

# Preschool in a Pandemic

Learn how the team at Malvern College Pre-School's newest Island West campus are innovating in trying times to keep their little learners engaged.

BY REBECCA SIMPSON

Teachers at Malvern Colleges – a family of education institutions with a long history spanning centuries and continents – have always sought to engage strongly with their pupils (or “Malvernians”, as they’re known), from the moment those pupils step tentatively onto school grounds. It’s doubtless one part of the reason why the Malvern alumni includes the likes of prime ministers, poets and playwrights and even Nobel Prize winners.

In the midst of a pandemic, however, engagement becomes more difficult. And here in Hong Kong, the Malvern faculty have arguably had the most challenging task of all: teaching mini Malvernians via remote learning for months on end.

It’s a feat that seems impossible when you think about it – keeping the youngest learners engaged remotely. But thanks to a lot of thought and planning, it has been a success. We caught up with the team from the Island West campus of Malvern College Pre-School to see how they’ve managed to capture the attention of our city’s preschoolers over Zoom and beyond.

## Expansion to Hong Kong Island

The school’s original preschool campus at Coronation Circle has been a popular choice for expat families since it opened in 2017. Its bilingual English and Mandarin offering, Reggio Emilio-inspired campus design, adherence to the Malvern vision and mission, and the addition of a certified Forest-Beach School programme for all pupils have made it an in-demand choice for Kowloon-side families.

According to Head of Pre-Schools JACQUELINE MCNALT, the expansion of Malvern with the opening in August 2019 of a new campus at Sai Ying Pun on Hong Kong Island was born from community demand. Today, despite the challenges faced by the city’s expat community since the launch, this new campus has already reached 96 percent of its enrolment target for the 2022-23 school year.



## Remote learning with a difference

When faced with the downsides of teaching via Zoom – not being able to replicate a typical classroom environment, for one – the Malvern teachers tackled the challenge by returning to the school’s core vision and values: nurturing each child with a range of stimulating learning experiences.

EMMA-JANE RITCHIE, Assistant Principal at Malvern College Pre-School (Island West), shares some insight into the planning and execution of the school’s successful remote learning initiative.



### • Short-form Zoom experiences

“Zoom is all about delivery,” explains Emma-Jane. “Our sessions are interest-focused to maintain engagement.” Little learners have little attention spans, so at Malvern College Pre-School remote learning is broken down into short-form Zoom experiences that include story time, themed sessions and more.

“Each experience is recorded, so parents can watch the session on demand. For working parents, this allows them to see their child’s participation and feel involved in their learning,” says Emma-Jane.

### • Let’s get social

Emma-Jane says that social wellbeing is just as important for preschoolers as it is for mums and dads – and little learners also love seeing their friends on Zoom. This is why the team at Malvern College Pre-School create special social activities for classmates to connect with their friends remotely, and to simply have fun.

### • Stimulation packs

Screen time isn’t the only way these little students are being engaged. Each month, families are sent an activity pack, full of offline and online support materials. “We give each student a resource pack for the learning intentions we are working towards,” explains Emma-Jane.

It sounds like they’re a hit too. “The kids love our packs! Parents say it’s like receiving a present from school every four weeks.”

### • On-campus support for exceptional cases

The pandemic has proven to be a varied experience for families. For those in need of on-campus care, the Malvern team has offered an on-campus care service for families that are unable to learn remotely.

Jacqueline adds, “When parents have really needed us, we have welcomed children back on campus for care service. We are a school supporting our community.”



## Return-to-School Tips

Over the course of the pandemic, all school students – including preschools – have spent a lot of time at home, safely tucked away with their families. But one day soon, schools will re-open and students will be back on campus. Emma-Jane shares some tips for managing any back-to-school jitters.

### #1 Stay positive

“Talk about COVID and the pandemic positively. This can be a scary time for kids, so abstain from any negative talk about returning to campus.”

### #2 Get familiar

“Finding some familiarities in school life will help your child adjust. Try talking about the routine of school and who will be there. At Malvern, new students are given a starter pack with staff bios and pictures, so new students can get familiar with teachers before they start school.”

### #3 Read books

“There are some great transition stories about starting school. Find a selection that cover the fun activities your child will do at school and the emotions your child may experience.”

### #4 Communicate

“Be upfront with teachers about your concerns. The Malvern faculty knows that every child is different, that’s why the team makes listening to parents a priority through the school’s ‘getting to know you’ forms. Learning about each individual child is a priority.”

Malvern College Pre-School Hong Kong (Island West) is at G/F and 1/F, Viking Court, 165-166 Connaught Road West, Sai Ying Pun. 3898 4668 | mcpsadm@malvernpreschool.hk | malvernpreschool.hk