

# Building Momentum

DR TIM KAISER is no stranger to Hong Kong or to CDNIS, joining the school as an English teacher soon after moving here back in 1994. Today, he's the incoming Head of School for 2023/24. We chat to him about his approach to the role, how the school has changed over time, and what's on the horizon.

## Where are you from originally?

I'm from Canada, from a very underpopulated part of the country with open spaces and wide vistas – very different from Hong Kong. The weather in summer is beautiful but the winters can be brutal. I had a great upbringing in Canada so it's always nice to go back and connect with my roots. I just spent some lovely weeks there this summer.

## Why did you move to Hong Kong?

For love! My wife is from Hong Kong and I followed her here in 1994 when she was a student in Canada; we were married soon after. I found my first job in Hong Kong and I've been here ever since.

## Tell us a bit about your time at CDNIS.

This is my 28th year at the school. When I joined, we were operating out of three rented campuses spread across Hong Kong island. Those first few years were exciting times, as we not only moved to the campus here in Aberdeen but we also celebrated our first graduating class soon after moving.



When I think back to the original Borrett Road campus where I taught – it was in the former British military hospital – there are some wonderful memories. We were a small start-up school with a real pioneering spirit, but there were always question marks: will there be a future for the school? What does that look like? And what kind of programmes can we deliver for the kids? I feel we answered those questions really well. It was exciting to be part of the early stages of the school's development.

## How has the school changed since then?

Moving to the campus here was vital for our future success. We've always been good at building a strong community, and having us all on one campus under one roof was pivotal in our continued success.

It led to some ambitious programmes, too. With our first graduating class, we had the Ontario diploma, which we were able to offer through the Ontario Ministry of Education. Then the IB was introduced a few years after that – and not just for Grade 11 and 12 students, but for all levels. We're one of the few schools that does the PYP, the MYP and the DP for every single student in the school. That was a huge undertaking.

We added a fantastic arts centre 15 years ago that has beautiful tailor-made classrooms, and a 600-seat auditorium and performance stage that would be the envy of any school in the world.

## What are you looking forward to most in your new role of Head of School?

With the fragmentation of society and the isolation of the past few years felt by students, teachers and parents, a key goal for me is to help bring the community back together. It's a piece that has been missing – and something this school has done so well through the years.



That will take some work, but I think people are ready for it – even hungry for it. Through activities and events, we can build bridges and watch the momentum start to grow. And we'll be happy to see that. The recent Jo Di Bona art project gave us that "flavour" again – it was a great project and it came at the right time. We'll build on the positivity around that – and not just around art but around being together and celebrating good things.

#### **What do you think students enjoy most about CDNIS?**

Balance. Schools can be a grind, and especially in Asia there can be a pressure-cooker environment. We aim to keep the academic focus but release the academic pressure – and I think that's what students appreciate the most. They're allowed a chance to see more of themselves in the world, whether it's through contributions to the arts or to the community, or through sports participation or something else. So, while I believe we can stake the claim that we are an elite academic school, that's not all we are. We produce outstanding citizens who contribute to all areas of society, and I believe we do this because of balance.

I also hear from a lot of people that we're a happy school – including from families doing tours who might have visited 10 schools or more. I'm grateful for this, because I think it shows that we haven't lost that aspect as we've grown in size. People in general are genuinely happy to be here – staff, students and families alike – and they want to contribute to the community.

#### **What are some exciting things coming up for the school this year or beyond?**

I have to credit our outgoing head Dr Jane Camblin who was insistent that during COVID we didn't put our head in the sand and hibernate, that we keep moving. That's why we have some really exciting projects on the go now. We're adding a new nursery programme, which means we'll have two-year-olds as CDNIS students for the first time in August 2024. And the bilingual Chinese and English programme that started in Early Years last year will continue this year, and we'll be adding the programme at an additional grade level each year until it's in place all the way through the Lower School. It's a very exciting and important development for families.

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#### **What are a couple of things you like best about Hong Kong?**

Having just spent four weeks in Canada, I can reflect on what I appreciate about Hong Kong and the region. Transportation here is second to none; it's amazing to be able to get around the city so easily – we're all so dependent on cars in Canada, and it's such a burden on the environment. Then there's the food, obviously, and also the opportunity to get involved in whatever you'd like to get involved in – there's an eclectic and

interesting mix of things going on. I like the weather here, too. Yes, it's a furnace for a few months but it's also lovely for such a big part of the year. Finally, it's a very green city, with so much exciting nature and wildlife. If you haven't spent much time here, you might not realise that.

#### **What are some things you like doing outside of school?**

It's a busy job and I wish I had a little more time to develop other interests. The arts has always fascinated me, and I have always enjoyed writing; I hope to get back into it again. I'm also a casual hiker (rather than a disciplined hiker!). *e.*

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