



Science skills are mastered not just in the classroom but also on the beach for students at this preschool!

BY REBECCA SIMPSON

STEM has been having a bit of a “moment” in education these past few years. Thanks to the STEM revival, schools are now hotbeds of innovation. They are Maker Labs for teens, robotics classes for primary schoolers, and everything in between.

Today, we’re seeing preschools offer STEM programmes to the littlest of students. Science for three-year-olds may seem like overkill at first, but it quickly gathers context when we when stop to think. Science is all about understanding our world, about being an inquisitive and imaginative explorer. And really, isn’t that what preschool is all about?

This is exactly what JACQUELINE MCNALT, Founding Principal of **Malvern College Preschool Hong Kong** (MCPSHK), had to say when we caught up with her to get some insights into the programme at the school.

Embracing science through nature

Jacqueline explains that Malvern College UK was the first school in the world to pioneer the Nuffield scientific approach – which all schools use today. That’s the approach of experimentation, enquiry and discovery. Today, that pioneering spirit is evident in this Hong Kong preschool campus. Students at MCPSHK are becoming little scientists in a fun, hands-on way.

So, STEM lessons start in circle time, with students exploring topics like insects or the concept of floating and sinking. To better understand floating and sinking, they’re then challenged to make a boat that floats. Next, they get busy designing boats, testing materials and finally building.

Learning at the beach

What really sets the school apart, though, is the extension into the real world. After initial exploration and hands-on lessons in class, the investigation is taken outdoors, to Forest-Beach School. “We’re the only school in Hong Kong that has a Forest-Beach School programme,” notes Jacqueline.

“It’s an exciting way for science to be taught,” she adds, explaining that the students launch their self-made boats off the shore. “It’s the scientific model in real life for our five-, four-, three- and even two-year-olds.”

This presents a unique Hong Kong childhood experience that many little ones will never forget. Jacqueline recalls a time at Forest-Beach School when a sea hawk swooped down and caught a fish right in front of the kids. One of them remarked, “This is better than a National Geographic video!”

The science of vegetable soup

The connection between nature and science is evident in a few ways. The school has two sites, and each one has a beach, a woodland and an organic farm. One even has goats and rabbits!

At these locations, children are growing and harvesting their own vegetables. They then use the organic produce to make vegetable soup over the campfire.

Growing and cooking vegetable soup is a science lesson at MCPSHK. Children learn about water and plant cycles, they learn to measure using maths, and they utilise team work. As Jacqueline says, “these are great experiences for children!” *EL*

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