

# Malvern College Pre-School Island West

Outdoor adventures and bilingual robots, Amelia Sewell reports on what's in store for students of the new Hong Kong Island pre-school



**M**alvern College may have only arrived in Hong Kong three years ago but it already has its feet firmly under the table.

After the opening of the first pre-school in Kowloon in August 2017, the main school launched in August last year, and the forthcoming academic year sees the opening of the second pre-school, this time on Hong Kong Island.

## Island life

Malvern College Pre-School Island West will be situated on Connaught Road West in Sai Ying Pun with a similar set up to the Coronation Kowloon campus: the model has proved exceptionally popular so, as the saying goes, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. The new site will be another bright and

airy 8,000 square foot space with room for 250 students from pre-nursery to K2. The curriculum will be bilingual EYFS within the Reggio Emilia philosophy. Offering half days as well as a playgroup from six months, the school will be led by Jacqueline McNalty who is also the founding principal at the Coronation Kowloon campus.

Within months of opening, the first pre-school found itself reaching capacity. McNalty anticipates that take up at the new site will be equally speedy.

"We launched with our founding families and were full pretty quickly. So with Island West being a new campus, we expect something similar," she says.

For those thinking that they might be interested in one of these spots, this should be seen as a gentle warning shot



– dawdle at your peril! One of the biggest selling points is that a Malvern pre-school place gives admissions priority to the main school (MCHK) in Tai Po; and it doesn't take a genius to work out that if Malvern is doubling its pre-school offering it will simultaneously decrease its capacity for external applicants at primary level. So if MCHK is on your radar for primary and secondary, it is undoubtedly worth doing some research on a preschool place.

## Smooth moves

As McNalty points out, another significant bonus is that the move from pre-school to primary, which can often be a shock to the system for little people, is made as smooth as possible when transferring from one Malvern school to the next. This is because pre-school pupils have opportunities to access the facilities at MCHK periodically; they see the P1 classrooms, meet the teachers and explore the library.

"We start the transition process early so that by the time the children start, they already feel familiar in the new environment and they go with such confidence. We also work in close partnership with the P1 teachers, providing progress reports and work samples on each pupil. So it's a real advantage being the little sister school," explains McNalty.

But equally, she is keen to point out that admission to MCHK is a separate application and it is not a given that pupils

go straight through from the pre-schools.

"They have to have the right academic as well as social and emotional elements. But we're tracking that carefully and if we've got doubts, we will start those conversations with parents early. It's an ongoing conversation."

## The great outdoors

With any new school that opens in Hong Kong, parents want to know what it is

offering that is different to the others; what gap does it fill? In the case of Malvern, there is one very key element to the broader curriculum that sets it apart from many others – the association with the Forest School.

The Forest School is a set up that offer hands-on learning experiences in woodland or other natural environments. Established in the 1990s, its aim is to foster "resilient, confident, independent and creative learner who take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves." As such, students attending Malvern frequently find themselves outside the classroom at one of the two designated Sai Kung sites for outdoor learning. Both areas have access to a beach as well as woodland; one has an organic farm with a goat and rabbits; the other has space for planting and growing.

Exposure to the Forest School curriculum is not just for the older pupils; the pre-school children also have fortnightly excursions with their dedicated Forest School teacher, giving their school experience a variety and diversity rarely seen in Hong Kong. This use of the outdoor for education though is very much in line with the Reggio Emilia approach, which views the environment as the 'third teacher' It gives the pupils a breadth and depth to their education and teaches them skills not often found in textbooks.

"Outdoor education is a fantastic thing for children of all years and with the addition of the Forest School, we've got



the best balance; innovation, creativity, inquiry, connection to nature. Our focus is on developing collaboration, communication and critical thinking skills with an emphasis on active, play-based learning.” says McNalty.

Recent Forest School excursions have included using tools, working with wood, understanding safety through lighting fires and then using these to cook food- all big and important concepts for the under fives, most of whom are probably more accustomed to air-conditioned rooms, flashy iPads and food ready and waiting on a table.

One thing a Hong Kong education often lacks is demonstrating to children that as much can be learnt outside of the classroom, as can be learnt in it. So it is refreshing to see that Malvern’s successful integration into Hong Kong is challenging the idea of what parents can expect from schools in a major city and providing a fresh approach to those lucky enough to be offered a place.

“We’re pretty unique in Hong Kong,” says McNalty, “and our parents love it.”



## Life education – a crucial element of schooling for our children

In collaboration with Malvern College Pre-School Hong Kong

**E**arly childhood education lays the foundation for a lifetime of learning and should have a cascading, positive influence throughout a child’s life. Rhian Evans Allvin, Executive Director of the National Association for the Education of Young Children states, “If we can maximize the support and learning opportunities, then we really stand a good chance of setting young children on a trajectory of success.”

Life education plays an important role in helping every child learn how to cherish life, to construct a healthy personality and to maintain a positive outlook. In addition, it allows children to learn how to love themselves and

the world around them, as well as the value of contributing to society.

Schools like Malvern College Pre-School Hong Kong understand the importance of implementing life education in early childhood. The school recently invited Ms. Hsin-wen Huang from Story Mommy to share her insights on this crucial topic with parents.

The aim of introducing life education is to teach these important skills as part of the school curriculum. Children learn to develop a positive understanding of themselves and of others, empowering them to overcome setbacks, to make healthy and responsible choices whilst also respecting the choices of others.



**Malvern College Pre-School Hong Kong** (MCPS) offers an educationally harnessed play programme based on the U.K.’s Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework for children aged 2 to 5. MCPS will have a new campus, Malvern College Pre-School Island West, located in Sai Yin Pun, opening in August 2019.

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## PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

Jacqueline McNalty

### What brought about deciding to open a second pre-school?

Our first pre-school opened in August 2017 at Coronation Circle in Kowloon. Our strong reputation in the market was quickly established, mostly due to word of mouth, and we are now almost at full capacity with a wait list for many of our classes. Therefore, we wanted to provide more families living in Hong Kong with an opportunity to have a Malvern College pre-school experience and we responded to the numerous requests to open on the Hong Kong Island side. Our new pre-school is right at the heart of the island, in the neighborhood of Sai Ying Pun, an area that celebrates cultural diversity, and which has a rich heritage, reflecting some of the key attributes of Malvern College itself.

### Tell us more about Malvern's association with the Forest School

We are very excited and proud that we are one of the first schools in Hong Kong to run the Forest School programme. Our world-leading programme is led by qualified and experienced Level 3 Forest School practitioners who work exclusively with us. It allows our pupils to build confidence, physical skills, self-awareness and social skills, while learning about the natural world through hands-on experiences in a woodland and beach environment.

### Does technology have a role in your pre-school curriculum?

We believe in the use of education technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) to support teaching and learning. Technology is part of our EYFS curriculum and falls under the category of 'Understanding the World' with outcomes we need to teach and record progress in. We understand that our pupils are citizens of the future and our use of technology is considered very carefully before it is used through the lens 'How can this tool enhance teaching and learning?'. Our beloved, bilingual robot Zenbo has already become an integral part of our programme. Zenbo can follow and track the pupils and responds to voice activated commands. Our 'bee bots' have also inspired a healthy interest in coding for pupils. And



it is important to remember that our outdoor Forest School programme provides an excellent - and important - counterbalance to this area.

### How do you smooth the transition from pre-school to the main school?

We are a tight-knit community and we have a very close relationship with MCHK. We have a planned transition programme for our K2 pupils with our sister school. As part of the transition process the pre-school K2 pupils will frequently visit the main school campus and have PE and gymnastics lessons in the primary gym and dance lessons in the dance studio. The pupils also get valuable time to visit the 'Grub' (cafeteria) to eat lunch and afterwards spend time with the P1 teachers, working inside a P1 classroom for a few hours. The pupils also have a special graduation ceremony inside the auditorium of MCHK in June, so they become very comfortable with the spaces and moving around the 'big' school. We also provide a very comprehensive pupil handover file to the P1 teachers at MCHK. Together, with all these strategies and measures in place, our K2 pupils transition from MCPS to MCHK with confidence and a very happy start to primary schooling.

### What's your background in education?

As well as being a wife and mother to two busy boys (Declan aged 8 and Hunter aged 6) I have been involved in school leadership and early childhood education for 26 years, working in Australia, the UK, China and Singapore. During my career I have undertaken different leadership roles including principal, acting head, vice principal, head of early years as well as curriculum coordinator and workshop leader. I was 21 when I was invited to help lead and open a brand-new pre-school in my native Australia, which was an amazing privilege and opportunity and instilled my love for opening new schools. I went on to help open two more pre-schools in Australia before moving internationally with my husband who is also in education. In 2013, I was invited to be on the team to help set up a \$250 million school in Singapore. I have obtained my Masters in Education and Bachelor of Teaching, majoring in early childhood and been awarded the gold certificate in International School Leadership from the Principal Training Centre (PTC). I am inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy and am passionate about working in partnership with my amazing staff and with parents to educate their children. □