

# GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE



## **CURRICULA**

The different options available in Hong Kong

## **IBCP**

IB's programme for career-related learning

## **ChatGPT**

How educators are dealing with disruptive technology

■ GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE ■

EDITOR'S NOTE



Selecting the appropriate curriculum for your child is vital. Photo: CDNIS

# CHOOSING A CURRICULUM

Teachers at Hong Kong's international schools are rightly proud of the overall educational experience they provide their charges. Recent issues of the Good Schools Guide have looked at aspects of school life beyond whiteboards and textbooks, like the various high-quality music and sports programmes offered by schools.

Yet at the end of the day, education boils down to what is taught in the classroom and at the heart of this is each school's curriculum. The importance of this is the focus of today's issue. We start with a round-up of the various curricula on offer at international schools in Hong Kong (page 4), before looking more in-depth. On page 10, we examine the International Baccalaureate's Career-related Programme (IBCP) and how it differs from the more widely known Diploma Programme. We also look at how different curricula can affect university admissions (page 14), and which kind of curriculum kids should be following at the early years stage (page 18).

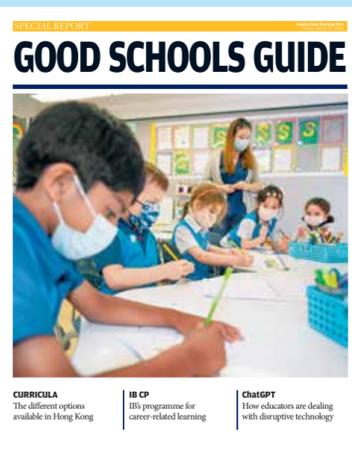
It's not all curricula matters, though. With the pandemic behind us, we check in with Hong Kong's international schools to see how pastoral care is being handled in its wake (page 22). Tech in the classroom is another pertinent issue. AI app ChatGPT has been making headlines with its ability to write convincing essays. Our article on page 26 examines how educators are handling this cutting-edge development.

AI makes social media look like yesterday's tech, but it's pervasive position in society means it is here to stay. We look at how international schools are educating pupils about everything from the positive career opportunities it provides to its potential dangers (page 34).

Last but by no means least is an investigation into the health of the kindergarten sector in Hong Kong (page 38). Low birth rates and the much talked about "expat exodus" has raised concerns that a worrying percentage of the city's kindergarten schools are in danger of closing as the number of potential pupils plummets. Is this worst-case scenario really in danger of coming true?

There's a wealth of information in this issue. We hope you find it useful and that it tides you over until our next issue in the summer. Enjoy!

**Douglas Parkes**  
Editor



EDITORIAL

Senior Content Editor  
Douglas Parkes

Senior Designer  
Davis Kwok

Chief Production Editor  
Rob Garratt

Production Editor  
Steve White

Assistant Administrative Supervisor  
Thomas Chang

ADVERTISING  
Client Director  
Cherry Law  
cherry.law@scmp.com  
2565 2471

Account Manager  
Eunice Fan  
eunice.fan@scmp.com  
2565 2452

*Good Schools Guide* is printed and published by South China Morning Post Publishers Limited, 19/F, Tower 1, Times Square, 1 Matheson Street, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong. Tel: 2565 2222 © copyright SCMPPL

# International Schools Festival

Get admission tips and discover the best curriculum fit for your child!

The South China Morning Post's International Schools Festival – Kowloon provides a platform to connect local and expat parents and their children with leading international and private schools and learning centres in Hong Kong.

Parents can meet teachers and representatives from dozens of Hong Kong's best international schools, who will be ready to provide helpful advice on different curricula, admission tips, interviews and more.

Not sure where to start? Below are words from principals of some of the most highly-sought after international schools in Hong Kong, which should help you make the best choice for your child.



**Mina Dunstan**  
Australian International School  
Hong Kong

In her role as the recently appointed head of Australian International School Hong Kong (AISHK), Mina Dunstan has a clear set of priorities. Initially, of course, that includes establishing connections, building relationships, listening and learning.

But beyond that, her mission is to strengthen the school's unique identity and its palpable sense of community, and to keep creating opportunities for students to excel both academically and in a wide range of co-curricular and service learning activities.

In doing this, Dunstan can draw on the experience gained during 17 years in Hong Kong's education sector with ESF schools and, previously, as a principal in Australia.

"I know the city and the context and, having worked closely with parents, I know the value they place on education," she says.

Nowadays, that means giving students the communication, social and research skills needed to win places at top universities around the world. And because society increasingly looks for creators, thinkers and shapers, it also means nurturing individual talents and finding ways to let them shine.

So, besides encouraging sports, music, drama and visual arts, Dunstan is keen to see more involvement in community-based projects, believing these can teach potentially transformative lessons about leadership and solving practical problems.

[www.aishk.edu.hk](http://www.aishk.edu.hk)



**Julia Woo**  
Invictus School Hong Kong

Julia Woo, who was recently appointed head of Invictus School in Hong Kong, has already outlined a number of clear priorities. In terms of broader vision, her goal is to inspire excellence, promote the concept of holistic learning, and build a strong sense of community among students, teachers and parents.

One key area where she hopes to do more is in developing students' leadership and communication skills. This can be done by providing more opportunities to learn outside the classroom through a combination of co-curricular activities, assuming responsibilities within the school's "house" system, and taking part in exchanges with other Invictus schools overseas.

Previously a senior official in Singapore's Ministry of Education, overseeing more than 10 schools as a cluster superintendent, Woo believes it is important to prepare students for a complex, uncertain and volatile world.

"That means equipping them not only with the knowledge they need, but also the 21st century soft skills and social and emotional competencies," she says.

As learning comes in many forms, Woo believes that connecting what is learnt in the classroom to real-world issues and guiding students to make good choices by inculcating the right values is of paramount importance. Her approach reflects a desire to deliver student-centred education in the social, moral, emotional, physical and cognitive domains.

[www.invictus.edu.hk](http://www.invictus.edu.hk)



**Ian Clayton**  
French International School (FIS)

Ian Clayton has been a key member of the teaching staff at the French International School (FIS) for the past nine years and is currently deputy head. He is also head of the international stream which, starting with the Early Years Programme for 3 to 5-year-olds, takes students by way of the IGCSE syllabus all the way through to the IB Diploma Programme.

The school's overall approach is child-centred, research-informed and project-based, with a strong emphasis on bilingualism, academic standards and pastoral care. The challenges associated with Covid naturally saw FIS focusing extra attention on various aspects of students' mental health and well-being. One objective was to provide practical support and guidance to help everyone deal with the enforced switch to online learning and all the adjustments that entailed.

But the school has also made a point of keeping a close eye on the impact of social media in the wider sense. This is done with the help of input from teachers, parents and trained counsellors. They understand the realities of the digital age where, as Clayton notes, social media frames the lives of students from the age of 12 upwards. But they also recognise the need to highlight and minimise the negatives.

[www.fis.edu.hk](http://www.fis.edu.hk)



**Kenny Duncan**  
Nord Anglia International  
School Hong Kong

As an international city, students in Hong Kong are spoilt for choice when it comes to international schools and the various curricula on offer. Yet based on the schools' experiences, being able to follow a national specific curriculum touts many benefits.

As explained by Kenny Duncan, Principal at Nord Anglia International School Hong Kong (NAIS), a national curriculum ensures nationwide uniformity of content and standards in education which means that children are taught the same things based on content that is government approved. For this reason, they can clearly identify subject areas, find their strong suits and make a transition to their home countries. The advantage for international schools is that they can adopt this and layer it alongside its own school curriculum to enhance students' learning and facilitate instruction.

"So, there are definite advantages," explained Duncan. "If I were teaching with British Schools in the UK it's far more prescriptive, you have to stick to the structure, but international schools get to take the best bits of the English curriculum and blend it with other aspects of other schools," he said.

Headquartered in London, Nord Anglia Education is an education group with schools around the world. Its global reach means that there is opportunity for each Nord Anglia school to adopt and implement any curriculum that fits their context. This enables the schools to truly localize to deliver the best education wherever they are.

"We have 82 schools which have differences in the way they are designed and built around their content and where they are in the world," Kenny Duncan, Principal at NAIS explained.

[www.nais.hk](http://www.nais.hk)

## PLOTING A COURSE

# THE BEST CURRICULUM OPTIONS FOR YOUR CHILD

Different curricula are on offer in the city's international schools and selecting the one that best fits your child's abilities and needs is key, writes **Erica Fong**



Choosing a school in Hong Kong can be a dizzying decision, but considering the different curriculums offered can help narrow it down. From preschool to pre-university, here are the different curriculum options available in Hong Kong international schools and how to decide on what's best for your child:

#### Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

##### Ages: 0-5 years

Developed in the UK, Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is a statutory framework that sets the standards for the learning, development and care of children up to five years of age. A mix of play-based and adult-led learning (via discussions, modelling and both direct and indirect teaching), EYFS is built around four guiding principles: that every child is unique, they learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships, the environment plays a key role in their development and learning, and that children learn in different ways and at different rates.

"Extensive research has shown that young children learn best via inquiry and the vehicle of play-based learning," says Jacqueline McNalty, head of Malvern College Pre-Schools. "This teaching and learning approach is developmentally appropriate and enables young children to explore concepts, develop skills, and deepen their understanding in a fun, interactive, multisensory and engaging way."

Children in the EYFS curriculum have three prime areas of learning: communication and language, physical development, and personal, social and emotional development, plus four additional topics that strengthen and support these areas, including literacy, mathematics, understanding the world, and expressive arts and design.

#### Montessori

##### Ages: 2-12 years

The Montessori Method is a child-centred, educational system developed by Dr Maria Montessori in the early 1900s that emphasises a hands-on approach to learning.

Encouraging children to learn through play, it focuses on the development of the whole child, including their cognitive, physical, and social-emotional skills.

Running in three-year cycles, Montessori schools believe that each child reaches their full potential after that period of being in the same environment with the same teacher. The teacher-designed curriculum covers practical life, sensory skills, maths, language, science, geography and art, under which children of different ages and abilities are free to explore their own interests and learn at their own pace.

Some Montessori schools – like International Montessori School in Hong Kong – offer dual-language immersion, making it easy for children to become fluent in both English and Mandarin while learning. So what are the downsides to this curriculum? While the Montessori Method can encourage children to become more independent and self-motivated, critics believe that it can also result in difficulty working in groups or under authority later in life.

**For younger ones, indoor and outdoor play is a key learning environment.**

Photo: Elson Li



In a changing world, educators understand the need to put less emphasis on formal structures and more on creating opportunities for students to develop the kind of communication, social and research skills that will be so important for success in life.



## Australian approach leads to first-rate results

That approach, seen both in and beyond the classroom, is central to everything that happens at the Australian International School Hong Kong (AISHK). It has helped to give the school a unique identity, fostered a real sense of community, and led to outstanding results in recent public exams, with senior-year students going on to top universities around the world.

"Our mission statement mentions connecting, striving and flourishing," says Mina Dunstan, the recently appointed head of AISHK, who has been working in Hong Kong's education sector for the past 17 years. "We understand, though, that success can come in many forms. So, as a school, we embrace inclusion and diversity, and our teachers nurture individual talents and personal strengths. We realise the world also needs creators, thinkers and shapers who can do things outside the box. And, overall, we promote and live traditional values like giving our best and letting everyone have a 'fair go'."

From Reception to Year 6, AISHK operates within the Australian curriculum framework which allows each state to localise certain elements. From Years 7 to 12, AISHK essentially follows the New South Wales (NSW) syllabus and learning objectives for pupils. In the final two years, however, it is possible to take either the NSW HSC (Higher School Certificate) or the IB Diploma Programme. Both, of course, are highly regarded and, for alumni, have opened the door to careers in law, medicine, business, the creative industries, and numerous other fields.



**We embrace inclusion and diversity, and our teachers nurture individual talents and personal strengths.**

**Mina Dunstan**, head of AISHK

"Being a dual curriculum school gives a lot of opportunity for personalisation," Dunstan says. "We offer a great range of subjects at senior level and our Year 12 students did exceptionally well in 2022."

Indeed, those completing the IBDP last November achieved a median score of 37 out of 45. An impressive 20 per cent of candidates entered for the NSW HSC got the highest grade, which saw the school making a significant jump up the Sydney Morning Herald rankings list. And the combined IB and HSC results for the Class of 2022 produced a median ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admission Rank) score of 88.5, thereby putting half of this cohort in the top 11.5 per cent of their age group.

All this was built on a strong grounding in core literacy and numeracy skills from the primary years. But it also reflects the provision of more bespoke elements like Putonghua classes and the expectation that children become well-rounded by taking the chance to get involved in a wide range of co-curricular and service learning activities.

The options now include music, drama and visual arts, as well as "all the sports you can imagine in Hong Kong." There are multiple ways to play an active part in projects within the local community, so students see how giving back and paying it forward can have a real impact on the lives of others. And, in deliberate effort to take students out of their comfort zone, every student by Year 9 is expected to take on the challenges of the Hong Kong Award for Young People.



Among other benefits, this gets them into the outdoors, gives practical experience in problem-solving, planning and leadership and, by doing so, teaches many invaluable – and potentially transformative – lessons.

"All these activities give our students self-confidence and a passion for making a difference," Dunstan says. "And the skills they acquire take them on to tertiary study and make them highly employable."

She adds that, as school life returns to normal, there will be extra focus on blending science and various aspects of design and technology into the curriculum. At primary level, for example, this would see pupils working in groups to solve a "big problem" or exploring a concept linked to sustainability.

During a typical day, such enquiry-based tasks complement periods of explicit teaching, collaboration, coming up with solutions, and specialised classes in languages, PE and expressive arts.

The teaching style aims to be engaging rather than didactic, and when using tech devices in the classroom, the emphasis is on creative uses not mere "passive consumption". This is a distinction the school views as particularly important in the current context.

"Our students have more ownership, choice and voice, which helps them develop self-regulation and self-management skills, as well as to ask questions and keep learning," says Dunstan, noting that experts are on hand to assist children with dyslexia or learning English as a second language.

"We want them to have agency in their education, but we also do formative assessment all the time, which informs the way a teacher moves a sequence of lessons. In secondary, there are also summative assessments with tests at the end of a unit or piece of work, but there are no 'high stakes' external exams before Year 10."

## GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE

### Reggio Emilia

**Ages: 3-6 years**

Named after the city in Italy where it was created, the Reggio Emilia method was established after World War II when educators and families believed that children needed a new way of learning. Instead of a teacher-led approach, children learn under a self-guided curriculum that encourages exploration and discovery through hands-on activities such as painting, drawing, sculpting, drama, art, music, cooking, science and more.

In the Reggio Emilia method, parents are seen as the first teacher for the child, while the environment is considered the child's "third teacher" – a space that goes beyond just being safe and useful, to encourage a connection with nature. For Malvern College Pre-School, which offers both the EYFS and Reggio Emilia method, this is seen in their Forest-Beach School programme, a temporary classroom that is held outdoors in nature for students to develop a wide range of practical and intellectual skills.

"We place the child at the centre of all that we do and value, what Reggio Emilia describes as the 'emergent curriculum' where we recognise children's individual interests, and we use these interests strategically when teaching our EYFS learning outcomes," says McNalty. "These learning principles and outcomes are also achieved at Forest-Beach School which continues to promote self-esteem, creativity, confidence and independence in the great outdoors."

### English National Curriculum

**Ages: 5-18 years**

The English National Curriculum (also known as the British or UK curriculum) is one of the most popular curricula in Hong Kong and known for its highly structured system that defines how subjects are taught, the knowledge and skills required in each subject, and the way that its students' progress is assessed and reported.

Under this curriculum, core subjects for students include English, science, maths and literature, alongside other subjects including art, music, physical education, history, design and technology, citizenship and foreign languages for a well-rounded education.

As students move from primary to secondary school, they gain a deeper understanding of each subject and how it relates to their other studies. Traditionally, this curriculum prepares students for their GCSE and A-level qualifications, which in turn are the gateway to getting into the UK's prestigious higher education institutions.

### International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Programme (PYP)

**Ages: 3-12 years**

The IB Primary Years Programme offers an inquiry-based, transdisciplinary curriculum framework that builds conceptual understanding and encourages children to be actively involved in the world around them. This student-centred approach to education

focuses on the total growth of the developing child, encompassing social, physical, emotional and cultural needs, in addition to academic welfare.

Students in the IB PYP programme are taught six subjects in a non-traditional, transdisciplinary way, through "units of inquiry" that are studied in connection with each other and in the context of the real world. This allows children to not just take in knowledge point-blank, but to understand "the bigger picture" and develop their own skills and thoughts.

### IB Middle Years Programme (MYP)

**Ages: 11-16 years**

As students transition from the PYP to the MYP, they continue to develop their knowledge, conceptual understanding and skills by studying eight subjects through the global contexts. The five-year programme sees them learning two languages, humanities, sciences, mathematics, arts, physical education, and technology per year, including some interdisciplinary learning that involves at least two subject groups.

The MYP framework includes approaches to learning (ATL), which helps students learn how to learn, key and related concepts where students explore big ideas that matter, and global contexts to help students understand the real world relevance of their studies. The students' learning then culminates in a student-initiated, independent inquiry project at the end of the MYP programme.

**Yew Chung International School offers a pre-IB transition programme for local students.**  
Photo: SCMP



In the six years since it was established, Stamford American School Hong Kong has continued to go from strength to strength. Building on an initial intake of 325, enrolment has grown steadily to the point where there are currently more than 770 students representing over 30 different nationalities in classes ranging from pre-primary level up to Grade 12.



# New Head Sets Course for Stamford American School

And now, with the appointment of Marco Longmore as the new Head of School, everything is well set not only to maintain the rate of progress, but also to enter a new era of opportunity and engagement.

By combining the standards of an American curriculum with an IB-centric approach, the Ho Man Tin-based school aims to give every child both academic and life skills, so as to help them achieve their greatest potential at each critical stage of development.

As students advance from elementary to middle and then high school, this is done by means of a pioneering STEMinn program, hands-on projects, and specialist courses. There is also social-emotional training, the option of a bilingual stream, and close care and attention each step of the way from highly-qualified faculty members.

"Since day one, a Stamford education has been purposefully designed to inspire and nurture students for future success," Longmore says. "Our curriculum, together with the all-round support we provide, helps younger children and adolescents develop a mindset which allows them to question and innovate. This means they are willing to challenge assumptions and, through an enquiry-based approach, connect learning to real-world issues."

In succeeding Karrie Dietz, who has become head of AIS Singapore, another school within the Cognita network, Longmore brings extensive experience gained during 30-plus years in the field of education. Along the way, he has led prestigious private schools in Britain and, more recently, founded highly-regarded new schools in the Middle East and Asia.



**Stamford education has been purposefully designed to inspire and nurture students for future success.**

**Marco Longmore**  
Head of School

This has involved working with different curricula, including the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP), and meeting the disparate learning needs of pupils aged from 3 to 18.

"To be successful as a school leader, you have to put students at the forefront of every decision, whether it is about academic growth, well-being support, or providing the wealth of opportunities they need to stretch themselves outside the classroom," Longmore says. "These qualities and characteristics shape the culture of a dynamic school community and set a strong foundation for long-term success."

In addition, he is a firm believer in ensuring that, in scope and content, the education provided must be relevant for students and how they relate to the fast-evolving world around them.

For this to happen, the school must be ready and willing to innovate and adapt. At various times, that might mean changing teaching practices, organisational structures, pastoral systems, and measures of success. Whatever the case, though, the basic objective would be the same: to give students the right skills and mindsets to achieve their ambitions.

"Education continues to evolve as we respond to the changes seen in Hong Kong and other issues experienced around the world," says Longmore, noting that Stamford views innovation as a core value. "Therefore, schools have to ensure that the students in our care have the vision, passion and confidence to be future leaders."

As evidence of this, members of the Class of 2023, which will be the first cohort to graduate, have received early offers from leading universities in Hong Kong, the United States and Britain. And with three final diploma pathways available for senior students, including the IBDP, the general prospects for future graduates look equally bright.

With Stamford fast maturing as a fully-fledged K-12 school, the next few months will be an exciting time, as various initiatives deferred because of Covid can now be newly introduced or restored.

Among these are plans for more sports events, outdoor activities, and even overseas study tours. Another priority is to re-energise the "house" system which, through joint projects, performances and competitions, will give the chance to interact and excel in different ways.

"Holistic education allows students to explore the full range of what life offers," Longmore says. "During the formative years, besides doing academic subjects, it is critical that students develop confidence based on self-worth and self-understanding. Having a diverse range of experiences gives them drive and commitment, developing a sense of purpose and belonging plus a sense of identity as members of their community and in the wider world."

Of course, an essential part of this is the role of outstanding teachers who provide the encouragement, care and support to bring out the qualities of character and the talents that define each individual.

"Even in my short time here, the team's genuine compassion and professionalism have been immediately evident," Longmore says. "I am determined to uphold our teaching excellence by recruiting and retaining the highest calibre of faculty, so that the opportunities for students are boundless and borderless in the years ahead."



## GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE



### Extensive research has shown that young children learn best via inquiry and the vehicle of play-based learning

JACQUELINE MCNULTY,  
MALVERN COLLEGE PRE-SCHOOLS

One thing to note is that the IB PYP is not a prerequisite for the IB MYP, and neither is the IB MYP a prerequisite for the IB Diploma Programme. In fact, many schools follow the IGCSE curriculum up until age 16, and then use the IBDP for ages 16 to 18.

#### International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) Ages: 14-16 years

The International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) is the international equivalent of the GCSE qualification taken by students in year 10-11 in the UK to prepare them for further pre-university studies, such as the International Baccalaureate and A-levels.

Subjects covered usually include English language and literature, maths, chemistry, biology, physics and language, plus further subjects such as geography, history, business studies, economics, art, drama and computer science.

Designed by University of Cambridge International Examinations, the IGCSE exams signal the completion of high school education and students who pass will progress to A-levels before entering university.

The IGCSE is much more structured than the MYP, which is a framework that allows more flexibility. Under the latter, teachers build a curriculum with guidelines, whereas IGCSE is taught in a straightforward manner with specific outcomes – being the external examinations. What's more, students in the IB MYP framework are not assessed through exams but through a series of criteria in each of the subjects, such as written assignments, solo or group presentations.

#### IB Diploma Programme (IBDP) Ages: 16-19 years

Widely accepted by universities around the world, the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) is a two-year programme for secondary school students between 16 and 19 years of age.

To earn their IB diploma, pupils must choose from six subject groups and complete theory of knowledge training, a research project, a 4,000-word essay, and participate in a mandatory creativity, activity and service (CAS) component. There is also the option to take fewer courses and earn IB certificates instead.

Critical thinking, inquiry, risk-taking, and communication are integral to the IBDP learning experience. The development of soft skills such as empathy, having a global perspective, and being open

to different viewpoints is also nurtured. Ultimately, the IBDP aims to develop students who have excellent breadth and depth of knowledge, who flourish physically, intellectually, emotionally and ethically.

#### A-levels Ages: 16-18 years

For students preparing to attend higher education, the A-levels are a UK subject-based qualification for ages 16 and above that is recognised in most higher education institutions across the UK and worldwide.

While there are no compulsory subjects with A-levels, students can self-select three or four subjects that benefit their future studies most, whether that means maths and a range of sciences, English literature and other arts subjects, or a mix of different kinds of subjects.

At the end of the two-year course, students must pass the written examinations as the main assessment.

"A-levels develop critical thinking, independent research and analysis, which are essential skills for success in higher education," says Ms Laura Yandell, Principal Deputy Head (Curricular) of Harrow International School Hong Kong. "The curriculum offers a wide range of subjects to choose from, allowing pupils to tailor their studies to their interests and future ambitions."

Since A-level courses are more in-depth than IB, which focuses on a broader range of subjects, A-levels are great for students who already know which subjects they excel in, allowing them to focus their efforts on getting the best academic results in those subjects.

Yandell adds, "The A-level curriculum is suited for pupils who are academically inclined and have a passion for learning. Pupils who excel in this curriculum are typically independent, self-motivated, and have strong analytical and problem-solving skills."

**Harrow is one of the few international schools in Hong Kong to offer UK A-levels.**  
Photo: Winson Wong



As it prepares for 60th anniversary celebrations this year, the French International School (FIS) can rightly claim to have been a pioneer in many respects. It was, for example, the first school of its type in Hong Kong, the first to introduce an IB curriculum back in 1988, and a leader in offering parallel streams – French and international – to meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds, but all with high expectations.



## Dual curriculum offers multiple benefits

### FOUR CAMPUSES, TWO STREAMS, ONE SCHOOL

The school now operates on four campuses and has more than 2,500 students in classes from kindergarten up to the final year of secondary. Total enrolment, though, is set to increase in the wake of Covid as more parents and prospective pupils seize on the advantages of learning in a multicultural environment where opportunities for personal advancement abound.

"The unique thing about FIS in the Hong Kong market is the choice," says new head of school Dr Emmanuel Bonin. "We naturally offer the French national curriculum leading to the Baccalaureate in the context of a focus on French language and culture. But we also have an externally accredited curriculum leading to the IB Diploma Programme (IBDP), which creates an equally good graduate profile."

The latter option begins for 3 to 5-year-olds with the International Early Years Curriculum (IEYC), which "flows through" into the primary and middle school years up until the age of 14. Then, in Years 10 and 11, students do the IGCSE syllabus overseen by the Cambridge Board. Throughout, the pedagogical approach is child-centred, research-informed and project-based, with everything underpinned by the British curriculum, but with more than a nod to the general IB style and quality control.

"It is an excellent preparation for kids moving into the IB Diploma," says Ian Clayton, deputy head of FIS and head of the international stream. "And, since the school offers a fully bilingual programme, we see a number of students from different educational backgrounds move into the IBDP."

There is a similar consistency and continuity running from primary level to middle and high school on the French side. This makes



**Dr Emmanuel Bonin**  
head of school

**"The unique thing about FIS in the Hong Kong market is the choice... We naturally offer the French national curriculum leading to the Baccalaureate in the context of a focus on French language and culture. But we also have an externally accredited curriculum leading to the IB Diploma Programme (IBDP), which creates an equally good graduate profile."**

transitions almost seamless, even for children moving to or from other schools within the worldwide network. It also helps that, in such cases, places are guaranteed when families have to transfer to another city.

"Traditionally, the French curriculum is centralised," Bonin says. "We follow that, but apply the international section and tailor it to ensure very strong bilingualism and to provide additional languages. We are confident that both curriculums also deliver a very high level of teaching in maths, science and humanities. For the Baccalaureate, students can mix and match from a wide choice of subjects – a philosophy course is the pillar – so they don't end up with no geography or only basic history, as they might in the US system, and so they don't over-specialise too soon."

To reinforce the sense of community spirit, pupils from the two streams will now be coming together in person to work on art or science projects, organise events, and take part in sports and extracurricular activities. The aim is to make sure kids are connected, feel comfortable in a multilingual environment, and can help in building a common FIS identity.

As a first step back into regional competitions, a school volleyball team was recently in Singapore and a swimming team is heading to Sydney next month, and much more is now on the way in terms of music, dance, drama and whatever else sparks an interest.



### HEALTH AND WELLBEING AT THE FOREFRONT

All this, of course, ties in too with ongoing initiatives to promote general health and well-being, which has taken on even greater importance after the "stay at home" years of the pandemic. There is a responsibility to ensure students are safe, happy, talk about learning, and not struggling to deal with more significant issues.

"That's something we really need to watch out for," Clayton says. "Kids can present well at school, but beneath the surface there may be lots of trauma you wouldn't guess."

Professional experts are on hand to assist. And FIS has a separate team of counsellors to help with the pressures of planning and preparing university applications.

"In this, we are very much focused on the desires and needs of the students," says Bonin, noting that the counsellors specialise in different geographical areas. "We strive for the best fit and measure success by ensuring students understand their options and can get to the university of their choice."

Typically, around 50 per cent of the French stream seniors go on to universities in France, with the balance choosing courses at anglophone universities in other countries. International stream graduates might take degrees anywhere from Hong Kong and mainland China to the US, Australia, Singapore and the UK.

"We get great acceptance rates because of the programmes we offer," says Bonin, who sometimes reminds parents that the college admissions landscape changes, so strategic choices made too far in advance are just wishful thinking. "I think multilingual education, an international mindset, and a global citizenship ethos are the best assets you can give to your children. What matters most now are the skills you develop, such as critical thinking, and the traits and values you exhibit."

We see students from different educational backgrounds move into the IBDP.

## GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE

### CAREER-FOCUSED LEARNING

# IS THE IBCP A PARADIGM SHIFT IN SECONDARY EDUCATION?

The sister programme to the IBDP offers a more practical curriculum that suits those not intending, or not able, to go on to university, writes **Ben Young**



ESF Renaissance College IBCP students.  
Photo: Handout

The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) has been the dominant secondary school curriculum used by Hong Kong international schools for more than a decade. The two-year programme is known for its academic rigour, requiring students to study six subjects including some combination of English, language studies, science, maths, social sciences and creative studies.

The IBDP excels at creating well-rounded students who are knowledgeable in a variety of fields. It is also great for instilling skills like discipline and time management, preparing them for further study.

But the IBDP can create problems and hurdles for certain kinds of students – namely, those who aren't as well-rounded academically, those who have their careers mapped out early, and those with no intention to go to university. Which is what makes the International Baccalaureate Career-related Programme, or IBCP, an excellent potential alternative as it provides a more specialised, practical and hands-on academic experience.

The ESF's Renaissance College (RCHK) in Ma On Shan became the first school in Asia to offer the IBCP in

**The IBCP was the perfect programme for me – it allowed me to focus on what I'm really passionate about and not worry about other subjects that aren't as helpful for my future**

CASEY CHAN, FORMER IBCP STUDENT

2013, and was just the eighth school in the world to offer all four IB programmes – the other two not already mentioned being the Primary Years Programme (IBPYP) and the Middle Years Programme (IBMYP).

"This was a milestone moment for us, and we attribute this to the work and vision of our leadership team as well as faculty and community members' wholehearted support," says RCHK's IBCP coordinator Wilma Shen. "RCHK has always been a pioneer among the IB world schools and we want this to continue."

Shen is a passionate champion of the IBCP as she has seen first-hand the positive impact the programme has had on student and alumni's academic and professional careers. She went so far as to call it "a paradigm shift in education".

"Through CP education, students are both encouraged and expected to develop a greater range of personal capabilities and professional skills that support their career aspirations and personal interest and strengths," she says. "The IBDP is more broad and general and prepares students for further education and academic matriculation, while the CP is a specialist



When it comes to nurturing success through personalised education and creating a best-fit pathway for students, Nord Anglia International School is a true expert at it.

## Maximising opportunities to offer the best

With a rich history and more than 70,000 international students spread across 81 international day and boarding schools in over 32 countries, Nord Anglia has plenty of experience, resources and solid collaborations that ensures its students get the best education from anywhere in the world.

Hong Kong itself is home to three state-of-the-art Nord Anglia campuses, and the school offers a unique global education for students from the age of three to 18 following the English National Curriculum in the form of EYFS, IGCSE while offering the IB Diploma Programme for the older Y12s to Y13s.

With stellar results to attest to its success, according to the school's principal, Kenny Duncan, the school found that a mix of the UK Curriculum and IBDP in the final years gives students a 'best of both worlds' education that truly prepares students to move on to any tertiary education of their choice. As a fact, 100% of students receive an offer from one of their first choice universities.

"We made the decision to stick with the English National Curriculum when our school opened in 2014, and that was based on the reputation of the English Curriculum around the world," Duncan explained.

The English Curriculum with its long history is one of the most popular curriculums in the world today. Its consistency, reputation and calculable outcomes makes it a definite market leader and it is why Nord Anglia decided to adopt this for its early and middle years, Duncan explained.



**"The English National Curriculum is our starting point, and we add to that through collaborative work with key organizations that are unique to Nord Anglia."**

Kenny Duncan, school's principal

"One of the key advantages with this curriculum is that students work within defined subjects and identify where they are learning and what they are learning in a subject field," he said.

With students able to clearly identify their subjects such as music, drama, dance or foreign language on top of core subjects such as math and English, it's easy for students to find their passions and subject specialisms.

Moving on to the last few years, Duncan explained that this is where IBDP might have advantages. The programmes has greater synergy for students and since it is a more rigorous and challenging programme compared to A levels, it is better suited for preparing students for university and a world of work beyond full time education.

Furthermore, IB provides a point score that is comparatively straight forward which also helps with university entrances. So, the transition from the IB programme to university is relatively seamless.

"It's really about diversifying and giving students more than one curriculum choice post 16," he said.

Aside from adopting and elevating the standard curricula, what makes the school stand out are its exclusive partnerships with elite organisations and Universities to develop the school's programmes catered specifically for Nord Anglia students. Teachers also undergo exclusive professional development with these institutes to ensure that they are able to deliver a one-of-a-kind education for the students.

"The English National Curriculum is our starting point, and we add to that through collaborative work with key organizations that is unique to Nord Anglia," explained Kenny Duncan, the school's Principal. "You won't find that in another school and other parts of the world."



Nord Anglia works closely with world leading institutions such as The Juilliard School, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and UNICEF to develop programmes that ensure students are given outstanding opportunities and experiences. So, for example in the area of performing arts and music education, Nord Anglia works with Juilliard to create a music curriculum that is enhanced by works hand-selected by Juilliard and taught to students through keyboard skills which serves as an entry point to learning music theory at Nord Anglia.

Similarly, the school places great emphasis on its STEAM curriculum working closely with MIT to roll out interdisciplinary subjects in STEAM. They do this through in-school challenges, annual visits to MIT and having specialized training for its STEAM teachers to develop a unique learning experience. The idea is to put the child "at the vanguard of developing skills for the 21st Century", according to the school.

In all, Duncan says another key advantage of Nord Anglia is that it is able to tap into its network to offer a truly global experience to its students and help them to understand their place in this world.

"We have a real benefit and that is that we work globally - imagine all our schools, around 70,000 people attending Nord Anglia schools around the world, teachers collaborating together, we have training conferences, and we have the Nord Anglia University that allows teachers to collaborate, exchange ideas, research and investigate standards," he said.

He emphasised that the school does not just hire teachers, but they develop and envelope them into research and development together with all the schools globally so that the teachers can bring those international ideas into the forefront of teaching and into the classroom. By doing this, he believes that it fosters engagement and enjoyment in learning amongst students which ultimately leads to academic success.

"We are very active in developing relationships with other organisations outside of our school because we really want to maximise opportunities for our children," he said.

GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE

pathway that can be tailored to allow students to focus on one or two areas of interest and develop transferable skills that are applicable to many different contexts, including further education and the world of work."

Through the CP framework, students take between two and four IBDP courses at Higher or Standard Level, in combination with their career-related studies (CRS), while fulfilling the relevant related and distinctive CP core requirements.

"All components of the CP reflect a balance between career-related objectives and academic rigour with the aim of cultivating internationally minded and well-rounded students, while allowing them to access multiple pathways including higher education, employment and apprenticeship," Shen says.

She explains that there are three main types of students that are more suited for the IBCP: students that find it challenging to cope with specific elements of the IBDP, often related to science, maths and language; students that know exactly what they want to study and want to specialise to get a "head start" in their field; and students who want to spend more time honing their specialist skill set – often related to music, performing arts and athletics, in a more hands-on learning environment. Shen also believes the IBCP may also be better-suited for students with certain learning disabilities.

The following list summarises the main differences and commonalities between the IBCP and IBDP:

IBCP	IBDP
Specialised	Broad and general
Concepts applied	Concepts explored
University and industry preparation	University preparation
Academic and professional	Academic
Interdisciplinary	Multidisciplinary

"The IBCP framework offers flexibility and integration," says Shen, who also works as RCHK's scholarship manager. "The model cleverly combines the career-specific learning that is linked with industry standards with academic subjects from the DP, from which the students can choose between two to four subjects depending on their career aspirations and personal capability. The core components of the CP then connect

the dots to draw everything together through the study of a second language, a personal and professional skills course, service learning and a culminating reflective project which addresses an ethical dilemma in their chosen field of work or career path."

She believes that, in many ways, this solves many of the core issues that the DP is facing. For example, students who are interested in a medical career can opt for three HL science subjects and top up with a pre-med course for their career-related studies. Similarly, students with a strong passion for the arts can choose all creative DP subjects, and at the same time, study university foundation courses at an art institute for their career-related studies.

"Over the years I also have had the chance to meet students who excel in one particular area such as music, visual arts, drama or sports, and very often these students discovered a passion in those areas and devoted much of their time towards perfecting their skills and technique," Shen says. "In my conversations with them, they all expressed that if they could, they would have preferred to spend more time on their interest area rather than having that time taken away by science, mathematics courses or some other subject that they have little interest in."

It got to the point where RCHK was starting to lose students to schools that offered GCE A-levels, Business Technology Educational Council (BTEC) courses or other equivalent vocational programmes. So when the school brought on the IBCP, Shen thought it was "a necessary and welcome addition".

Two notable examples of successful RCHK IBCP alumni are Casey Chan and Haylie Tsang, two talented visual artists who supplemented their studies with university-level foundation courses at the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD), one of RCHK's partner institutes for career-related studies. This led to them getting accepted into world-renowned art schools, California Institute of the Arts (CalArt) and Central St Martins – University Arts London, respectively.

"The IBCP was the perfect programme for me because I knew that I wanted to study art," says Chan, who graduated from RCHK in 2016. "It allowed me to focus on what I'm really passionate about and not worry about other subjects that aren't as helpful for my future."

"We were given lots of opportunities to experience different art and design majors, to give us a feel of what each requires. It also gave me a taste of college life, which made me better prepared."



The core IBDP programme is recognised for its academic rigour but some students are better suited to the more practically oriented IBCP. Photo: Nora Tam

"The exposure to the very different curriculum at SCAD pushed me further in my development as an artist," she adds. "Being educated by two institutions at the same time provided me with different perspectives of art-making, which helped the quality of my work both conceptually and technically. As a result, I was able to produce work that I probably wouldn't have been able to otherwise."

"The IBCP offered me what the DP programme could not. For two years it allowed me to focus on the career that I wanted for the future, to meet people who share the same passion as me, and to grow as a creative individual – all to a greater extent than if I had been doing the IBDP," says Tsang, who graduated in 2018. "I was able to develop my artistic and creative skills within the art industry. I learned to become a better presenter, collaborator and most importantly, a better designer."

"I feel that the skills that I have inherited from this programme really helped me with my future studies both in art and other industries," she continues. "I have developed skills that are geared toward my future studies but at the same time those skills can be expanded to other fields. I tend to see that I enjoy the workload and what I'm doing because the things I do I know are beneficial for my future studies and career."

As of now, the ESF appears to be the leader in offering alternative curricula in Hong Kong with their King George V School (KGV) currently the only school in Hong Kong that offers the IBDP, IBCP and BTEC qualifications. BTEC qualifications are even more specialised and employ a continuous assessment and assignment model and have less examinations and academic rigour than the IBCP. This means every KGV student has a chance to play to his or her strengths.

"We have had huge success with our BTEC and IBCP students achieving outstanding grades and attending universities all over the world, including the US, UK, Australia and right here in Hong Kong," says KGV vice-principal Rory McKeague. "We would recommend that more schools offer a greater number of pathways to students and offer them an authentic personalised learning experience, with the rewards being happy and fulfilled students prepared for life beyond the classroom."

At the rate at which educational paradigms are shifting, with expectations of and demands on schools continuing to change, parents can expect to see more of Hong Kong's top international schools offering the IBCP, BTEC, and other new innovative curricula that cater directly for student's needs.

IBCP students from Hong Kong have used it to get into prestigious art schools such as California Institute of the Arts. Photo: Shutterstock



When it comes to offering an international education in Hong Kong that is wholly unique, few can beat the Upper School curriculum at Canadian International School, Hong Kong.



# An Education Like No Other

Not only is it the only school outside of Canada that offers both the IB and Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), but it also stands out as a big school that has created an intimate environment that supports senior students to succeed and prepare themselves for their transition to university.

"We've established ourselves as one of the top international schools in Hong Kong and we are unique," explained Dr Chantelle Jackson-Boothby, Director of University Counselling at CDNIS, Hong Kong. "We are an International Baccalaureate (IB) World School and an Ontario Ministry of Education inspected and authorized institution – which means that our students undertake not only the IB Diploma Programme but also the globally recognised OSSD."

The OSSD is awarded by the Ontario Ministry of Education to students in Ontario, Canada based on their earning of 30 course credits, both compulsory and elective, between grades 9 and 12. The Ministry authorizes several international schools to award credits and the OSSD, inspecting them on an annual basis to ensure that its high standards are met. The Ontario curriculum is rigorous, progressive and student-centred, making it a natural complement to IB programmes.

Many students enjoy doing the OSSD because it is a non-exam-taking system, it is easy to convert credits and has a flexible academic system. It also has a high degree of recognition and admission rates for top-tier overseas colleges and universities.

In Hong Kong, CDNIS is the only school that offers the dual diploma of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma and IB Diploma programme. While this may sound daunting and rigorous, Jackson-Boothby reassures that CDNIS does a brilliant job intertwining the two diplomas so that students can easily do both.

"Yes, it sounds intense, but it's important to note that our students are not duplicating work," explained Jackson-Boothby. She explained that while students are undertaking both the IBDP and the OSSD, they're earning those credits across both curricula,



We pride ourselves in being a school that promotes community, we want students to explore their creativity and develop leadership skills.

Dr Chantelle Jackson-Boothby, Director of University Counselling at CDNIS, Hong Kong



so that whatever classes they take in the IB diploma programme, those then also meet the requirements for the OSSD and they gain credits there, too.

The key advantage of the dual diploma programme is that students finish high school with both of those diplomas under their belts, which helps them stand out from the crowd when applying to universities around the world.

To earn the OSSD, students are required to complete compulsory credits which are done alongside the IB credits, so "if they can be successful in both, this is something that looks very unique when students apply to university", Jackson-Boothby said.

Since many of the international schools and some local schools in Hong Kong offer the IB, British and American curriculums, students in Hong Kong who graduate with the IB and OSSD stand out.

"It's a really great way for students to differentiate themselves from their peers and it also shows that they can handle the rigours of these two programmes which translates well to the academic rigours of university life," Jackson-Boothby added.

On top of this, having the dual diploma recognition also means that students are not limited to applying to just Canadian universities. With both diplomas, the world becomes their oyster.

"Of course, by default and by sheer definition of studying the OSSD, it must seem like our students are only interested in going to Canada, but our students are applying globally, to universities in Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, Hong Kong, etc." Jackson-Boothby emphasized.

"From a purely evaluative perspective, our students often will receive offers based on one curriculum or the other, which is great because they can be awarded offers from universities based on having met one of the two conditions," she said.

With such a unique programme, CDNIS has a brilliant track record of its students attending top-tier universities all over the world, from Johns Hopkins University in the USA to University

College London to the University of Edinburgh, University of Hong Kong, and universities in Canada such as the University of British Columbia, University of Toronto and McGill University.

Another stand-out aspect of the Upper School at Canadian International School of Hong Kong is its unique University Counselling Programme. Jackson-Boothby, along with her team of two other university counsellors which will be three next year, focus primarily on supporting students and their families on their university applications. Their aim is to ensure students are aware of all of the higher education options open to them.

"We want students to start thinking about their university goals early on and to make informed decisions both inside and outside of the classroom," says Jackson-Boothby.

While academic rigour is certainly a strength at CDNIS, Jackson-Boothby said that school life at CDNIS is also a big draw for any potential applicants.

"We pride ourselves in being a school that promotes community, we want students to explore their creativity and develop leadership skills," she said. The school is also committed to helping students clue in to what life is like outside of the classroom, as such they are constantly motivated by their peers to challenge and stretch themselves beyond the four walls of the school and to take part in its plentiful extra-curricular activities.

CDNIS credits its student successes to the support it provides and in the way the school prepares students for the challenges of a university environment. As a result of this commitment, Jackson-Boothby said that students who return from university express that their transition from secondary school to university was seamless thanks to the support that CDNIS provided.

"When we get down to what we want our students to accomplish in secondary school, we are really supporting them not only in the classroom but through mentorship academically and through counselling," she said.

## ■ GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE ■

### HIGHER EDUCATION

# CHARACTER COUNTS FOR UNIVERSITY CANDIDATES

Bagging a place at a good university is a clear motivator when it comes to choosing a curriculum, but it's no longer just a matter of getting the grades, writes **John Cremer**

Choice of curriculum figures high on the list of questions most parents want to explore when assessing the relative merits of international schools in Hong Kong. During their research, they will typically size up everything from the teaching of STEM subjects and languages to the classroom time given to music, art and design.

But what they are really looking for is reassurance on two counts: that their children will not "miss out" in any significant way and that, in the senior years, the chosen curriculum creates a clear pathway to university places and opportunities beyond.

Aware of that, leading schools have become expert in setting out the plus points of the IB Diploma Programme (IBDP), UK-based A-levels, and the international version of the national curriculums of France, Germany, Australia and the US.

There is no doubt that each serves its purpose, judging by the high overall rate of acceptance at top universities around the world, even during the pandemic disruptions of the past few years.

But the spirit of friendly rivalry means that every school continues to push for improvements. They are fine-tuning where necessary, incorporating new elements, keeping an eye on the competition and, all the time, remaining alert to what college admissions teams now look for in candidates.

"For prestigious universities, it used to be grades, grades, grades – but that is no longer the case," says Dr Robin Lister, founding headmaster of Malvern College Hong Kong, which offers the IBDP for its depth and breadth. "Pupils concentrate on a limited number of higher and standard subjects, thus keeping their options open and ensuring their education is both specialist and broad. This leads to more well-rounded individuals and, in practice, means that later on you have a doctor who can talk about art, an architect with an interest in geography, or a linguist who is familiar with maths."

In his view, a particular strength is the requirement to write a 4,000-word extended essay, which stands as a first piece of "proper" research. The chosen topic often comes

up as an opener in university interviews and the process involved is widely seen as useful preparation for studies at tertiary level. For the essay, students can write about anything – an examination of a specific author's contribution to late 20th century literature, the use of enzymes in modern industry, or a comparison between baroque music and the traditional music of Africa.

The IBDP also includes a compulsory theory of knowledge course which covers key aspects of philosophy and epistemology, as well as the need for critical thinking and to question what they are taught.

"This is an excellent start for any university course," Lister says. "Pupils learn to see connections between disparate subjects, to apply knowledge, be willing to engage, and to go beyond the confines of one particular approach."

In recent years, he notes, universities elsewhere are following America's example by looking for more than academic excellence and wanting to see personality, drive, ambition and how candidates have contributed to

Increasingly, universities look beyond academic assessments to candidates' community involvement and passions. Photo: German Swiss International School (GSIS)



As she settles into her new role as head of Invictus School in Hong Kong, Julia Woo can draw on an abundance of relevant experience when it comes to assessing plans and priorities.



## Clear priorities for new head of Invictus

Formerly a senior official with Singapore's Ministry of Education where she oversaw the running of more than 10 well-regarded schools, she is understandably excited by the latest challenge and brings a clear vision of how to inspire excellence, promote holistic learning, and build a strong sense of community among students, teachers, parents and other key stakeholders.

"Overall, our mission is very simple," says Woo, who earlier in her career served as principal of two schools in Singapore where she successfully increased enrolment and pioneered innovations. "It is to prepare students for today's 'VUCA' world, which is characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. That means giving them not only the knowledge they need, but also the soft skills and social and emotional competencies."

This approach reflects Woo's firm belief in the importance of nurturing well-rounded individuals with the personal qualities and self-confidence to make the right choices. And it will inform her decisions as she guides the school, which was founded in 2019, into a post-pandemic era which promises new opportunities for sports, drama, volunteering, group projects, team competitions and international exchanges.

"We aim to lay a very strong foundation, and that starts in the kindergarten and primary years," says Woo, noting that Invictus offers a "through-train" system taking children all the way up to Year



13 in secondary. "We follow a spiral curriculum which progressively adds breadth and depth and is also in line with the school's objective of providing a quality, affordable education which sets high standards and lets students explore their potential."

There are two main campuses, with kindergarten and primary classes in Tseung Kwan O and secondary in Chai Wan, where pupils do IGCSEs and A-Levels, using the Cambridge programme. This choice has proven popular and effective, with the qualifications recognised by universities everywhere and the option available in Year 12 to do enquiry-based research which goes beyond the usual subject areas.

The curriculum allows for a smooth transition from primary to secondary school and has standardised exams along the way to ensure core competencies and proficiencies. It also offers a wide range of STEM and arts subjects at higher levels and is known for its academic rigour.

"We are mindful that our senior students are competing with others globally for places at universities," Woo says. "Our approach is to prepare them to be the best they can be, so they have a competitive edge when making those choices."

To that end, the concept of going beyond the classroom, to give exposure in other ways, is one that Woo is particularly keen to develop. She views it as an essential element in holistic education where learning comes in many forms and connects what's learnt in the classroom to real-world issues.



“We give our students not only the knowledge they need, but also the soft skills and social and emotional competencies.”

Julia Woo, Head of School

"I have already seen that our students have a lot of potential; they are very teachable and open to learning; they have talents and strengths we can tap," she says. "But one key area where I think we can do more is in developing leadership and communication skills. We can make our students more confident in themselves and more forthcoming. We want to encourage them to take leadership of their own learning and pursue things they are passionate about."

Doing that will become much easier as pandemic-related restrictions become a thing of the past and post Covid, Invictus wants to offer a diverse range of co-curricular activities, or CCAs, from the Arts to Sport, and cognitive domain.

Since January, students have had the chance to get involved in everything from football, fencing and taekwondo to coding, chess and cooking. And, depending on interest and demand, the current plan is to keep adding to the options, initially with new clubs focusing on music, visual arts, and the cognitive domain.

Besides the fun aspect, the lasting benefits of all such activities are readily apparent. They teach life lessons and have a positive impact on physical and mental well-being. And, by encouraging interaction between children from different backgrounds and age groups, they help to hone social skills, self-awareness and much else.

In future, there may also be regular exchanges, five-day immersion programmes and sports competitions with the other Invictus schools already up and running in Singapore, mainland China, Thailand, Malaysia and Cambodia, as a good way of making students more globally savvy and knowledgeable.

"I'm very passionate about making a difference for staff and students and parents," Woo says. "In particular, I know it is very important to build a good relationship with parents who entrust their children to us and want to see them succeed. We listen to feedback received from parents because it is a great source of ideas on ways for us to keep improving. We have good teachers who are caring, always give their best, and want to take the school to another level."



## GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE

their school and community, perhaps through involvement in charities or coaching younger pupils.

“Work experience is now increasingly important for a wide range of courses – law, architecture, science and technology,” Lister says. “When applying, don’t spend too much time writing about sporting achievements or holiday travel unless it’s directly relevant to the course. And remember that a ‘faultless’ personal statement might give the impression it has been written by someone else.”

To meet the same broad objectives – high-quality education and unlimited opportunity – the German Swiss International School (GSIS) offers both the IBDP and the Deutsches Internationales Abitur (DIA).

Both final diplomas are recognised globally, but the curriculum for the latter qualification, which is overseen by the German government, has been carefully designed to provide an excellent foundation in languages, sciences, mathematics and the arts. Because there is no early specialisation, students can explore different interests for longer by doing 10 subjects. And to give them real-life experience of the workplace, at least one week of vocational training is now an integral part of the syllabus.

“DIA graduates are bilingual and proficient in one of Europe’s most widely spoken languages,” says Grit Cichon, GSIS deputy principal and head of the German international stream. “Those who wish to pursue further academic studies at any German university can get an education-related resident visa and free tuition. And, for admissions, the more holistic approach of German universities means that grades matter as much as the individual’s portfolio of extracurricular skills.”

According to Simon Misso-Veness, deputy principal and head of the English international stream at GSIS, the school decided to add the IBDP around 10 years ago. It has proved successful in broadening the appeal for a more internationally minded body of students and parents. It also fits well alongside the DIA in developing independent thinkers who focus on the five key approaches to learning and the 10 attributes that make up the IB learner profile.

In addition, with all the talk these days about STEM, it is worth noting that these subjects have long been established as core pillars in both GSIS streams and consistently been updated too as science and technology moves forward.

“Schools should be reviewing their curriculum regularly to consider how these subjects may relate in an interdisciplinary way,” Misso-Veness says. “The days of teaching in boxes are fast disappearing.”



### Colleges now look for sustained and exceptional involvement in one or two areas – not the all-rounder profile

MARTIN CAMPION, CAMPION COLLEGE CONSULTANCY

At the Canadian International School of Hong Kong (CDNIS), there is a variation in that almost all senior students finish with a dual diploma. One is the IBDP, the other the OSSD (Ontario Secondary School Diploma), and having both is seen as advantageous for university applications. It also reflects the diverse aspects of the school’s identity found in its name, something further reinforced by a comprehensive Mandarin programme for all grades and active student involvement in local community-based initiatives.

“Central to our mandate is to provide a future-ready education,” says Dr David Butler, upper school principal at CDNIS. “Our investment in design, robotics and science programmes is testament to this. However, we also believe that students should balance STEM subjects with physical health, the creative arts and character education. The world needs scientists and technicians who are also ethical and share a sense of common humanity.”

With regard to next steps, the general aim is to produce graduates who will fulfil their potential and “add value” to a university, wherever they choose to enrol.

“But it is important to understand that now there is no such thing as a ‘typical’ applicant,” says Dr Chantelle Jackson-Boothby, CDNIS director of university and college counselling. “[Admissions offices] look for evidence of maturity, leadership, concern for others, and



In addition to academic excellence, Invictus School also teaches students to be adaptable and aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Photo: Handout

they seek to identify students who will both inspire and be inspired by others during their university years and beyond.”

She adds that there may be a misconception about the supposed preference for well-rounded applicants. More usually, universities are actually more interested in what makes candidates unique, whether through academic achievements or extracurricular interests, and how these experiences have shaped their development and sense of service.

“Everything changed in higher education admissions as a result of the pandemic,” Jackson-Boothby says, noting that one of the biggest impacts can be seen in the undergraduate admissions process in the US. “The standardised testing landscape has evolved there, with few colleges now requiring it and the vast majority continuing to adopt a ‘test-optional/flexible’ or ‘test-blind’ policy even for the coming admissions cycle.”

To help clarify the whole process for prospective applicants, Nord Anglia International School Hong Kong (NAISHK) has instigated a well-received “fireside Fridays” programme. This allows staff to take a more informal, personalised approach to offering advice on topics ranging from researching university courses and acing Ivy League applications, to getting part-time jobs, taking a gap year, career options, changing courses and even student activism.

There is also a series of “teatime talks” where university representatives speak exclusively to the NAISHK community and, for example, take questions about how the IBDP’s CAS (creativity, activity and service) module is viewed and what else is needed to stand out from the crowd.

“All of our students get into one of their first-choice universities, as a result of a programme which ensures we find the best-fit choices for each individual,” says higher education and CAS coordinator Susan Holt.

Others, of course, such as Invictus School Hong Kong, favour the IGCSE curriculum leading to A-levels. It might require fewer subjects – three or four – in the final two years, but supporters emphasise the greater focus, long history, and the fact that many educators still regard A-levels as the “gold standard”.

More recent modifications mean students can also do a Cambridge Board inquiry-based International Project Qualification, or IPQ, which entails writing a research paper on a chosen topic outside their usual subject areas. Furthermore, an intermediate AS qualification, taken in the penultimate year, is a good gauge of progress and generally carries more weight than a projected grade for university applications.

“In my experience, universities will look at each applicant in their own context and not prefer one over another based on the curriculum that their school happens to offer,” adds Martin Campion, founder and senior adviser of Campion College Consultancy. “Recognise too that straight A\*s at A-level or 40+ on the IBDP do still impress, but only get you into the ballpark for highly selective universities. They increasingly use their own assessment tests, in addition to interviews, to make their admission decisions. Also, colleges that do look closely at achievement beyond the classroom now look for sustained and exceptional involvement in one or two areas, not the all-rounder profile.”



Hong Kong’s very own International College Hong Kong Lok Yuen (ICHK HLY) recently beat international competition from 61 countries to take home the highly coveted Sustainability Award as part of the International School Awards 2023 organised by ISC Research, a leading provider of international school data, trends and intelligence based in the UK.



## Learning In The Wild

With 290 international schools worldwide in the running for the awards, ICHK HLY was recognised for the initiatives that the school has put in place to promote engagement with the natural world and to develop an understanding of the role that students play in sustainability.

“To have been shortlisted is already quite an achievement, but to win this award is a great recognition of the work that we’ve been doing,” said Derek Pinchbeck, Head of School at ICHK, Kindergarten & Primary.

Indeed, stepping on to the school grounds makes it easy to understand why the school beat out their competitors. The seamless transition between the outdoor and indoor learning space firmly sets learning within a natural environment. For this reason, the environment fosters an eagerness amongst students to explore and get messy as part of their socialising and learning. This ultimately makes for an engaged and involved student body keen to use their skills and knowledge to build a more sustainable world. This development of highly knowledgeable and skilled students with the desire to use those knowledge and skills to make their world better is “what schools should be all about,” explained Pinchbeck.

Founded by a group of like-minded parents almost four decades ago, ICHK HLY is a non-profit school that takes advantage of Hong Kong’s unique natural environment to create a happy, healthy and learning community that empowers all its students to flourish.

“Because of this sense of family and community, we are genuinely committed to our mission to empower everyone to flourish. We have a broad holistic view of education, which allows our students to flourish academically, socially, emotionally and physically, which are all interconnected,” explained Pinchbeck.

For this reason, it’s easy to see why the school is known as a happy school. Students are genuinely happy to go to school while the school defines its success by this happiness which comes from students feeling



We have a broad holistic view of education, which allows our students to flourish academically, socially, emotionally and physically.

Derek Pinchbeck, Head of School at ICHK, Kindergarten & Primary

challenged and supported in all areas of their learning and development.

“I’m at the gate greeting the students every day and we give them a high-five and then they’re into a school which values outdoor spaces as much as it’s modern well equipped classrooms. We have this huge green field which is very unusual for Hong Kong, physically, students have the space to run, play and climb,” said Pinchbeck.

By engaging students physically and academically in quality outdoor as well as indoor spaces, allows students to authentically explore their sense of self and get messy with their learning. Wellbeing is further supported, because the students who get out of their comfort zones have a higher desire to experience new things and add a layer of richness to their lives. This confidence to try challenging things, whether they be academic or physical, is an important element of helping students to flourish.

“Students learn to react positively to situations that may be initially challenging, this may be solving a difficult maths problem or the fear of getting dirty or climbing to the top of the climbing frame,” stated Pinchbeck.

The importance placed on being knowledgeable about the natural world that we live in is also a valuable goal in and of itself.

“This is especially true in Hong Kong where 70 per cent of the land is still undeveloped,” explained Pinchbeck. “Not teaching children to be knowledgeable with and love nature is thus effectively barring children from enjoying a majority of the experiences that Hong Kong has to offer,” he explained.

The school takes the research of Dr Helen Street, a world famous educational consultant, seriously. Street advocates that student wellbeing should be strongly supported by school grounds that offer opportunities for play in a natural setting.

In this context, ICHK HLY excels and stands out. Whether it is their outdoor classroom, trips to the woods, or its new Organic Garden, children have the opportunity to experience a vast range of opportunities



to grow socially by interacting with their peers in a unique natural setting that provides plenty of meaning and growth.

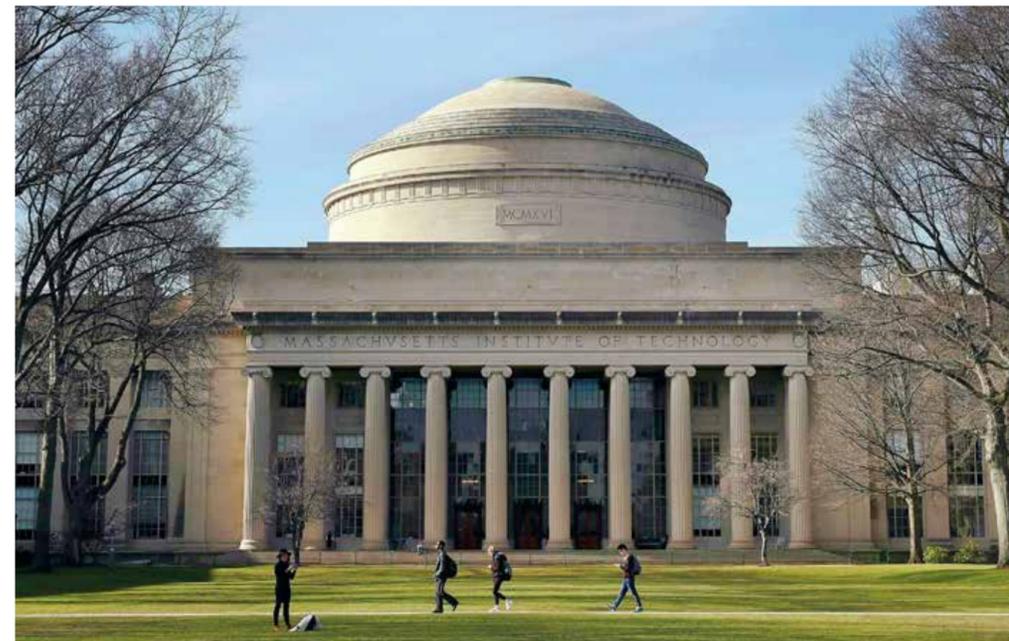
In a stunning example of how the school has further utilised its extensive outdoor space to embrace learning in a natural environment, last year, the students planted their very own Miyawaki Forest, which is a method of planting designed to promote the speed of growth through the dense planting of trees. The forest is expected to reach maturity in approximately four to five years.

Pinchbeck explained that a vital component of the school’s thinking around this project was to provide transferability of knowledge for students. Therefore, the school made sure that all of the more than 300 species that were planted, were indigenous to Hong Kong.

“Our aim was that as children grow and explore more of their natural environment they will come across the same plants that they had grown to love on the school grounds,” he said. “It is our hope that engendering a love of local flora and fauna in Kindergarten and Primary School will mean that our students will flourish into adults who are passionate advocates for sustainability in Hong Kong and beyond.”

For these reasons, Pinchbeck emphasised that learning does not just take place in a classroom but is truly integrated into the students’ lives. With such hands-on experiences that are rich and fulfilling, Pinchbeck’s humorous advice to parents is: “If you want your child to come home clean every day, we’re not the school for you!”

Scan to learn more



The Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, US, is one of the most prestigious technical universities in the world with a long list of Nobel Prize-winning alumni. Photo: AP

## FORMATIVE YEARS

# LEARNING HOW TO LEARN THROUGH PLAYTIME

The many physical, emotional and social benefits of play set the tone for how effectively a child will learn later, writes **Jolene Otremba**

When it comes to early years schooling, educators and parents can agree that it is the most crucial and formative period, laying the foundation for a child's future success in learning. This is the time when children can most easily foster a positive attitude towards accruing knowledge, and appealing to their natural interest in play can go a long way to ensure future progress.

"That is the time when they create meaning in what they learn and this positive attitude carries with them for the rest of their lives," says Derek Pinchbeck, head of school at International College Hong Kong (ICHK).

And his peers agree, noting that kindergarten and primary are the school years when children authentically learn, discover and understand the academic objectives put forward to them. For this reason, appealing to their natural desire for play is important.

"It's about fostering that attitude towards learning. Kindergarten really sets the tone for learning for the children's life as it links into their natural curiosity," says Pinchbeck, who has published a number of writings on the topic.

When play and academics are intrinsically connected, play becomes the most powerful vehicle for a young child to inquire, explore, collaborate, think critically, and to expand their knowledge, skills and understanding of the world around them.

As a huge proponent of play-based learning, Jadis Blurton is another well-known expert in the subject area. As head of school at The Harbour School, Hong Kong, she says that parents really have to recognise that "play" is really the child's "work". She notes that there can be a real misunderstanding around play, especially in a school environment. Thanks to the traditional concepts of schools, it's easy to separate play and learning into classroom time and recess or break, but in fact the two need to be balanced and intrinsically linked.

She emphasises that this concept is nothing new. From a cognitive perspective, renowned psychologist Lev Vygotsky, who is best known for his work on psychological development in children, pointed out through his research during the early 1900s that play is when children operate at their highest possible cognitive level. In other words, children are in the best mindset for learning when they're playing.

"Anyone who has ever cooked with a four-year-old knows that a child is having fun – playing – but also learning to measure, hold and pour, sequence steps, and complete a project," Burton says.

And there are plenty of other well-known experts in the field who conclude the same. O. Fred Donaldson, a PhD researcher in play, says: "Children learn as they play. Most importantly, in play, children learn how to learn." Another thought leader, Maria Montessori, founder of the educational method that bears her name, popularised the saying that: "Play is the work of the child."

Understanding that this is how a child's brain works, and that it is 90 per cent developed by the age of five, the American Academy of Paediatrics states that play is fundamentally important for learning. It is during this time that children figure out how to problem solve, collaborate and foster creativity.

"Children develop their positive sense of self as every child is viewed as an individual, a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured," says Jacqueline McNalty, head of Malvern College Pre-Schools (Island West



**Success at this age is not conveyed in a letter grade but through a description of the child's own achievements, social development, emotional adjustment and understanding**

**JADIS BLURTON, THE HARBOUR SCHOOL**

Campus and Coronation Circle campus).

So, with that understanding, what should kids be learning during these early years?

According to Brendan Kean, head of primary at the Australian International School (AIS), children at this age should focus on honing social skills, core literacy and numeracy skills, to be able to access more challenging concepts later on in their learning journey. But this should be done in an engaging way that stimulates their natural curiosity – through play.

"Learning has to be developmentally appropriate, so we have a play-based programme based on the Early Years Framework for Australia which is designed to encourage the best out of students," he explains.

"At AISHK, we encourage this focus to lay the foundations for critical and creative thinking, independence and student agency."

And they are not alone in this. Most international schools in Hong Kong adopt various versions of play-based learning and adapt it within a national curriculum, but the general idea is the same – play forms the foundation for all learning.

"Children are brilliantly designed to explore, think, analyse and review. They do this naturally, so it is not necessary, or even possible, to 'force' them to learn," Blurton says.

**The Harbour School Hong Kong takes a holistic approach to mental health.**  
Photo: Handout

# Setting the Stage For Later Success



A strong foundation in the early years of a child's education can no doubt boost their success as they transition through their later stages of learning. While the right curriculum is certainly essential, a wholesome and inclusive learning environment is equally important when fostering a students' love for learning and personal growth.

And it is upon this understanding and educational ethos with which Anfield has built and delivered the curriculum through each of its schools.

"What makes Anfield stand out is its inclusive environment," explained Elise Rees, Head of School. "Because we're a Catholic school, our values are based on family values, support and love and we look at the child as a whole."

Whether it's academic learning, social or emotional learning, the school believes that these are all intertwined and that educating children's hearts and minds and creating positive experiences are key to preparing students as they venture on to new phases of their schooling.

"We believe that their all-round experience from the early years onwards is really important," she said.

Anfield as an organisation has been operating for over 20 years in Hong Kong. With campuses (nursery, kindergarten and primary) spread across the city, the school follows the National Curriculum (UK) with its British Curriculum tailored for an international student audience.

"While we follow the structure of the curriculum closely, we are also realistic about our students' knowledge and prior experience," explained Rees. For example, she noted that the schools make a concerted effort to link the international experience of students with life in Hong Kong.

Further to the core curriculum and academia, being a Catholic school also means that Anfield puts great emphasis on instilling certain values such as family, love and support, and student wellbeing is paramount. Encouraging students to recognise their feelings while fostering a growth mindset means that students are taught that it is ok to try and that mistakes are sometimes key to



**We're a Catholic school, our values are based on family values, support and love and we look at the child as a whole.**

**Elise Rees, Head of School**

growth. Keeping classroom sizes small and intimate with a low student to teacher ratio ensures this.

"Within schools we want to encourage our students to do their best academically, but we also want to ensure that socially we're helping them to take responsibility and know how to deal with different situations when they arise," Rees added.

Since wellbeing is a key priority, the school is known for its Special Educational Needs (SEN) provisions. With an additional class at the Kindergarten level catered for students with additional needs, as well as two additional classes at the primary level, these classes host a smaller number of students with a higher adult ratio. Ideally these students would be given the support to make the transition to mainstream classes in the future.

With a breadth of resources available including access to the Watchdog OPRS scheme, occupational therapists, and SALT, students with additional needs have access to an incredibly wide range of support in an intimate and small environment and thus can work at their own pace. The incredible success of this support has seen the provision extended to the establishment of a new school site in Yuen Long, the St. Bosco Koon Ying School, which will cater solely for students with additional needs.

"Work has already started and the school will open on the new site in August 2023 and it will specifically be for students with additional needs," shared Rees.

Aside from that, Anfield is mindful of its incredibly diverse population spread across its campuses. For this reason, the schools are focused on building and fostering international mindedness amongst its student body. Aside from a focus on language acquisition, every month the schools hone in on international celebrations such as Diwali and Chinese New Year to introduce various cultures, languages and countries and how students are related to them.

"This can really help children understand what it means to be a real global citizen, and be given the opportunity to share their own experiences and learn about the wider world," Rees added.



Of course, the school also recognises the importance of leadership and uses every opportunity to instill a sense of leadership amongst its students. The school's Year 5 and Year 6 take part in the Junior Award Scheme for Schools (JASS) awards which is an accredited award scheme that helps to benchmark and foster successful and confident learners; while there are plenty of opportunities for digital leadership, international mindedness (IM) leaders and opportunities within the student council.

"All these different opportunities for leadership are growth opportunities," explained Rees.

In terms of leadership, the school also holds itself to high standards. To ensure that it is keeping up with all current practices and standards, the school is accredited by the Council of International Schools (CIS) which operates on a 5-year cycle. The accreditation process is reviewed every five years and looks at all aspects of a school's governance and leadership, curriculum and assessment, wellbeing of students, staffing and much more. This ensures the quality of education while giving schools a stamp of international approval.

"It's an international organisation, not every school gets the accreditation," explained Rees. Getting that approval goes a long way to show that Anfield is getting it right, and meeting the standard of an international education and facilities.

## GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE

Instead, young children should be exposed to various activities and mentored and guided through their experiences to broaden and deepen their understanding of their world. Pinchbeck gives a more specific example of this by saying that flourishing child development can be split into four very broad categories: cognitive, social, emotional and physical, and that all children should receive an optimal balance of growth in all these areas, which naturally feed each other.

"When entering kindergarten, children need multiple opportunities to socialise and play with others, they need to experience all the joys and frustrations that come with sharing, interacting and collaborating, and in experiencing this broad range of social interactions, children can learn to understand and manage their own emotions and learn how to navigate an increasingly complex social world," Pinchbeck says.

Another point that was highlighted was that play-based learning is not limited to just social and academic skills, but it also fosters physical development, which is equally important. Children need to be given the chance to run, climb, move and develop both gross and fine motor skills.

The physical confidence and fine motor skills developed in this way enable them to engage in activities like writing or other skills as they get older.

For these reasons, creating a playful learning environment is crucial, and the good news is that international schools in Hong Kong are doing well in this space. Most are excelling in using their existing space and surrounding environments to create those learning opportunities.

For example, Malvern College Pre-School is guided by Reggio Emilia's principle of "using the environment as the third teacher". It is the only school in Hong Kong to operate the world-leading Forest-Beach School programme, where students take their learning outdoors to the school's Forest-Beach School site which sits on natural woodland and a beach area.

The school encourages "playing and exploring", "active learning" and "creating and thinking critically".

"We encourage children to have a go and first try things independently, to not be afraid of failure and to

think of solutions through problem solving," explains McNalty.

And Malvern College isn't alone. In much the same vein, ICHK is another school famed for using its natural outdoor environment to create classrooms outside the traditional classrooms.

"The access to the outdoors and access to nature is a big thing, because this focuses so much on those first-hand experiences, and we really want children to genuinely love coming here, and the enthusiasm sticks," Pinchbeck explains.

Expressing a passion for learning is one of the key indicators of success, as that becomes the fuel that promotes future learning.

"The hands-on curriculum supports children as they progress through age-appropriate developmental milestones and prepares children for inquiry-based learning," says Ross Armitage, primary principal of the International Stream at the French International School of Hong Kong.

By creating those rich experiences for children, they will be able to tell you why they are learning, what they are learning and why that is important. "This means there is meaningfulness for them, and they will take that positive attitude towards learning and take it forward to secondary school," adds Pinchbeck.

When children can see the point of why they are doing something, rather than being forced to do something, the learning then comes from themselves and that is a real marker of success, they agreed.

So then, what are other telltale signs that a school is doing early years right?

According to both Kean and McNalty, the look on your child's face every morning is the best indicator.

"Success in our students can be seen in their everyday school life," says Kean. "From how they approach the teacher to how they show up to school and their classrooms, how they take responsibility and care for their belongings, and how they interact with their peers. Students flourishing in all aspects of daily school life is a significant gauge of success."

And Blurton could not agree more. She said that with young children it is generally easier to gauge success



because children themselves are so proud of mastery. When a child shows you a new skill or learns to collaborate, they will inevitably make friends, too.

"Success at this age is not conveyed in a letter grade, but through a description of the child's own achievements, social development, emotional adjustment and understanding," she says.

For this reason, McNalty says that as success can look different for each child, happy, smiley children coming through the door shows that they are getting it right.

So, when it comes to choosing the right school that supports a child's learning, educators agree that each school has their own unique offerings and strengths, so the most important thing is that the school can provide the optimal learning spaces with the optimal social opportunities to develop all the right skills.

"Look for a school that feels warm and happy, bring your child to see how they would react to the learning environment, and see that they feel comfortable to ask any questions," advised McNalty.

**Learning by doing is just as important as formal lessons.**  
Photo: Malvern College Hong Kong



Sport is another aspect of school life rich with opportunities to learn. Photo: AISHK



## Caritas Wu Cheng-chung Secondary School builds students' resilience with the "We School" approach

Thanks to parents' recognition and support for CWCC's "We School" approach, the number of students enrolled via the "S1 Discretionary Places Allocation" nearly tripled in 2022-23 compared with the previous academic year.

"We are encouraged by parents' trust and confidence in us," says Au Hoi-kin, Principal of CWCC. "It shows that our ongoing efforts in optimising the overall planning have paid off."

CWCC's students - 70 percent of them are international ones hailing from 20 countries and regions and 30 percent native Hongkongers - thrive in the 'globalised' experiential learning environment. The "We School" concept focuses on fulfilling the needs of students, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, currently living in Hong Kong and equipping them with global citizens' future-ready skills. It also emphasises cultivating mutual respect for diverse cultures and developing empathy to identify needs of the others for social innovations.

Under the "We School" spirit, the students and faculty are united as a team devoted to helping and serving others. It is exemplified with the newly completed lecture theatre for which dedicated school staff from all levels sacrificed their spare time to pitch in and help with the installation of floorboards, seats and other details. "The lecture theatre has since become the favourite cosy performance venue among our students," Au adds.

This spirit provides the impetus driving the nurturing of the 21st-century global citizens at CWCC to achieve the '6Cs', namely critical thinking; creativity; collaboration; communication, citizenship and character-building. CWCC's environment mirrors the diversity in the outside world and its school-based curriculum fosters resilience and global citizen mindsets, he says. "Naturally students develop mutual respect for other cultures."

The curriculum's focuses fall into five main areas: STEAM; entrepreneurship; art and culture; media communication; and sports. They



aim to empower students to unleash their full potential and acquire the 'CWCC' attributes, which are cheerful, warm, collaborative and confident, Au adds. "We hope our students are cheerful and confident because they enjoy the campus experience and capitalise on the opportunities for their self-actualisation. They exude warmth because of their kindness and willingness to help others. And they learn to be good team players."

### STEAM

Infused with entrepreneurial spirit, CWCC's STEAM curriculum motivates students to leverage design-thinking for social innovations with positive impact on the society. One of its students' award-winning mobile apps shares information on stray cats. "The students developed empathy inspired by the stray cats in the neighbourhood. The rationale behind the informative app is to apply their IT knowledge and skills to help those in need," Au says.

In collaboration with NGOs, CWCC students explore the community to identify social needs. For instance, they visited and interacted with residents at elderly care homes, some of them expressed frustration over not knowing what their children and grandchildren were doing. "The students later found a simple and effective solution," Au says. "They returned to the care homes and taught the residents to stay updated on their families' recent activities via the social media platforms."

CWCC has built partnerships with universities and large corporations for its STEAM projects. The school works with the Centre for Information Technology in Education (CITE) of the University of Hong Kong as a "Project Web 3.0 Ambassador School". HKU's specialists help equip the students and teachers with the skills and knowledge to develop cutting-edge personalised experiences in the metaverse, NFT and blockchain.

CWCC's "Swift Coding Lab" is powered by Apple and it is one of Microsoft Showcase Schools. It also participates in the AI project spearheaded by the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

### Art, culture and sports

The main objective for art, cultural and sports activities is to promote mutual understanding and respect for diverse cultures. The school was approached recently by ViuTV to collaborate on a show featuring Dominican singer Chris Polanco, who had a multi-language jam session with the students. The show also featured Nepali folk dance and teaching of Chinese characters, Au says. "The event stimulated students to think about genuine integration in our society."

The newly completed cooking studio combines the teaching of life skills - vital to building resilience and independence - with the understanding of different cultures and the "We School" spirit of sharing. Students learn

- Caritas Wu Cheng-chung Secondary School (CWCC) embraces the trailblazing "We School" approach to nurturing students' future-ready skills and resilience.
- The government-aided co-ed school uses English as its teaching medium and is a microcosm mirroring Hong Kong's diversity and rich inspirations.



to prepare the basic dishes eaten at home and share them with other students. The students are prompted to learn about other cultures through exposure to varied cuisines.

CWCC's diverse sports and recreational facilities also include a newly built rooftop soccer pitch with French-made artificial turf and an esports room, where students learn about car racing, digital entertainment and esports management.

### iFuture Curriculum

In the iFuture Curriculum is an entrepreneurship programme delivered together with NGO Ednovators and the Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK). Focusing on students' life goal planning and future careers, the programme inspires students to think about the creation of new job categories in the future and cultivate their entrepreneurship, says Lo Yuk-kwong, Assistant Principal at CWCC.

Ednovators explores the education systems in different countries, gives teachers inspiring ideas and organises teachers' exchanges. EdUHK conducts qualitative and quantitative research to identify problems and develop solutions with all stakeholders. "CWCC students, in groups mixing different forms, are involved in the research and focus group discussions," Lo says. "Students also work with professors on app design, develop media projects and join multicultural fairs."

CWCC is committed to its students' whole-person growth. Its dual-mode academic curriculum prepares students for the exams of the Hong Kong Diploma for Secondary Education (HKDSE) or the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) and the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced 'A' Level. It enables students to have more options for their tertiary education, either locally or overseas. The school awards scholarships to students who show impressive progress in their studies and other endeavours and sponsors students' study trips abroad. Startup fund is also available for students' social innovation projects.

The school provides shuttle bus service in Central and Wan Chai for students living on outlying islands.

Scan to learn more:



## ■ GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE ■

### MENTAL WELLNESS

# PASTORAL CARE A PRIORITY

After some of the world's toughest and longest-lasting pandemic restrictions, Hong Kong schools recognise the need to address students' mental health, writes **Jolene Otremba**



There is no doubt that the pandemic has had a pronounced impact on the mental well-being of students. For this reason, pastoral care and well-being have become key priorities at many of the city's schools.

"The impact of Covid-19 on students in Hong Kong has been far-reaching, affecting many aspects of their lives. One of the most significant impacts has been on students' mental health," says Tracey Chitty, safeguarding and well-being adviser, student support services at the English Schools Foundation (ESF).

"The pandemic has caused a great deal of stress, anxiety and uncertainty for students."

Like millions of children around the world, Hong Kong students have lived through extended school closures, changes in social norms, and up until very recently, prolonged mask wearing.

According to Unicef, at least one in seven children worldwide have been forced to remain at home under countrywide public health orders or recommendations, and more than 330 million youngsters have been stuck at home for at least nine months up to March 2021. The UN has said this has subsequently driven a rise in anxiety, depression and developmental delays, among a range of other health concerns.

Ominously, international experts say that we are only now beginning to scratch the surface of the effects the pandemic and associated restrictions had on children.

"In many ways the wider effects of the pandemic and nationwide lockdowns on children and young people have been greater than the Covid-19 infection itself," says expert researcher, Jessica Morris, a researcher at the Nuffield Trust, an independent health think tank, in an article in the British Medical Journal in 2022.

In Hong Kong, educators agree that they are grappling with the fallout.

"I think we are still trying to understand the impact of Covid-19 on students," says My Thanh Mac, head of upper school guidance at the Canadian International School of Hong Kong (CDNIS). "Anecdotally, it is clear that students' maturity has been delayed after several years of a lack of routine and structure that schools would usually provide. Social skills have been impacted."

And she is not alone to express this view. "Social interaction has changed," adds Ryan Copley, acting vice-principal of Renaissance College Hong Kong (RCHK). "There's a lot more emphasis now on computers, and students are attached to their devices more than maybe they were previously, since the computer was their window to the rest of the world during that time."

Aside from learning impairments and developmental delays, emotional well-being has suffered. A survey conducted in 2022 by an NGO, Baptist Oi Kwan Social Service, showed that of the 1,192 secondary school students surveyed, a whopping 48 per cent expressed

symptoms of depression, with 36 per cent displaying moderate to severe signs of depression, while 51 per cent exhibited symptoms of anxiety. When asked the causes, respondents replied that what upset them the most was variously, the pandemic, their education and the state of society today.

While this paints a glum picture, most educators are optimistic that having a strong support system in place at schools could go a long way to remedying the situation. Furthermore, My points out that it's not only Covid-19 that has brought students' stresses to the fore. Hong Kong's academic culture and climate are also impetus for schools to focus on well-being.

"I do feel strongly that in a climate like Hong Kong's where students are often pushed to academically excel, there is a need to constantly remind them that they have to be well to do well," she continues.

So, what does well-being mean for students?

Overall, the schools agree that well-being isn't something that a school has to "do" to a child, but instead should be integral and wholistic, encompassing all the students' experiences from their relationships to activities to their learning and assessments. The school's role in all this is to create an environment that supports students to thrive.

"There needs to be layers of support which allow that scaffolding around the pupil at different stages of their

**Many children are showing negative effects from the relative isolation they faced during the pandemic.**

Photo: Harrow International School Hong Kong

## Three education pathways to cultivate global citizens

Christian Alliance International School (CAIS) is a through-train school that welcomes students of all backgrounds to its preparatory, lower and upper primary and secondary sections.

Being the only international school in Hong Kong offering three education pathways, CAIS is uniquely placed to ensure a distinctive edge and learning flexibility for its students. The pathways include the Alberta (Canada) curriculum, Advanced Placement courses, and International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP).

The school offers the internationally recognized Alberta curriculum to students from primary to secondary, and is accredited to provide studies leading to the High School Diploma qualification of Alberta Education, Canada. Head of School at CAIS, Richard Vanderpyl, says, "As part of our annual rigorous accreditation procedure, the Alberta government assesses the school across a wide range of measures to ensure that we are delivering a high-quality education. We are proud of our ongoing successes and seek to constantly improve to fulfil our mission and become the best school for Hong Kong."



From Grade 10 onwards, CAIS students can begin earning credits in the Alberta Diploma Program. Upon successful completion of 100 credits, with at least twenty Level 30 credits, students will be awarded an Alberta High School Diploma. The curriculum has earned the accolades of universities throughout the world due to the quality of students produced. CAIS graduates continue to gain admission to some of the world's top schools and universities each year, including Berkeley College of Music, Imperial College London, and the University of Toronto.

The Advanced Placement (AP) program supplements Alberta courses for Grade 11 to 12 students seeking further academic challenge. Successful completion of AP exams positions them to qualify for credit transfer or advanced placement at many universities. CAIS presents AP Scholar Awards to students demonstrating college-level achievement through AP courses and

exams. A certificate is presented and acknowledged on a score report sent directly to universities, giving applicants a distinctive edge.

The school's World Languages Program prepares students to graduate as global citizens, who are skilled in and have good cultural-linguistic awareness of more than one language. English is the medium of instruction at CAIS, while all primary students take Chinese Studies, using traditional or simplified characters. The newly opened Centre for Innovation is a purpose-built laboratory and makerspace for teaching STEM to strengthen students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.



In addition, CAIS is an accredited IB World School that offers the IB Diploma Programme for students in Grades 11 and 12. This programme challenges students in well-rounded academics, while teachers prompt the students with even larger questions of what they have been created to do, and how their learning can help them realize their purposes. "By the end of the two years, students will be astonished at what they were able to achieve when pushed," says CAIS IB Coordinator, Benjamin Myers. "By stretching themselves in high school, IB graduates are ready for the rigors of just about any university and are well-positioned for the career world beyond."



With the completion of the school's Phase IIA campus expansion project since last August, CAIS students are able to enjoy an enriched learning experience in spacious

and well-equipped spaces, spanning sports, music, drama and performing arts. The highly anticipated Aquatic Centre is the final phase of the school's campus project and will be completed in 2023. It is a major facility enhancement for the school, which will offer a world-class swimming and water sports facility to students on-site and significantly expand the school's extracurricular program.



CAIS is committed to holistic development through academics, spiritual life, athletics, and the arts. Regardless of which curriculum students or their parents choose, CAIS strives to ensure that each individual is called to faithfully use their gifts and talents to a high standard and for building community with others. This aligns with the school's mission to cultivate learners with knowledge, skills, integrity and discernment, growing in love for God and service to humanity. Founded by the Kowloon Tong Church of the Chinese Christian and Missionary Alliance, CAIS teaches through the lens of a biblical worldview, enabling students to learn the importance of compassion and empathy, and be equipped to make a positive impact through serving the community.



### Christian Alliance International School

(852)3699 3862, 3699 3863, 3699 3865

www.caisbv.edu.hk

33 King Lam Street, Lai Chi Kok, Kowloon, Hong Kong

## ■ GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE ■



**We know that child development isn't linear and they're going to have ups and downs and bumps in the road, and so we have to make sure that there's a range of people all the way along that journey to walk alongside them**

**TOM HICKS, HARROW HONG KONG**

**Tom Hicks, principal deputy head of pastoral and well-being of Harrow International School Hong Kong.** Photo: Handout

development," explains Tom Hicks, principal deputy head of pastoral and well-being at Harrow International School, Hong Kong. "We know that child development isn't linear and they're going to have ups and downs and bumps in the road, and so we have to make sure that there's a range of people all the way along that journey to walk alongside them, support them, to pick them up and to challenge them."

He emphasised that that was certainly not the role of one person or one department specifically, but instead is the responsibility of the entire school. From the teachers and support staff, to the lunch lady and even the school bus driver, everyone plays a part.

"As the children develop their own independence and resilience, they've got champions all the way, and that's what we mean by a culture of pastoral care," Hicks says.

The importance of that support cannot be understated. Numerous studies show that student well-being and achievement are underscored by wellness, and their emotional and physical state has a significant impact on their academic performance.

"When students feel supported, safe and happy, they are more likely to engage in their studies and perform better," reaffirms ESF's Chitty.

In that respect, schools today are mindful that creating a caring environment is paramount. While each school might do things their own way, pastoral care involves key components and building blocks, the experts say. These include building a community, creating values, nurturing a culture of support, offering support through academics and using the help of technology to track wellness.

To this end, well-being should be overseen and supported by professionals who can address the social, emotional and academic needs of students. This could include guidance counsellors, social workers and learning support specialists, among others.

"The saying that it takes a village to raise a child couldn't be more true. At RCHK, we don't like the idea that you can pass a well-being problem to somebody else because it's not your expertise or your field," says Copley.

So what schools can do is build teams around their needs, advised Hicks. At Harrow Hong Kong, for example, its team of support staff includes 24-hour nursing care, a host of professional guidance counsellors and well-being specialists to cater for its day and boarding students.

Another important element is reinforcing values throughout the school.

Copley explained that at RCHK, its "Heart of RCHK" model is embedded into its core curriculum from Year 1 all the way to Year 13. The model recognises five roots to well-being – health, appreciation, sense of accomplishment, relationships and environment. The school focuses on five strategies to foster these: character strengths, mindfulness, mindset, resilience and positive emotions.

"It's not just a poster that we stick on a wall and forget about it, we live it and make sure that it's part of our identity," Copley says.

In a similar vein, Harrow Hong Kong also drills their "Harrow Values" of honour, courage, fellowship and humility, adding a social vision statement that the school should be a caring and respectful community where everyone thrives.

"And that's really crucial as those statements are absolutely central and guides our community... so by giving them a framework, there's a value structure," adds Hicks.

Driving home these values and creating a well-being culture has to be done in a systematic way.

"Schools can use tiered systems of support to recognise that that first layer of support is proactive and preventive in nature," My says. "And this should take the form of the curriculum."

My points to a growing body of research that suggests that a social and emotional learning (SEL) curriculum needs to be a core component of education. Included in the curriculum should be topics such as self-awareness, decision-making and emotional regulation.

"These skills are just as important as the knowledge students learn in classrooms," My adds.

Vice-principal of primary (well-being) at RCHK, Dr Stephanie Howdle-Lang, agrees, explaining how its "Heart of RCHK" programme is deeply embedded in every unit and topic that the school covers and that everything is linked back to pillars that support students. "Our approach is to embed well-being throughout the school, we consider it in all decisions we take, too" she says.

On top of a professional guidance team, the school uses systems that help students to feel part of smaller groups like houses. Then it introduces opportunities for them to develop skills of listening and representing others through peer mentors, student councils and so on. Even their primary school is now developing a training programme for "Playground Ambassadors" to promote peaceful and friendly playtimes.

"We want every student to feel known, so we make sure that as well as class teachers, we have other adults who can form relationships with the children, such as counsellors, emotional literacy support assistants and educational assistants," she explained.

Not everybody has the facilities and capabilities to do it all, but it should always be a goal, says Copley.

"Academics and well-being really go hand in hand. The minute you disregard it in favour of academics, it will cause bigger problems down the line."

**My Thanh Mac, head of upper school guidance with students at the Canadian International School of Hong Kong (CDNIS).** Photo: Handout



*Student work of the Emotion Thermometer Activity. Students are given a list of emotions that describe different dimensions, intensities, or temperatures of this emotion and asked to label the thermometer in order of intensity. Credit: Institute for Social and Emotional Learning (IFSEL) lesson plan.*

## Health and well-being in focus at HKIS

**Even before the Covid years focused extra attention on the importance of young people's health and well-being, Hong Kong International School (HKIS) had a comprehensive programme in place to promote the necessary awareness and give students the skills to have positive interactions with those around them.**

With the aim of educating the whole child, there is time in the curriculum to teach each age group the essentials of social-emotional learning and physical fitness, so they understand who they are and can better deal with the changes and challenges that face kids growing up in Hong Kong.

In planning these classes and activities, the school is guided by the broad National Health Education Standards set out in the United States, which focus on areas such as communication, decision making, accessing information, analysing influences, and goal setting.

But the overall content and philosophy is also shaped by reference to Unesco and WHO recommendations. The latter, in particular, emphasise the need for a holistic approach bringing together the different domains of wellness - physical, mental, emotional and social - and adapting things to suit specifics in the local context.



*Lower Primary Swimming Lesson.*

"That's our approach, and it starts from a young age," says Amy Smith, high school health teacher at HKIS and the coordinator for other grades. "With international schools, health education is 'all over the map', but it is a big need, so we have had to figure out where the gaps are. It is now layered in and scaffolded and part of our strategic plan."

For the younger grades, direct instruction on social and emotional issues and health literacy are usually built into lessons, breaks and group activities during the school day. The key recurring themes include self-regulation, conflict resolution and building friendships, with teachers giving practical advice and examples of what to do and why. Behind this, there is also the concept of developing self-management and a growth mindset.

For older students, more formal sessions in the classroom tackle hot topics ranging from body image and mood changes to media literacy and "our relationship with our devices."

The lessons are based on research findings and surveys, anecdotal data from the school community, and simple observation of what the student population needs.

"For example we are seeing all this information from the US and around the world on the impact of being online," Smith says. "We already knew the impact of social media was quite detrimental, but the pandemic has magnified that. So, there is now a big focus on mental health, but the root of that is social skills and communication. In some classes, it may mean going back to the basics of how to talk to people, how to set out your boundaries."

Where necessary, different engagement strategies are used to get students - some of whom still prefer to hide behind their laptops - up and moving. They are asked to keep journals and reflect on changes, and to have short one-on-one conversations on suggested themes, perhaps about their favourite subject or sometimes feeling out of place, before rotating and talking to another classmate or in a small group. Besides breaking down barriers, these exercises also apply practices from positive psychology.

"We talk about different forms of communication, for example what it means to be assertive or aggressive," Smith says. "And for lessons on body image, students might watch a short video to get them thinking about how we see ourselves and media ideals. It requires a very thoughtful type of lesson plan because lectures don't work. You have to change things up every few minutes and ask 'What happened there?' or 'Why did you think that way?'"



*High School Students in High School Plaza.*

In the middle school, projects are a popular way of putting over key information about health and nutrition. For instance, students might be asked to create an advertising pitch for a food group or to promote a protein, thereby sparking interest, curiosity and involvement.

"Our health and PE programmes are taught as separate subjects, unlike other schools; I find that model works best," says Smith, noting that a newly-built Student Activities Centre (SAC) is set to open on the Tai Tam campus in August 2024. The sports complex will house two gymnasiums, tennis courts, and a swimming pool. The SAC aims to enhance the physical, emotional and mental health of the HKIS community. "In each programme, we explain how physical activity has an impact on mental health, and there is a vibrant sports and after-school programme."

She adds that health and well-being can be very personal, especially when it comes to discussing sex education, relationships, peer pressure, the relentlessness of the online world, and potential risks like binge drinking.

Therefore, HKIS has counsellors for each grade level to offer more specialist advice and support.

"We also do guided meditation for the first five minutes of class, with focused belly breathing and ways to calm down," Smith says. "It helps with sleep, mental health, happiness, and preparing for a sports event or a test. Kids and parents love it."

Scan to learn more



## TECH INNOVATIONS

# GETTING REAL ABOUT ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Despite concerns about the potential for misuse, forward-thinking educational institutions are embracing AI and the challenges that come with it, writes **Ben Young**

The hype behind ChatGPT is far from overstated. It has the potential to completely transform the world of education – particularly in fields that involve writing and conducting large amounts of research. But concerns around plagiarism and students becoming too reliant on AI tools – therefore hindering their ability to think for themselves – have alarmed teachers, parents and nearly everyone working in the education space.

Schools that refuse to adapt and consider these tools will fall behind and their students could be tempted to use software like ChatGPT anyway, perhaps in nefarious or fraudulent ways. But the International Baccalaureate (IB) – considered by many to be the world's most forward-thinking secondary school curriculum provider – believes that students can use AI to bolster their education and become better learners, thinkers and workers.

"The IB believes that this AI technology will become part of our everyday lives – like spell checkers, translation software and calculators," says Matt Glanville, head of assessment principles and practice at the IB. "We therefore need to adapt and transform our educational programmes and assessment practices so that students can use these new AI tools ethically and effectively. The IB is not going to ban the use of such software but will work with schools to help them support their students on how to use these tools ethically, in line with our principles of academic integrity."

The IB's official policy as of now is that students are allowed to quote from content created by ChatGPT in their essays and other graded assessments, but similar to quotes or materials adapted from outside sources, it must be credited in the body of text and appropriately referenced in the bibliography.

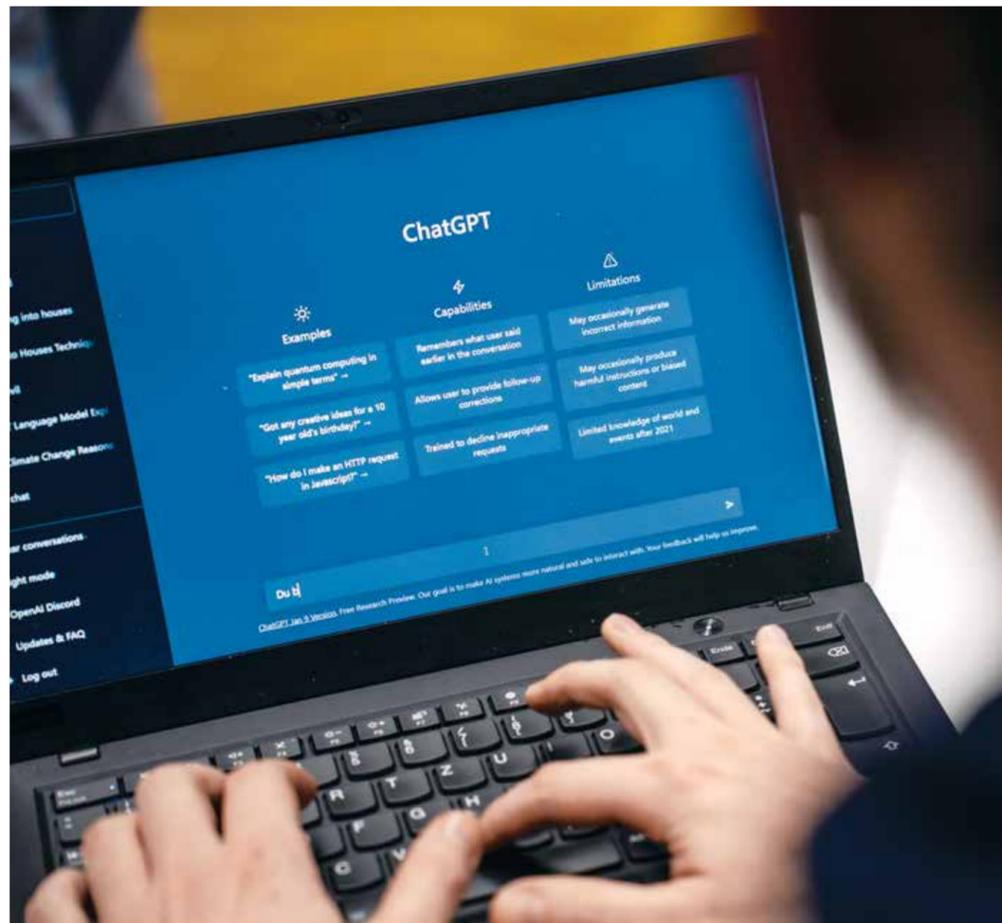
"Work produced by artificial intelligence tools – even only in part – will not be considered as a student's own," Glanville explains. "It must be clear that AI-generated work included in a piece of assessment has been taken from such software. If not, the student would be misrepresenting content as it was not originally written by them."

Glanville understands that the emergence of ChatGPT will cause students to "test the boundaries" of what is acceptable and what is plagiarism. However, this phenomenon is something that IB has been dealing with since its inception.

"The issue of students being disempowered to think, whether because of too much support in completing their work or asking someone else to write it for them, is a long-standing variation of current issues that the IB is familiar with managing," adds Glanville, who noted that IB teachers frequently have to deal with cases of essays bought from the internet from 'essay mills'.

"Of course, these new technologies are significantly different in terms of speed, ease of access and scale, but the problem of students getting someone else to write their work for them has existed for many years."

Because IB coursework requires frequent check-in meetings between students and educators, it is essential for the latter to ask students to expand on ideas that they have written about to ensure the work is actually their own. Glanville adds it is also important to pay attention to students' workflow and watch them develop their work over a period of time. It is also up to the teacher's best judgment to notice whether a student



is suddenly producing work far beyond his/her regular capabilities within a very short period of time.

All that being said, ChatGPT also presents incredible educational opportunities which the IB has fully embraced. More importantly, most people expect the use of advanced AI software to be routine within a few years, and it is important to prepare students to be able to thrive in that kind of environment, both in the workplace and even within their personal lives. It is therefore up to educators to equip students with the necessary life skills and understanding.

"Students will need more expertise in identifying and addressing bias," Glanville says. "All work produced by AI is based on the information it has 'learned' from, and particularly in today's internet this is heavily biased by its human authors. Students need

to understand that AI will inherit the bias and blind spots of its programmers, or source material in the case of self-learning systems."

He adds that IB students may be asked to evaluate AI-produced essays and refine the prompts – the question(s) that are fed into ChatGPT to produce the work – to get the essay closer to what they want. Just as with AI art software, a small tweak to a prompt can dramatically alter what ChatGPT ultimately produces. Creating good prompts, therefore, is a valuable skill in itself.

"Students will continue to learn to think around problems and be creative, rather than seeking simple answers or following a routine process," Glanville says. "Even today, AI tools can complete the latter more quickly and effectively, while creative problem-solving is where students can excel."

**OpenAI's ChatGPT is just the first of what is likely to be a wave of AI tools that students – and schools – need to come to terms with.**

Photo: DPA

## Wycombe Abbey School Heads discuss what makes a Wycombe Abbey education so special



Wycombe Abbey School Hong Kong recently welcomed Mrs Jo Duncan, Headmistress of Wycombe Abbey UK, to its Hong Kong campus to talk about the synergy between the two schools and to discuss what makes a Wycombe Abbey education special.

"It's very exciting to have a family of international schools and there's a great deal that we can do together as we look to the future, both in terms of pupil and staff interactions and the sharing of best practice," said Mrs Duncan, who was appointed to the role of Headmistress at the UK school in 2019.

This was Mrs Duncan's first visit to the Hong Kong campus since she took up her role and she was impressed by the eye-catching architecture of the purpose-built Hong Kong school, with its grand atrium and massive glass ceilings that allow natural light to filter in to its corridors. She noted what a privilege it was to study in such a lovely space.

"Coming from Britain where we often work in older, listed buildings where you can't easily alter things because they've been there for hundreds of years, it is wonderful to see WASHK's bright, modern building," she said.

But beyond the four walls, Mrs Duncan was most excited to connect with our staff and pupils and to talk about what is at the heart of a Wycombe Abbey education and how the 'DNA' from the UK school is transferred to the school in Hong Kong.

"It's looking at how to take the 'DNA', and the heart of what makes Wycombe Abbey the school that it is and how we can best share that with our sister schools," she said.

Founded in 1896, Wycombe Abbey UK consistently ranks as one of the top all-girls independent boarding and day schools and has educated a list of notable people including Dame Sarah Springman, former Rector at Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, one of the foremost technical universities in the world, and Principal of St Hilda's College at the University of Oxford, and actor Sally Phillips, and CNN Journalist and Chief International Correspondent Clarissa Ward. While the Hong Kong school is relatively new, it has strong connections to the UK school, and Mrs Duncan said that these connections are premised on the personal relationships that have built up since the school's inception.



**Aside from having strong academic standards, virtues such as determination, resilience, resourcefulness, and the ability to reflect are viewed as markers for success at the UK school.**

**Mrs Duncan**, Headmistress of Wycombe Abbey

She noted that there are a number of Wycombe Abbey alumnae now living Hong Kong who maintain regular contact with the UK school, and those relationships have formed an international link for pupils on both sides of the globe.

"I'm keen to meet with people who are connected to Wycombe Abbey, the Seniors (alumnae), the women who've been through the School, as well as current and prospective parents," she said.

Since Wycombe Abbey School Hong Kong only caters for pupils from the ages of 5 to 13 years, many female pupils look to Wycombe Abbey UK as their next step. Although they are pupils at a Wycombe Abbey school, entrance is not automatic to the UK school. Mrs Duncan emphasised that pupils still need to undergo the same interview processes and assessments to get accepted and this is to ensure that pupils are a right fit for Wycombe Abbey and will thrive there.

"I think it is critical," Mrs Duncan said. "Very often parents view the School as protecting itself, whereas actually the reverse is true, we're making sure that it's a good fit for your child so that your child succeeds and flourishes."

Each year, the Wycombe Abbey UK takes in approximately 85 pupils at age 11. Most girls tend to board and stay through the seven-year period of senior school in the UK.

Even though the Hong Kong school is only in its fourth academic year, three pupils from Wycombe Abbey School Hong Kong have already applied and joined the UK school, settling well into their school environment, Mrs Duncan assured.

Their successful applications were premised on the fact that the UK school and the Hong Kong school are part of the same Wycombe Abbey family; they share the same values and educational ethos.

"Aside from having strong academic standards, we're really looking for 'academic qualities,'" Mrs Duncan explained. "Virtues such as determination, resilience, resourcefulness, and the ability to reflect are viewed as markers for success at the UK school. And like the Hong Kong school, it is also looking for students who want to be part of a community and who want to get involved in a whole range of extracurricular activities."

Since the UK school is a boarding school, there is plenty of curiosity about what it's like to go from a day school in a city like Hong Kong to a boarding environment in the UK. Mrs Duncan said there are plenty of support structures in place. "Pupils join us at 11 and they're all together in one boarding house for the first year," she explained. There is lots of support to help the transition from prep school to senior school. Mrs Duncan also noted that a unique feature of Wycombe Abbey as a boarding school is that it is has mixed aged dormitories; the pupils embrace this and she believes this forms a key part of the whole experience.

"The girls love it! They get to make friends across the year groups as well as within their own group, and the older girls support the younger ones and the younger ones can seek advice and get support for day-to-day matters from the older girls," she said.

So overall, what makes the Wycombe Abbey schools so successful? According to Mrs Duncan, it thanks to the dedicated, capable staff who establish strong relationships with pupils, and that becomes the basis for their learning and supports academic excellence and ensure they flourish and grow in to the young women of tomorrow.

**School Details:**  
Wycombe Abbey School Hong Kong  
17 Tin Wan Street, Aberdeen, HK  
Tel: 2129 7128  
Email: admissions@was.edu.hk  
Website: www.was.edu.hk



[Book Your Private School Tour](#)

## ■ GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE ■



Ryan Yue, director of educational technology with students at the American School Hong Kong.  
Photo: Handout

ChatGPT is still an extremely new phenomenon, having been released in November of last year. As such, the IB's policies are still evolving, and will continue to evolve accordingly.

"In summary, we believe AI is not a crisis in education or assessment, but it does create significant challenges and opportunities," Glanville adds. "In the short term, we must teach students the ethical use of AI for assessments and the IB is well placed with assessment tasks that focus on understanding and not the coherence of written answers. However, in the medium to longer term, IB education practices will need to evolve as these types of tools improve and become a significant part of everyday life."

Regardless of the policies the IB has in place, it will be up to schools and teachers to learn, adapt and become students' role models on how to use AI in an ethical way.

Fortunately for Hong Kong, it has some of the best IB schools and teachers in the world. Even though ChatGPT has been slower to catch on in the city because it still cannot be accessed without using a VPN, schools have started hosting discussions and workshops to remain a step ahead on the issue.

Ryan Yue, director of educational technology at American School Hong Kong (ASHK), called the eventual prominence of ChatGPT and similar software in the classroom "inevitable". He believes that the challenges educators face regarding AI resemble those that came about when the internet exploded in the early 2000s.

"When the internet first came to schools, it brought us a new learning experience, but at the same time, it also came with some unexpected issues, such as plagiarism," says Yue. "We believe that students will get used to using ChatGPT positively, just like we did with the internet all those years ago."

Yue is optimistic that AI tools will ultimately create a great deal of value for students and teachers, particularly in terms of freeing up time currently spent on certain more tedious and time-consuming tasks that could be better used elsewhere.

"It definitely helps with consolidating information on the internet – whether we're writing an essay, designing a



**Students need to understand that AI will inherit the bias and blind spots of its programmers, or source material**

MATT GLANVILLE, IB

product, or doing a STEAM project, researching and gathering information is an essential part of the learning process, but it is usually very time-consuming," he says.

"With AI tools like ChatGPT, we can gather the information we need from different sources on the internet more effectively. Without spending so much time searching for information, students can focus more on understanding and applying which pieces of information they need for their learning.

"With AI, students can do more than they expect," he continued. "Education in the future could be more creative and more focused on subject knowledge and critical thinking skills."

Yue says that ASHK students are "very smart and hungry for technology" and, as a result, have become familiar with ChatGPT more quickly than teachers. And because ChatGPT isn't officially available in Hong Kong, students are experimenting with its competitors, such as Poe Chatbot and you.com. Bing has also recently released their own large-language tool: a Google-like search engine with similar properties to ChatGPT.

But while these programmes are making great technological leaps, so too are those used to counter AI-related plagiarism and fraud. Yue has ensured ASHK – an IB school – is fully equipped with this software, including Turnitin, a well-known plagiarism detection system that will be able to detect texts generated from ChatGPT and GPTZero, an AI-text classification tool.

Yue is also prepared for any future challenges and opportunities that may arise from additional developments in AI that many believe will take place over the next decade.

"We believe that ChatGPT is just the start of the game, and AI will be able to do a lot more than just chatting and generating text," Yue adds. "More media formats of data will be managed by AI in the future. AI can already create digital images and videos, and soon will be able to automatically generate computer programs for you according to your requests."



AI tools will likely be a boon in research and other time-consuming tasks but hazards remain and need to be anticipated. Photo: Getty Images

# SPECIALIST PROVISION: THE CHINESE LANGUAGE PROGRAMME

Offering an academically ambitious yet broad and holistic programme of study, Shrewsbury students benefit from interactions with a specialist team of teaching staff for Chinese, Music, Performing Arts, Physical Education and Aquatics from the age of 3.

Having drawn recognition as truly distinct among the international school sector, we decided to take a closer look at their programme for Chinese language and culture.

"Chinese is a core subject at Shrewsbury," explains Head of Chinese, Haze Kwok. "It has high status and is popular among students. It grounds us geographically, historically and culturally."

Shrewsbury students engage with the Chinese language every day as part of a bespoke and highly integrated programme of study that prioritises user confidence and communicative competence. Delivery lies at the heart of an effort to develop a rounded, respectful and appreciative view of the world among a bright and engaged student population.

In Early Years (Nursery and Reception) classes, Chinese Language lessons complement classroom themes, follow the interests of students and are driven by the power of play. Within Primary classes, academic impetus grows.



Drawing upon Yuwen (People's Education Press) text samples, Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced classes run simultaneously to ensure that prior experience is recognised, validated and utilised. Advanced level students follow a trajectory towards First or Second language study at iGCSE and are routinely afforded entry to bilingual programmes of study at their point of graduation.

**"As a Chinese family, language acquisition and cultural understanding was a high priority for us. The Chinese programme at Shrewsbury is academically strong and evidently enjoyable: Lilan and Yinzhu are more motivated to learn Chinese than ever before. Through historical study, thematic connection and the exploration of poetry and idioms, learning is rich, contextualised and balanced."**

Parents of Year 2 twins

"These extraordinary outcomes attest to the strength of our programme and the strength of our commitment to the development of truly distinctive services as the only provider of premium level primary education in the region," explained Shrewsbury Principal, Ben Keeling. "The regular study of Chinese language and culture supports rapid acquisition among those new to the language and the opportunity to develop true bilingualism among those who bring good levels of fluency with them from home."



To learn more about our ambitious programme of specialist-led learning opportunities, please contact the admissions team to reserve a campus tour.

[www.shrewsbury.edu.hk](http://www.shrewsbury.edu.hk)

## ■ GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE ■

### LESSONS OF TRAVEL

# FOREIGN EXCHANGE TRIPS FINALLY RAMPING BACK UP

The resumption of student exchange programmes restores important opportunities for worldliness, personal growth and self-expression, writes **Keith Chan**



Exchanges can give students a taste of very different lives. Photo: Canadian International School

With the reopening of international travel to and from Hong Kong, most international schools have resumed their overseas exchange programmes – regarded by educators as essential for students' learning and personal development.

Community-based experiential learning is no longer an extracurricular opportunity for some students, but rather a core component of an international school's programme and identity that all students participate in, says Matthew Schulte, head of local and global engagement at Canadian International School of Hong Kong (CDNIS), which has a long history of offering extraordinary overseas learning opportunities to its student body.

Overseas exchange programmes provide students the opportunity to grow and become more independent, says Alan Erickson, student welfare and safety principal at Stamford American School Hong Kong (SASHK).

"For some programmes, students are encouraged to take healthy risks and try things outside their comfort zone, such as kayaking, hiking and other

outdoor activities. The programmes also promote intercultural understanding and build friendships. Students learn to understand other countries and cultures while appreciating their own."

Charles Pierru, principal of secondary campuses and studies (French Stream) at the French International School of Hong Kong (FISHK), says overseas exchange trips allow students to bond while discovering new cultures they have not been exposed to previously. For example, the school's annual French trip offers students a chance to use the vocabulary learned in a school environment for authentic purposes.

"Overseas programmes provide unique sporting and cultural experiences for students, and the friendships and connections between schools is strengthened on these trips," says Mina Dunstan, head of school at the Australian International School in Hong Kong (AISHK).

"We have experience that students on previous trips have grown in many ways. They have embraced the challenges, maintained a positive attitude and worked as a team, creating memories that will never be forgotten."

As for the type of exchange programmes being proposed, international schools are moving away from the cultural tour style of the past towards programmes with a more clearly defined focus, bringing in aspects such as community service, art, language, science and technology, and character development, according to Penny Pan, director of Chinese studies at CDNIS.

The Hong Kong International School (HKIS) was the first international school in Hong Kong to reopen overseas travel for its high school students after Covid-19, according to high school associate principal Annalee Higginbottom. In February, its students took part in the APAC (Asia-Pacific Activities Conference) Band programme in South Korea, the APAC Theatre trip in the Philippines, the APAC Basketball trip in Vietnam, and APAC Swimming trip in South Korea.

"Our exchange programmes have a very clear focus and purpose: some are competitive, some are about co-creating art with students at other schools in Asia-Pacific, and some are about connecting with other cultures and social groups. Students are challenged both



ENGLISH SCHOOLS  
FOUNDATION  
英基學校協會

ESF.EDU.HK

KINDERGARTEN

PRIMARY

SECONDARY

A WORLD CLASS EDUCATION FROM K1 TO Y13

YOUR CHILD'S  
JOURNEY WITH ESF



FIND OUT MORE

GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE

physically and socially. They are expected to demonstrate greater independence and responsibility for themselves and their peers," says Higginbottom. "These opportunities also allow students to build new relationships around shared passions and experiences, and to use personal talents and skills developed in the classroom to benefit a wider community. As a result, the students are more well-rounded, have more personal lived experiences, know how to interact with diverse, dynamic groups of people, and most of all, they have great stories to tell."

Higginbottom says HKIS is likely to introduce more overseas travel next year, providing its international student community with more chances to connect with the Asia region. "The school will also keep many options locally as this supports its commitment to reduce our carbon footprint, and gives students the opportunity to get to really appreciate the richness of Hong Kong."

The CDNIS has relaunched its overseas experiential learning programme, called Experience Week, focusing on community building, cultural engagement, connection to outdoors and character development. All its students and staff in Grades 10-12 will have the opportunity to take part in an overseas Experience Week programme in November 2023. Grade 10 students will choose between five itineraries in Taiwan; Grade 11 students will choose between four regional community-building and cultural engagement trips in Bali, Borneo, Vietnam and Cambodia; while Grade 12 students will join a residential programme in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Schulte says the Experience Week programmes are carefully designed to push students beyond their comfort zones, challenging them physically, intellectually and emotionally, while empowering them to develop the skills and perspectives necessary to understand and take steps to solve real-world problems. He says the programme differs from those offered by other schools as it is built around a clearly articulated experiential learning curriculum that leads to a highly intentional sequence of learning experiences, from Grade 2 all the way through to Grade 12. "These programmes lead to impactful and lifelong memories, stronger friendships and a sense of community. The resilience gained from these valuable experiences will support students in their academic endeavours and life beyond school," he says.

Pan adds that the school is also looking to relaunch its Taipei Summer Mandarin Immersion Trip this summer for students in Grades 4 to 10. "While this programme will focus mainly on Chinese language and literature studies, we will also arrange activities for students to venture out and take part in excursions where they will learn about the local culture. In addition, the school is also planning a series of cultural trips to China where students will learn about the country's past, present and future."

At FISHK, the International Stream Secondary School plans to offer a mix of overseas and Hong Kong-based exchange programmes at the end of June 2023 for its 11- to 15-year-old students. These activities will be based around the creativity, activity, service (CAS) elements of



**[Overseas exchanges] offer students the opportunity to enrich their educational journey by discovering another country and culture, as well as immersing themselves in a new school and language environment**

GENEVIEVE DUSAULT, FISHK

the IB Diploma Programme (IBDP). In the 2023/24 academic year, there are plans for its students to take part in overseas sporting trips jointly organised with the French Stream Secondary students. A first-year IBDP CAS week is planned for the end of 2023, while another CAS activities-based week in April 2024.

Pierru says the CAS activities week is a fantastic learning experience for the younger students, who are exposed to aspects of society that they are rarely faced with, such as poverty, homelessness, rural living conditions and non-education of girls. "Finally, as a school with a truly international curriculum flow, and a diverse student body of over 40 nationalities, the overseas trips allow some students to reconnect with the country of their birth and for others to discover aspects of countries hitherto unknown to them," he says.

Genevieve DuSault, assistant of university orientation and programme coordinator for overseas exchanges at FISHK, adds that the school's students are also able to join the ADN-AEFE (Alexandra David-Néel – The Agency for French Education Abroad) international exchange programme, which allows Grade 10 students of French educational institutions abroad to spend four to eight weeks of their school year in a French high school within the AEFÉ network or in France.

"This offers students the opportunity to enrich their educational journey by discovering another country and culture, as well as immersing themselves in a new school and language environment," he adds.

AISHK is launching its Activity Week programme for its secondary students, with the overseas destinations including Cambodia, France, India, Japan, South Korea, Sri Lanka and Vietnam. According to Dunstan, the journey is stimulating, challenging and rewarding, allowing students to engage in activities that focus on culture, skill or service.



Dunstan says the school hopes to once again offer overseas travel opportunities for students in the area of representative sport: "AISHK has had much involvement with the AISA (Australian International Schools Association) Games, an under-16 age group involving Australian International schools from around Asia, and is also active with the SDRC (Southern Delta Region Conference), an under-14 age group which enjoys representative sport opportunities abroad."

She adds AISHK aims to provide international experiences for a range of age groups. "Previously, Year 6 students have had their first experience abroad with travel to Beijing, and we hope to provide international travel experiences to this age group again soon and in consultation with parents. In sport, the broader age group is also welcomed, with trips progressing from short cross-border trips to bigger and more substantial trips."

The SASHK plans to offer students a number of overseas sports programmes in 2023 and 2024. These will include a swimming team trip to Singapore in October/November 2023 for students between Grades 4 and 12, a high school volleyball trip to China in November 2023, a high school boys basketball trip to China in February 2024, and a middle school sports trip to Singapore in May 2024 for students in Grades 6 to 8.

In addition, the school also plans to run overseas education trips to the Philippines, Thailand and Cambodia for its high school students in Spring 2024, each with a different theme but which will all include cultural exploration and school exchange opportunities.

Erickson says that as SASHK is a member of Cognita school group – with member schools in India, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam – this has made it easier for the school to offer regional competitions against others while still offering quality exchange experiences in art, music and other activities.

**Hong Kong International School's students travelled to South Korea for a band conference.**  
Photo: Handout



Students on sports teams often get chances to travel and compete against their peers abroad. Photo: Australian International School Hong Kong



Alan Erickson of Stamford American School Hong Kong says exchange programmes are an excellent way to build students' independence. Photo: Handout

DISCOVERY BAY INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

愉景灣國際學校

Discovery Bay, Lantau Island, Hong Kong

www.dbis.edu.hk  
+852 2987 7331

Apply Now for 2023–24  
Nursery to Year 12



**Early Years**  
Reggio Emilia inspired environment



**Primary**  
British Curriculum with an international flair



**Secondary**  
A Level, BTEC & IGCSE pathways

Our students are



Independent Thinkers



High Achievers



Compassionate Citizens



Enthusiastic Learners



Supported & Safe



Happy, Valued Individuals



## LIFE ONLINE

# COACHING SOCIABLE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA SKILLS

Opportunities - and potential dangers - abound in the world of Snapchat and Twitter but schools have to offer advice and counselling where its needed, writes **John Cremer**

Debates about the pros and cons of social media won't go away, but while others can talk in abstracts, international schools in Hong Kong have to come up with workable guidelines that address everyday realities and somehow strike a balance between the inherent risks and the tantalising possibilities.

That is no easy task, especially when "digital native" students are a step or more ahead of teachers and parents in adopting the latest apps, and any "rules" about access or usage are easily circumvented or just ignored.

But in a world where social media is almost omnipresent - from mums and dads on Facebook to the itchy-fingered know-alls of Truth Social and Twitter, the cat lovers on Instagram, and the influencers driving TikTok and tomorrow's latest craze - each school needs a clear policy and approach.

In practice, that can mean making searches on mobiles or creative use of a favourite app an accepted classroom activity and part of a standard lesson plan. During talks about careers, it may mean highlighting all the new types of role - full-time as well as freelance - fast emerging in fields like sales, marketing, design, technology and communications.

But importantly, it also means providing expert help and support for students who, one way or another, discover that social media is not always their friend. A whole new vocabulary has been coined in recent years to reflect the threats and dangers: cyberbullying, doxing, online scams, identity theft, and much more of an explicit sexual nature. So, schools must also have access to trained counsellors ready to step in when needed to offer sympathetic advice and perhaps some straight talking to break the cycle.

"First of all, we have to acknowledge that social media now frames the lives of students from the age of 12 upwards," says Ian Clayton, deputy head of the French International School (FIS). "So you cannot ignore it, ban it, or say it's bad for you. It exists, but we can give advice and rough rules of thumb about language and interactions online."

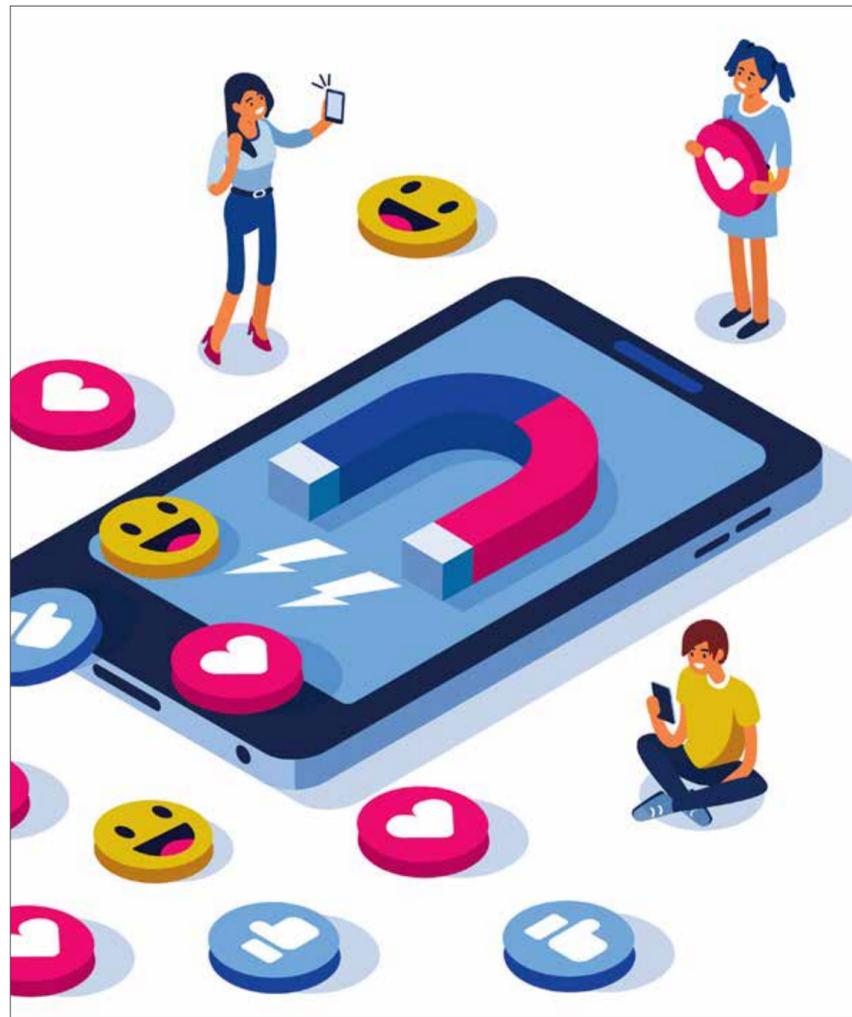
A usual starting point is to explain the concept of the digital tattoo - what you put out there cannot simply be erased or deleted. Students also hear about the "grandma test", essentially asking yourself if she would be proud to see the content of your posts and profile.

"We look at it holistically and talk about the positive, but also about how social media creates 'perfect lives' and comparisons to lives different from your own," says Clayton, who is also head of the international stream at FIS. "That can lead to depression and anxiety, so we mention options and that, if students get into difficulties, there are significant adults to help them at school. They don't just have to rely on their peers to solve social media issues."

One persistent worry, he notes, is the unremitting 24/7 presence, along with the pressures and changes in behaviour it inevitably brings. That comes from the speed, from the instantaneous nature of responses and from the power of the algorithm. The latter keeps things fresh for kids, but also creates any number of "rabbit holes", prompting the endless checking of phones and hours a day staring at screens.

Worse, though, is the pile-on effect that can happen when others join in a chorus of hate for no particular reason. Such a situation is a minefield to navigate.

"If one kid makes a derogatory comment, it is in front of 20 others straight away," Clayton says. "What kids talk



Apps like Snapchat and TikTok are a powerful magnet to young ones hungry for acceptance and status. Photos: Shutterstock

about with these platforms and apps is a bit like passing a note round the class in the old days, but it is multiplied by 10,000. And something like Snapchat gives them a kind of subculture. Teenagers always had that - it makes them feel different. But it also means they can mislead parents into thinking what they discuss is very wholesome."

To address specific concerns, FIS has an open line for communication with parents and encourages self-referral. There are plans to restart in-person workshops in the coming months. Meetings take place with "elected" parents at least once a term. And outside experts are

invited in periodically to give an alternative perspective and speak about new social media trends among students in Hong Kong and further afield.

"We do have 'rules', but aimed at promoting a healthy lifestyle and balance, so students are not on devices eight hours a day and at weekends," Clayton says. "We try to put some responsibility on kids to organise their time in a structured way. Regarding the very latest developments, teachers are a little bit behind the curve, so it is all about being judicious and tying advice into the bigger picture of mental and physical health."



## Standing out in university applications: the competitive edge of bilingual IB education at VSA

The IB Language and Literature courses at VSA are taught at a near-native language level, providing students with a comprehensive and immersive learning experience. Over 60% of VSA students graduate with an IB Bilingual Diploma, a testament to the school's dedication to bilingualism and academic excellence.

### Increased Chinese cultural awareness

One of the key benefits of their bilingual curriculum is that it fosters a passion for Chinese learning in their students. VSA offers a range of after-school activities that allow students to immerse themselves in the charm of Chinese culture, including the Chinese Orchestra and the Chinese Modern Dance Team.

Additionally, VSA recognizes the importance of developing students' cultural identity, which is why they include Chinese History as one of the courses in their Chinese curriculum. By providing students with a strong foundation in Chinese culture, literature, and language, they hope to inspire a lifelong love of learning and a deeper appreciation for Chinese heritage.

### Enhanced cognitive function

The benefits of bilingual learning extend beyond cultural awareness. As the Head of VSA's Chinese Department, Ms. Jennifer Li, notes, growing up in a bilingual environment can lead to improved cognitive flexibility and task execution in students. This is due to the unique demands of bilingualism, which require individuals to quickly and seamlessly switch between languages. As a result, bilingual learners have an advantage in adapting to changing circumstances and navigating complex tasks.

VSA takes a transdisciplinary approach to learning, which means that teachers from different subjects collaborate to design activities that require students to think and create in both Chinese and English. This not only reinforces students' language skills but also develops their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. "The English and Chinese departments work closely together, discussing the different assessments that students take. This collaboration is beneficial because students complete the same assessments in both languages, allowing them to transfer their skills from one language to another," shares Ms. Jaime Walls, Head of English.

Bilingual learning has become increasingly popular in recent years, and for good reason. Studies have shown that learning a second language not only improves cognitive abilities but also has a positive effect on academic performance, social skills, and cultural awareness. Victoria Shanghai Academy (VSA) continues to champion bilingual education for their Secondary students, following a fully bilingual Putonghua and English experience in its Primary school.



“Bilingual learners have an advantage in adapting to changing circumstances and navigating complex tasks”

- Ms. Li, Head of Chinese at VSA

### Competitive advantage of bilingual IB students

Bilingual IB students are highly sought after by universities and employers who recognize the value of linguistic and cultural proficiency. They have an advantage in pursuing international careers or further international academic studies. Current VSA students and alumni have been accepted into outstanding universities and programmes worldwide. They have gone on to study and work in fields as varied as biomedicine, computer science, engineering, game design, hotel management, law, medicine and allied health professions, music, and theatre. University placements include Oxford, Imperial College, St. Andrew's in the United Kingdom, Stanford, UC Berkeley, Pomona College, Boston College, Carnegie Mellon, Georgetown in the United States, McGill and UofT in Canada and more worldwide.

At VSA, bilingual education is not just a part of the curriculum, but a cornerstone of the school's mission to nurture global citizens. By embracing bilingualism, VSA is preparing its students to be leaders in their communities and beyond.



**Sign up for upcoming Secondary Admissions Webinar**  
Bilingual Learners in a Global Context  
(16 March 2023, 6:30pm-7:30pm)



**Apply for External Scholarships to VSA now**  
Scholarships available for one quarter, half or full term tuition for Year 6-11



**Ainsley, Year 12 DP Student**

"Applying to university is an extremely complicated, precise and time-consuming process which I would have been hard-pressed to navigate by myself. Fortunately, I had the university counsellors at VSA to guide me in every step of the application process. VSA offers a comprehensive and supportive university counselling experience. I was advised in every step from choosing appropriate universities to writing my personal statement and preparing for interviews. Needless to say, my counsellors played an integral role in my subsequent acceptance to read law at Oxford University."



**Amelie, Year 11 DP Student**

"I think a preconception that should be addressed is how people think that the bilingual curriculum is really difficult, learning a new language is hard, but the support from teachers, classroom interactions, games, and fun along this journey makes learning a language at VSA very worthwhile. Learning a new language also gives me a better chance in terms of the career I wish to pursue, in which being a polyglot enables me to adapt better in any industry all over the world."



**Christy, Year 10 MYP Student**

"Studying at VSA since Primary school exposed me to a range of languages, including Putonghua, English, Spanish, and French. This exposure has allowed me to express myself effectively and connect with people from diverse backgrounds. The opportunities inside and outside of the classroom have nurtured me to become a global citizen and provided me with a solid foundation for exploring global issues. Through these experiences, my language skills have improved and I feel well-prepared for future university studies."

■ GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE ■



An all too familiar sight: social media can be seductive to the point of addiction and schools can play a role in informing children about its dangers. Photo: Shutterstock

During the pandemic, social media acted as a life raft that kept students connected to their peers and the outside world. Now I encourage them to look for positive influences online

AMY SMITH, HKIS

At The Harbour School (THS), the emphasis is similarly on teaching responsibility from an early age and ensuring pupils understand the consequences of their actions, rather than employing a more coercive model of rules and guidelines.

For this, there is a “tools not toys” curriculum starting from Grade 3, so kids gain a sense of their place in their communities, both digital and in person, as soon as they start working with devices.

“THS has always been about preparing students for the future and that means recognising the trajectory of socialisation into the digital realm,” says Christine Greenberg, the primary and middle school principal. “It is very easy to come up with rules, [yet] very hard to establish a culture of empathy, kindness and respect. But the latter plays the most crucial role.”

That said, there is one rule the school does teach. In essence, if your “real self” wouldn’t do something with a

grandparent watching on, then your “virtual self” shouldn’t do it either. So, for instance, it’s not OK to lie about your identity or hide behind a spam or alt account to say or do anything in the increasingly broad category of mean things.

The other unwritten rule to take full advantage of the many positives. First among those is that students have incredible agency, which makes them more apt to learn difficult and sophisticated skills that can be put to immediate practical use.

Indeed, a group of THS sixth graders recently set up an International People’s Culture Club with a website and games children that play around the world. It all sprang from their sense of reach and empowerment, and the project taught useful skills such as video editing, script writing, honing a five-minute pitch and understanding the customer.

“Generally speaking, most students are conscientious,” Greenberg says. “But, of course there are always a few in every school who experiment with the usual problems: irresponsible use of the chat function, spamming, the sinister side of anonymity and forwarding inappropriate material. Therefore, it is important to get parents involved because they set the tone and culture during down time like weekends and holidays when social media is likely to be used the most.”

For this reason, THS makes a point of sharing its programmes with parents and explaining the school’s expectations and rationale, so that key lessons can be reinforced at home.

“Being a good person has much to do with being prepared and knowing about societal norms and consequences,” Greenberg says. “We cannot do that if we’re avoiding certain topics.”

For students at Hong Kong International School (HKIS), lessons in digital citizenship now begin in upper primary, with the focus on learning to be safe and responsible. The topics include digital footprints, privacy and security, media balance and well-being. And although the pupils are younger than the recommended age for using most social media apps, they can practise posting and commenting to their peers in safe closed

environments like Google Docs or slides, collaborative Padlets and Seesaw portfolio posts.

“The positives include the ability to connect and share ideas with others,” says Amy Garrett, upper primary instructional coach at HKIS. “This doesn’t come without challenges or risks, but we all know how much our lives now revolve around digital communication, so while it’s easy to be worried about the implications of social media, it’s also easy to see social benefits.”

In the more senior grades, as students begin to have more independence with their devices, they are taught how to find balance and communicate effectively. This is done in health lessons, not in STEM or IT classes, as well as in workshops led by the school’s counselling team.

The health focus is on skills like decision-making, accessing valid information and using appropriate language, which also have wider relevance. And, going further, HKIS also runs a “digital citizenship week” where high school groups create videos and awareness campaigns to instruct younger pupils.

“We hope that as our older students leave, they are well on the way to cultivating a positive digital footprint that they can be proud to share with college admissions officers and possible future employers,” says Amy Smith, high school health teacher and coordinator at HKIS.

“During the pandemic, social media acted as a life raft that kept students connected to their peers and the outside world. Now I encourage them to look for positive influences online and follow people who are using their platforms to advocate for issues, raise awareness and help bring about social change.”

According to Skye Jeynes, ESF learning technologies lead, it makes sense to regard links to the online world as incredibly valuable tools for creating content, sharing and networking with others. In fact, social media should be seen as an authentic platform for real-world teaching and as a way to prepare students for everyday life outside the classroom.

“Quite simply, by being proactive, promoting positive habits and addressing potential issues in good time, schools are helping to create a safer and more productive learning environment for students,” Jeynes says.



Christ Church Grammar School  
PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA  
ESTABLISHED IN 1910

Christ Church Grammar School has a long and proud history in educational achievement, and with consistently strong academic results is one of the best performing, non-selective schools in Australia.

The School builds good men to make a positive difference in their world.

At Christ Church we take a holistic perspective and focus on influencing and inspiring a new generation of boys to make informed decisions regarding their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health.

The School provides an education with rich academic, co-curricular, pastoral, spiritual and social experiences.



Leading boys' school in Western Australia



Focus on boys' health and wellbeing



Mandarin is studied from Pre-Kindergarten



Same timezone



More than 1/3 of all students play a musical instrument



Direct flights to Perth



The School has many traditions and a welcoming community



Easy admissions process



Accept boys and families of all faiths and religions



LOCATION



Perth is the capital of Western Australia and has wonderful weather all year round, with people spending a lot of time outdoors in the fresh air.

Perth has beautiful beaches with clear blue water. Cottesloe Beach is close to Christ Church Grammar School.

Kings Park is the largest inner-city park in the world (bigger than Central Park in New York).

Christ Church Grammar School sits on the banks of the Swan River, with boys having access to a boatshed and river school.

Please contact Genevieve Graham for more information regarding a position for your son

Admissions Registrar | +61 8 9442 1512 | admissions@ccgs.wa.edu.au

CRICOS 004339

## CHANGING NEEDS

# SHIFTING DEMOGRAPHICS IN HONG KONG'S STUDENT BODY

Lower birth rates and emigration have seen enrolment fall over the last three years, with an increased proportion of local and mainland students, writes **Victoria Burrows**



Canadian International School recently introduced a bilingual English and Mandarin programme in its lower school. Photo: Handout

Hong Kong's birth rate has been declining for decades, putting stress on schools. Fewer births mean fewer students, which means less government funding, classes being cut and, in the worst-case scenario, school closures.

This isn't a new problem. In 2005, then Secretary for Education and Manpower, Professor Arthur Li was already proposing government measures to help secondary schools tackle problems arising from "under-enrolment".

This long-standing problem has become more acute in recent years, though, and is impacting lower down the education pyramid. Hong Kong's recent spike in emigration is starting to put the future of some of the city's kindergartens in doubt.

A study released in January by the Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers found that about 10 per cent of the city's kindergartens are at risk of closure due to residents leaving the city, in addition to the already low birth rate.

Many more kindergartens are already feeling the pressure. Anfield International Kindergarten in Kowloon Tong reports lower enrolment numbers, ever since the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Parents were hesitant to have their children participate in any e-learning programme and even when school temporarily reopened, they were fearful of sudden closures or risks to their child's health," says Christina Pickford, head of school at Anfield International Kindergarten, who points out that as enrolment in kindergarten-level education is not mandatory in Hong Kong, parents felt no pressure to send their children to school during this period.

Even though the current year is the first full academic year without any Covid-related school closures, enrolment numbers are still low.

"Many overseas families decided not to return to Hong Kong due to the government's travel restrictions over the past three years," says Pickford. "Another unexpected factor which has affected our enrolment is the increasing number of parents deciding to emigrate to other countries since the last academic year 2021-22. We've been lucky to keep all our classes open, but class sizes are still lower than our pre-pandemic numbers."

Admissions for the 2023-24 academic year are affected, too.

"As there are fewer children in Hong Kong, we have had fewer children applying for places than in previous years, as with all schools throughout Hong Kong. Schools are actively trying to get these children into their schools so it's quite competitive," she says.

Invictus School Hong Kong in Tseung Kwan O has also felt the impact of emigration. However, since Covid-19 restrictions were eased earlier this year, numbers have improved again, with enrolment for the coming academic year up 10 per cent by February.

Principal Fiona Chan says that there has been a noticeable shift in demographics. In previous years, the school had many nationalities, including Europeans, American, Australian, Korean, Japanese and Russian families. This year there are far less expatriate families, with more Hongkongers and mainland students, especially from Beijing and Shanghai. The local parents who have chosen to stay in Hong Kong are looking for international curricula and approaches.

As the student demographic has changed, so must schools, says Chan. "We provide education, but we run the school like a business, as if families are our

customers, and so we must change to accommodate their needs," she says. "We design activities more in line with their expectations, and we've changed our communication strategy – we find that local parents want to be kept up to date with their children's daily progress, whereas our expat parents tended to require less day-to-day communication from our side."

One request many kindergartens in Hong Kong are hearing is for Mandarin Chinese classes. The Canadian International School of Hong Kong (CDNIS) recently introduced a bilingual programme in its lower school, with class time divided equally between English and Mandarin Chinese instruction.

Lief Erickson, lower school principal at CDNIS, says they added the dual-language option as there was a growing demand for a strong foundation in Mandarin Chinese from their parent community, and from graduates about to head to university or into the workforce.

"Having a strong foundation in Chinese opens more doors. It's also the right time to learn the language when you're younger," says Erickson.

The school is one of few in Hong Kong to report that they have not seen a decline in admissions applications over the past few years. Erickson attributes this to offering programmes and opportunities focused on preparing students for the future.

"When parents apply to our school, they are not just considering our kindergarten, they are looking long term and considering how CDNIS may support their child throughout their educational journey, from Early Years to graduation. In fact, in any given year, anywhere from a quarter to a third of our graduates have been enrolled at CDNIS since kindergarten [13 years or more]," says Erickson.

"The world is changing quickly and Hong Kong is no exception. This is why the school's strategic initiatives have been focused on preparing our students for a dynamic future."

Some of these school-wide initiatives include enhancing their robotics and coding programmes with the introduction of underwater robots, and hosting

internationally recognised street artist and muralist, Jo Di Bona, to spray paint a large mural in the school lobby that students can watch over the course of 10 days.

"The education market here in Hong Kong is certainly competitive and this is why CDNIS is always looking to provide unique learning experiences and opportunities, not just for our kindergarten students, but all students from Early Years to Grade 12," says Erickson.

Another way that kindergartens have adapted to recent circumstances is by strengthening their focus on the personal, social and emotional development of students. The Covid-19 pandemic has had significant impacts on early childhood education, including negative impacts in social, emotional and behavioural development, mental health, physical development and school readiness.

"Because of the small class size, we have made use of this opportunity to provide more focused support and interventions for children's development," says Pickford.

Anfield International Kindergarten now includes time allocated for daily mindfulness sessions and has increased the parent-teacher communication for each child.

"Anfield's openness and family focus has been a long-standing tradition for our schools since we opened in 1999, and we have now further focused our curriculum on the personal, social, emotional development of our students in every area of learning," says Pickford.

"We have also placed concentrated importance on students' communication and language development. We're building back the foundations of Early Years students to prepare them for their school lives."

While little can be done by schools in the face of Hong Kong's low birth rate, many kindergartens are convinced that to weather the recent drop in student numbers, standards of education and care must remain high.

"If you offer a high quality of programme and care about your students, parents will come," says Chan. "New students are joining already, and I believe more people will come back to Hong Kong in the next few



years. The city is more stable again now and has lots of opportunities. I'm very positive about Hong Kong's educational outlook."

Pickford is also hopeful, although adds that it may be a while before enrolment numbers are back up to former levels.

"It will take time to recover the lost number of international families in Hong Kong, and the impact of the low birth rate, we believe, is a difficult experience for all schools throughout Hong Kong," she says.

"Hong Kong continues to be an international destination that has many things to be recognised and celebrated for. We are hopeful this is a short-term impact and are looking forward to a brighter future for our young generation."

**Anfield kindergarten has tweaked its curriculum to better provide what parents seek nowadays.**  
Photo: Handout



ABBOTSLEIGH

Sydney, Australia  
Empowering young women since 1885

Abbotsleigh is a leader in girls' education. We inspire girls to strive for excellence within and beyond the classroom. Our girls love to learn here and believe that they are capable of anything.

- One of Australia's leading girls' boarding schools
- No. 1 ranked independent girls' school in New South Wales for academic results

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please contact Colleen Fenn at [registrar@abbotsleigh.nsw.edu.au](mailto:registrar@abbotsleigh.nsw.edu.au)

We'd love to hear from you.



# Create the future.





# Think International Schools Group

since 1994

Think | Inquire | Inspire

## Think International School/ Kindergarten

Kowloon Tong IB World School  
117 Boundary Street, Kowloon Tong, Kowloon  
Tel: 2338 3949 office@tis.edu.hk www.tis.edu.hk



## Think International Kindergarten/Nursery

Kowloon Tong (IB) Tel: 2338 3949  
 Nam Cheong Tel: 2157 2111 Mei Foo Tel: 2727 7585  
 Laguna City Tel: 2727 4747 Ma On Shan Tel: 2633 7800



For application and further information, please visit our website:  
[www.think.edu.hk](http://www.think.edu.hk)

