



Shrewsbury International School Bangkok's Last Night of the Proms

Best of British

Whether it's international students coming to study in the UK or overseas schools following a British curriculum, there is something the UK offers in an education that is attracting more and more people, but what is it? Nicky Adams investigates

Krista Doran is happy if her 17-year-old son Johnny waves back as he passes through security at LF Wade International Airport, leaving behind his home and the crystal-clear waters of Bermuda for another half-term of study at boarding school in south-east England.

"We first looked for a British boarding school for Johnny's sister Kira, who is six years older, and it was a natural decision for him to follow her there," Doran explains. "I felt that a school abroad would benefit their education, expand their ability to adapt to new environments, provide more opportunities for activities and travel, and offer the experience of meeting new people from all around the world.

"Boarding schools in England have a good reputation among parents here in



ABOVE AND BELOW: International students make up 20% of Felsted's senior school roll



Bermuda, particularly for their international perspective, the GCSE and IB/A-level pathway and academic results. Our daughter really wanted to go to England, so she and my husband visited three shortlisted schools and eventually chose Felsted for its proximity to London and comfortable co-ed campus as well as the chance to study the IB, take part in activities and engage in charity projects."

WORTH TRAVELLING FOR

Doran's reasons for flying her children halfway round the globe for a British education are familiar to Gemma Kilby, international admissions registrar at Felsted, which counts members of 27 countries among its student body.

"Parents based overseas often tell me that they have chosen a British education for their children in order to give them the best education available with a global outlook and to prepare them for entry to top universities in the UK, US and Europe," says Kilby. "Also important is a commitment to student wellbeing, which of course parents are concerned about when they are so far away from their children."

A famous name can also be an attraction and Roedean School has no trouble drawing students from countries all around the world – currently 39 are represented on the senior school roll.

"Undoubtedly, many international



families have heard of us,” says Diana Banham, Roedean’s head of admissions, “and they know we offer the chance for top academic results and an established pathway to Russell Group universities. But when they visit us, parents are also impressed by the strong enrichment programme, which schools in other countries often do not have, and particularly the workshops by the academics, Olympians, scientists, explorers, West End actors and celebrated writers we have access to in this country.”

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT BODY

These days, around 20% of students at many British boarding schools are likely to be non-UK resident, but international admissions to British schools are nothing new. Sevenoaks was one of the first schools in the UK to open its doors to students from other countries and, back in the 1970s, was an early adopter of the IB – perennially popular with non-UK parents who want to keep their children’s options open when it comes to university choices.

“We have 48 different nationalities at Sevenoaks, which means a dynamic and diverse student base,” says Arabella Stuart, the school’s director of admissions. “An international outlook promotes the principles of tolerance and open-mindedness and prepares students for success in a complex world.”

ON THE DOORSTEP

The good news for international parents who dream of a British education for their



TOP: Johnny Doran, from Bermuda, is a student at Felsted
SECOND DOWN: Roedean’s Victoria Chung, from Hong Kong, with her GCSE results
ABOVE: Huili School Shanghai **RIGHT:** Wellington College International Tianjin



child is that fewer of them are having to travel to find it – British schools are coming to them. Increasingly, the well-known names of independent schooling in the UK are setting up shop in far-flung corners of the world to satisfy a growing demand for schools that offer British academic standards, a rounded education and an international outlook, without the airfares.

“Taking British education overseas and establishing sister schools with the same learning ethos and characteristics as the home school has become an educational phenomenon in many countries, particularly in Asia,” says Richard Gaskell, schools director at ISC Research.

“There are now 87 international schools around the world that are overseas campuses (sister schools) of an established British independent school brand or are affiliated to an established British independent school through a service or management agreement.

“There are only 114 international schools in total, so British schools have a significant presence in the global education market.”

POTENTIAL NEW MARKETS

China currently has the most British independent schools, with 41 either



owned by or with service agreements with UK independent schools.

There are 11 British independent schools or campuses in the UAE, eight in Thailand and four in Malaysia, however, schools are always looking for potential new markets and Haileybury School has recently opened a sister school in Kazakhstan.

Moreton Hall, Cardiff and Vale College, Fettes College, Lady Eleanor Holles, St Bees and Reigate Grammar School have all opened schools overseas,” says Gaskell. “Others are in the process of developing international schools for the future too, such as Rugby School, which has just announced it will open a school in Japan in 2022.”

countries wider afield such as Myanmar, Singapore and Thailand,” says Jane Scott, Dulwich’s director of communications.

She adds: “Since 1996, Dulwich College has engaged with international education in response to the demand for a British-style education on the part of a growing middle class in the emerging economies of South East Asia. This has imaginatively combined commercial strategy and educational mission, providing funds towards broadening social access on the home front, and helping to ensure that the college remains an agent of social mobility in the community of which it has always been a part.”

“Taking British education overseas and establishing sister schools with the same learning ethos and characteristics as the home school has become an educational phenomenon”

Harrow got the ball rolling as the first British independent school to open a foreign campus in 1998, in Bangkok. Dulwich College followed with its school in Shanghai in 2003 and in recent years there has been a steady stream of British independent school openings abroad – 12 in 2016, the same number in 2017, 17 in 2018 and another 12 in 2019.

“Many independent school brands are now moving into the international arena. This academic year, Uppingham School,

Some of the first British schools to set up abroad now have multiple sites in multiple countries – top of the leader board is Dulwich College with no fewer than 10 schools abroad, Wellington with seven and Malvern with five, though Harrow, Brighton, Repton and Hurtwood also have four each.

“Schools such as Dulwich College have long espoused internationalism in their promotion of the teaching of modern European languages and there are notable historical connections with

‘COMMONWEALTH OF SCHOOLS’

Currently, more than 9,000 students are benefiting from a Dulwich education overseas by attending one of the Dulwich ‘Commonwealth of Schools’, as the master puts it. There are four Dulwich Colleges in China (two in Shanghai and one each in Beijing and Suzhou); one in Seoul, South Korea; and one in Singapore. The latest addition, Dulwich College Yangon, has two campuses in Myanmar. Students at these eight co-ed schools are mainly ex-pat, but two high schools →

have also been established by Dulwich College in Suzhou and Zhuhai, China, in conjunction with local Chinese schools, to teach the IGCSE and A-level curriculum to Chinese students aiming for top universities mainly in the UK and the US.

Wellington College is catching up, with six schools in its overseas family – four international schools under the Wellington name and two bilingual schools in China under the name ‘Huili’.

“The latter are very much Wellington in ethos,” explains Clare Hillman, head of international licensing for Wellington College International, “with students ultimately sitting iGCSE and A-level or IB, but they are separate in that they deliver the Chinese curriculum for students aged six to 15 and are bilingual. In total we now educate 4,000 students in Wellington schools overseas.”



TOP AND ABOVE LEFT: Wellington College International Hangzhou ABOVE RIGHT: Huili School Shanghai

A RICH EXPERIENCE

The parents lucky enough to find a British school on their doorsteps are attracted by much the same attributes as those who fly their children around the world for a British education, reports Hillman, after many lengthy conversations with prospective parents.

“The best UK schools offer great academic success, as well as giving children a rich experience outside the classroom in sport, in the arts and in leadership activities,” she says. “Chinese and Thai parents are principally motivated by language – they see fluent English as a major advantage for their future lives and careers – and achieving globally recognised qualifications (IGCSE, A-level, IB), which combine with the connections of the schools themselves to provide reliable pathways to leading universities in the US, UK and worldwide,” she says.

“They also look to British brand schools

for their heritage and reputation for high-quality education, both in terms of academic excellence and developing the whole child.”

Shrewsbury School was early to the party with the launch of its school in Bangkok in 2003 and since then has been busy opening two more – a second Bangkok campus last year to keep up with the rising demand for places in the city, plus a new school in Hong Kong. Plans are afoot for Shrewsbury to open more schools in Asia and further afield in the coming years.

“British education is quite rightly perceived as the gold standard globally, and we delight in playing our part in developing outstanding schools around the world,” says Shrewsbury School’s international development director, Maghin Tamilarasan.

“The attraction to both local families and expatriates is clear – our international schools have become recognised for the highest levels of academic achievement,

excellence in sport, creative and performing arts, and a wide variety of co-curricular opportunities that the Shrewsbury name is synonymous with. All this while preparing pupils for the modern world in the comfort of their local environment.”

She concludes: “Indeed, there has never been a more critical time to develop closer links and greater understanding between nations and where better to start than with the young leadership minds of the future?”

The same reasons seem to pop up again and again for why a British education is renowned. The chance to achieve strong academic results, study the IB, gain a global outlook, prepare for top universities and receive a rounded education with activities and travel. On top of that, student wellbeing is increasingly being treated as a top priority, making British independent schools in the UK and abroad continue to be some of the most outstanding schools across the world. **16**