So it's no surprise that the French International School (FIS) is expanding. The school is due to throw open the doors of its new Tseung Kwan O campus in 2018, at which point it will accommodate over 3,000 students across multiple locations.

Currently, FIS boasts four campuses in Hong Kong and runs two streams of education, from reception through to high school graduation: the French stream (French curriculum) and the International stream (English and IB curricula). The Blue

Pool Road campus in Happy Valley is home to high school students from both the French and International streams. Jardine's Lookout houses reception to Year Four from both streams; these children move to Chai Wan for Years Five and Six, following which the French stream students return to Jardine's Lookout for two years. Finally, the school has a temporary campus in Hung Hom for French stream primary school students.

A new campus, a new way of learning

Once the new state-of-the-art Tseung Kwan O campus opens, French and International stream students will have the chance to learn side by side. Final confirmation of which years groups will be located at the

new campus is yet to be confirmed.

The new campus is being pegged as one of the most innovative and green schools in the city. So what makes it so cutting edge? "It is a very clever design by a Danish company that is a leader in this area. Educationally, it's what we're calling the villa concept", says Ian Clayton, Head of International Stream at FIS.

The villa concept offers a new way of learning for FIS students. "There will be three classes of the French stream and two classes of the International stream sharing a villa", explains Clayton. In the middle is the Agora: the shared area. The walls separating each room will be retractable and students will share a large area in the middle of the villa where they can experience intercultural



The exterior of the existing Chai Wan campus.

and bilingual teaching and learning."

This new way of working is designed to allow fluidity within the teaching staff and offer students more exposure to teachers from the other stream. "There will be times when the French teachers teach the international class and the international teachers teach the French students. This exchange will be for a percentage of the week. The students will also do lots of shared projects in this common area. The classrooms are big, specifically for that reason – so students can share, so they can interact, so they can mingle", says Clayton.

This non-traditional approach is the

brainchild of the FIS teaching body, driven by the school's Principal, Christian Soulard. "When we were planning for TKO, the idea evolved. Our Principal drove the idea. As a school we are focused on our bilingual offering, so this new villa style of teaching is an experience we believe will help our students. Schools are traditionally built in a linear fashion, but we wanted to build our classrooms around this shared nucleus. And that's where the brilliance of the designers really came into its own. They helped make our vision a reality."

A Green Campus To Share With The Community

FIS is a green and community conscious school. Since 2008 the school has been annually awarded as an international "Eco-School" by the Foundation for Environmental Education. The new TKO campus will see the school deliver a new level of sustainable building design and integration throughout the new campus.

The new campus will feature a botanical garden with native Hong Kong flora for students and the community to share sustainable development projects and activities. This eco garden will be maintained by the student body. The TKO campus will serve the local community, allowing access and shared facilities for the immediate community out of school hours.

An Academic Legacy

The FIS has an established history of academic excellence. "Academic results are our strength" boasts Ian Clayton. Not only is the school delivering strong academic results, but it's also well regarded by universities in both Europe and the US. FIS has a stable relationship with an array of universities and staffs a dedicated team of career guidance experts to help senior students with their journeys to further education.

Recently, student Noé Ensarguet was honoured at the old Ecole Polytechnique in Paris for winning the Mathematics Olympiad. 21,000 students took part in the Olympiad and only 38 were winners, with Noé named





The villa style concept at the new campus.

one of them. He was recognised in the presence of Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, the French Minister of Education.

In 2015, FIS students excelled academically in the IB, IGCSE, and the French Baccalaureate. 100% of FIS IB students secured a place at their first or second choice university. 75% of the IGCSE graduates were awarded an A* or A across all subjects. The French Baccalaureate students had a year to remember too as student achieved the best academic results to date for the school.

A Place Where Students Feel Valued

Proud of their strong reputation for academic excellence, the school is also keen to emphasise the relationship that each student forges with the school. "Students have great relationships with the teachers – they feel the teachers know them well and they know the teachers well. It's a mutual understanding."

He cites modest class sizes as a contributing factor to the way FIS students feel valued. "This is linked to our small class sizes – in the senior school, it's not unusual for our students to be in a class of only 10

or 15 students." A reduced student-teacher ratio means FIS students are offered not only academic but also pastoral monitoring.

The FIS sense of community and student sentiment of being recognised is a powerful proposition for parents and students alike. "Students don't fall through the cracks here. As a student, you can't go unnoticed at FIS. Everyone knows you and you know everyone."

A Bi-Lingual Education

The FIS offers students an opportunity for robust academic achievement supported by a sense of belonging and care from teachers. When the TKO campus opens in 2018, the students will also benefit from a new way of learning and state-of-the-art facilities.

But what makes the FIS truly unique is the bilingual immersion the students experience. While English is the common playground language at FIS, students graduating from the school are fluent in both French and English. Perhaps most importantly though, embracing and understanding respective cultures could be the most valuable life lesson of all. □



School Report

French International School

Established: 1963

Number of students: circa 2,600

Curriculum: French stream: French National Curriculum (French Baccalaureate)

International stream - English National Curriculum to IGCSE then IB

Fees 2016/2017: \$96,589 - \$124,038

Address: Blue Pool Road Campus

French and International Streams

165 Blue Pool Road, Happy Valley

Jardine's Lookout Campus

French and International Streams

34 Price Road, Jardine's Lookout

Hung Hom Campus

French Stream

68 Gillies Avenue, Hung Hom

Chai Wan Campus

French and International Streams

1 Cheung Man Road, Chai Wan

Tel: 2577 6217