

AMANDA DENNISON

A Shrewsbury icon

Amanda Dennison is immediately recognisable within Bangkok's international education network as a highly skilled leader who understands. Understands what it means to run a successful international school; what it means to operate in an increasingly competitive market and through times of global challenge and what it means to tear down barriers.

As the Principal of Shrewsbury International School Bangkok City Campus, in 2020 she celebrated 10 years of headship within the Shrewsbury Bangkok family. Her 30 year career in education has covered a journey across diverse environments - with pastoral care, equality and fairness a constant motivational force throughout her profession. With Amanda's latest appointment to the Board of Directors at the British Chamber of Commerce in Thailand (BCCT), here we focus on the story of one of Bangkok's most experienced educationalists and delve into how this consummate leader encompasses qualities of compassion and empathy alongside a keen wit and unwavering energy to dismantle outdated legacies of patronage and bias.

Amanda started her career in the late 1980's. Where now, visitors to London's docklands are met with the clean straight lines and polished marble of an eminent and prosperous financial hub, in 1987 the area was home to communities of working class families and former dock workers left stranded and forgotten by the closure of many of the ports in the preceding decade. It was into the heart of this diverse and marginalised community that Amanda first became a teacher and she recalls a challenging environment:

"In my initial year at the school, one class saw 27



teachers come and go. Nobody wanted to stay. These children needed consistency and something needed to change"

Amanda made a commitment and stayed at St. Luke's Primary School for 10 years, fighting to ensure a generation of children progressed to a secondary education with academic stability. She saw beyond superficial challenges, providing a level of cohesion which released raw potential. And it was here too where Amanda credits the birth of a fighting spirit which has always stayed with her. A strong resolve was born to help young people overcome the barriers they faced.

And it's those barriers which have always driven Amanda. Those who know her talk of her compassion, empathy and ability to see in others their potential for greatness. Her track record of success and headship should also be heard however; it speaks of an individual with a focussed determination to ensure success is never restricted, both for herself and for others.

Since that demanding start, we see a career that includes deputy and headteacher roles and the successful creation of a 'Beacon School', so called for the (then) British Labour Government's 'Beacon School' programme under Prime Minister Tony Blair. The programme ran from 1998 to 2004 and epitomised Prime Minister Blair's focus on school improvement through diversity, collaboration and partnership; education was a major party manifesto of the time. As a beacon school, the success Amanda and her team achieved was held up as an example for others to follow. Schools from across London, the UK and even globally came to learn from their accomplishments. Amanda recalls coffee and cake with Tony Blair in her office; a simple story with Amanda keen not to indulge in the unnecessary trappings of celebrity or connection:

"We ate croissants, drank coffee, chatted about the school and he left. What's important to me is not endless discussion about how or why



Teaching Diplomacy: City Campus School Council members at their first School Council meeting



Shrewsbury's commitment to growth and renewal saw the creation of a second Bangkok campus in 2018. The opening ceremony was attended by British Ambassador to Thailand, Brian Davidson

but the actual realisation of a plan. Successful schools remove barriers, limits and restrictions to pupil achievement.”

And with this sentiment now a firmly established working mantra, Amanda's journey progresses to Thailand and the beginning of this, the latest point on the map.

In 2010 Amanda took up a role at Shrewsbury International School Bangkok as the Vice-Principal and Head of Junior School. At the time, the Shrewsbury brand was still only 7 years old in Thailand and its international status was the first in the British school's almost 500 years of history. In its pursuit of expansion and educational excellence overseas, it's certainly no over-dramatisation to say much rested on the success of this venture.

With Amanda in charge of the junior school, Shrewsbury International's reputation for inspiring and achieving excellence grew. So much so, that waiting lists for their primary facility became the norm and thus, in 2018, a second campus was opened to accommodate the need with Amanda leading the team.

Shrewsbury City Campus is a purpose built primary school in the heart of Bangkok. It reflects the changing requirements of education and its facilities have been purpose built with the younger learner in mind without having to compete with the demands of teenage pupils.

Amanda and her team spent countless meetings with architects designing a school environment they were proud of. Now in its third year of successful operations, it has grown to over 350 students and is yet another accolade on a growing list. Amanda credits the school's success to the same core threads of equality, fairness and compassion which have followed her through her career:

“Children are known by their name here and so are their families. The same applies to the team of amazing staff; I will always opt for a

we can expect the same dedication to this role as any of her previous commitments – and this dedication brings with it an agenda of tolerance and a strong determination to ensure everyone has the right to meet their fullest potential:

“I am keen to raise awareness of any inequalities I see as well as support the creation of an open culture; a culture where individuals are empowered to recognise and challenge inappropriate and unacceptable behaviours in themselves and others”

And so, after 30 years in education, the honour of accomplishing beacon school status and a lead role in the creation of an entire new school; what's next?

“A bakery in my hometown of Morecambe” she jokes “Amanda's Macrons”.

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strongly affiliative working relationship. That has always and will always be my preference. Managing a team of committed people who can understand and share in a vision is very important”.

The school's remarkable growth is all the more impressive given the backdrop of increasing competition and a global pandemic. But then Amanda isn't new to challenges and isn't one to give up on one either.

In 2021 Amanda was awarded a seat on the board of directors of the BCCT. It's fair to say



Amanda reads to students in City Campus Library