

# Powering into Preschool!

Is sleep the key to a successful start to preschool? JACQUELINE MCNALT, Founding Principal of Malvern College Pre-School Hong Kong, shares her thoughts on this and on Malvern's new Sai Ying Pun campus.

## What advice can you give parents preparing to send their child to preschool for the first time?

The number one piece of advice I give to our parents is the importance of sleep. Research shows that children two to six years of age need around 12 to 13 hours of sleep each night. Also, the time children go to sleep is critical to their growth and brain development.

It's important to note that children don't share adult sleep cycles. Research from the American Academy of Pediatrics has linked a good night's sleep (and going to bed earlier) with greater success at school; we know for certain, too, that a tired brain is not a learning brain, and it impacts on memory.

Children who aren't coming to school tired have greater resilience and greater balance related to wellbeing, happiness and mood.

## Jacqueline's tips for a successful start to preschool

- Introduce the idea of starting school; try reading some story books about it.
- Focus on the positive aspects of school, like learning new things and making friends.
- Have a fun day shopping for school items: pencils, uniform, bag, lunch box, drink bottle, and more. This will make your child excited about starting school and feel ownership of those items.
- Label everything with named and iron-on stickers; this helps children develop independence through finding items and packing their own bags.
- Practice going to the toilet wearing school uniform; focus on flushing and washing hands.
- Practice opening lunch boxes, water bottles and food items so they can manage themselves.
- Practice putting the uniform on and off, developing confidence and independence.
- Walk around the school area to help your child become familiar with their new environment.
- Have a good routine in place before school starts, with plenty of sleep.



## Tell us about Malvern's new campus on Hong Kong Island.

We're very excited to open our second Malvern College Pre-School (MCPS) campus, in Sai Ying Pun, to add to our campus at Coronation Circle, Kowloon. The Island West campus will offer the Early Year Foundation Stage (EYFS) UK curriculum, delivered in a 50-50 bilingual, play-based approach. The Reggio Emilia learning environment reflects the look and feel of the Coronation Circle campus, with natural materials and a sensory focus. It's an 8,000-square-foot open-plan environment that allows for greater flexibility, inquiry and collaboration. And of course, all our new pupils (and parents) at our MCPS Island West campus also get to attend our incredible Forest and Beach School programme!

## Malvern is famed for its music programme; how are you integrating music into preschool learning?

We have a music specialist who works exclusively with us and provides a formal music lesson to each class. In MCPS, the Music Department aims to develop our pupils' abilities in listening, performing and creating, in order to build a firm music foundation. It's important that children are given opportunities to discover a broad range of experiences with music, including listening, exploring body music, playing musical instruments, singing and notation. Our experienced and talented class teachers also incorporate music, movement and dance daily within the Pre-School session in both English and Mandarin.

## And what about the school's approach to technology?

At MCPS, we understand that we need to prepare our pupils to be adept digital citizens as technology will certainly play a huge part in their future world. We're very well resourced; our teaching and learning tools include resources such as Interactive Whiteboards (IWB) and Bee Bots, which have promoted an interest in simple coding.

## At the other end of the spectrum is Forest-Beach School; what is this, and will it be offered to Island West students?

Malvern is unique as we are the only preschool in Hong Kong offering a world-leading Forest-Beach School programme. All our pupils from both MCPS Coronation Circle and MCPS Island West attend our Forest-Beach School one day per fortnight. In our urban environment in Hong Kong, it's important to connect children to nature for their wellbeing and for a focus on outdoor learning.

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  - MCPS Hong Kong: Units 9-12, Coronation Circle, 1 Yau Cheung Road, Southwest Kowloon
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## About Forest-Beach School

CLAIRE JONES is Forest-Beach School Leader at Malvern College Pre-School Hong Kong.



## How do you deal with Hong Kong's heat and humidity on Forest-Beach School days?

Teaching Beach School alongside Forest School means that in the hot and humid months of the year children can paddle and feel the breeze from the sea. The children have a drink and snack when they arrive and are reminded to have water breaks throughout the session. The type of clothing children wear

is important, too. Wearing a hat not only protects children from the sun but also keeps them cool. UV-protective swimwear with long sleeves protects from the sun, and when it gets wet it keeps children cool by staying damp.

Children learn how to adapt in different situations and they develop resilience by feeling uncomfortably hot and sweaty at times. They learn to make decisions about what they need, and to develop confidence and independence. At Malvern College Pre-School, we also encourage children to talk about how they are feeling and we support them to recognise what it feels like to be hot or cold.

## You've taught Forest School in other countries; what's great about Hong Kong's outdoor classroom?

Hong Kong is an amazing place to teach outdoors, with a rich biodiversity that allows children to come into contact with living things that previously I've only shown them in books or in captivity.

At Forest-Beach School, children investigate which animals live in different habitats in the local area. They learn how to care for unique species like stick insects and lantern bugs, observe giant land snails and a wide variety of plant life.

It's a privilege and a great pleasure to be able to be part of and lead these experiences for Malvern College Pre-School Hong Kong. *✪*