

# ■ SPECIAL REPORT ■

# Bridging the cultural gap

YCIS blends eastern and western traditions to offer a holistic learning experience, writes **John Brennan**



Hong Kong's Financial Secretary John Tsang Chun-wah and winner Yew Chung International School student Alice Wang Yanqiu attended the prestigious 2016 Harvard Book Prize & Scholarship event.

According to Cathy Ben-David, head of marketing and admissions, Yew Chung International School of Hong Kong (YCIS) aims to blend the best of the cultural influences that have helped to forge modern Hong Kong.

"We strive to unite the best elements of eastern and western traditions and practices, the growth of the individual and the inquiring mind, as well as developing a sense of personal responsibility and the social welfare of all," Ben-David explains.

Yew Chung was established in 1932, with the secondary section added in the 1990s. The YCIS Secondary campus is located next to Kowloon Tong MTR station.

"Yew Chung is committed to educating the whole person, from infancy through secondary education," Ben-David says.

"Our holistic approach to education involves co-operation with parents, family, community and the world around us."

Rather than being taught within a single programme throughout their secondary school education at YCIS, the students' studies progress through the curricula of different international bodies.

"The YCIS curriculum is designed to be developmentally appropriate for each age level," Ben-David says. "It is rooted in a bilingual education that utilises instructional and information technology, and fuses both western and Chinese philosophies for character formation."

So, while Year 7 to 9 students in YCIS's Lower Secondary (Middle School) follow an internationalised version of the National Curriculum of England, by Years 12 and 13 they are studying for the International Baccalaureate Diploma (IB Diploma).

In Year 10, students join the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) two-year course. This culminates with the Cambridge International Examinations and is seen as ideal preparation for the IB Diploma Programme.

The switch in curricula between Years 11 and 12 is not considered to involve any significant change in learning style, as independence and self-reliance are prerequisites for the complete four-year Upper Secondary section.

However, the IB Programme is more challenging in terms of content and depth of knowledge, as well as in the research skills that are required.

In the 2016 IB Diploma exams, a total of 19 YCIS students gained 40 points or more, with 44 being the highest score achieved. The maximum possible points total is 45.

The average score of IB exam candidates from YCIS was 35.4, compared to a world average of

30.07 points, and 100 per cent of YCIS candidates passed the exam.

Since YCIS first offered the IB Diploma Programme in 2000, all the school's graduates from the programme have been accepted by local and overseas universities.

In the 2016 IGCSE examinations, two YCIS students received straight As (A\* and A) in 11 subjects, three received 10 straight As, and another eight students earned nine top grades.

Ben-David says the YCIS secondary campus is now moving towards teaching in flexible learning communities. "This enables a range of seating and gathering learning arrangements to meet the tasks at hand. In 2017-18, the Global Learning Centre, an inspiring multi-purpose media centre for continued learning, will be opened."

In Years 7-11 there are a maximum of 25 students per class, and in Years 12-13 this drops to a maximum of 20.

Ben-David says YCIS welcomes applications from eligible students of all nationalities, cultures, and educational and language backgrounds, so long as they share and support the values of YCIS that shape the school's community.

"Students must display an aptitude for success and an ability to embrace our teaching and learning philosophy."

While YCIS secondary education begins in Year 7, students who complete Primary Year 6 in the local education system can apply for entry to Year 8. The school also welcomes students to enter Year 10, for the start of the two-year IGCSE Cambridge International Examinations course.

The next point of entry is Year 12, for the beginning of the two-year IB Diploma programme.

YCIS's secondary fees range from HK\$188,230 to HK\$192,540, but scholarships, consisting of a partial, or full, tuition fee waiver for the given academic year or years, are available in a range of categories. These include Overall Achievement, Music and Performing Arts, Art and Design, and Sports, among others.

Students may apply for a scholarship in up to two categories, and YCIS's Scholarship Panel reviews all supporting documents - such as letters of recommendation and evidence of the students' talents and achievements. They will also meet with applicants for a face-to-face interview.

The scholarship scheme has been open to enrolled students for many years, but from the 2015-2016 academic year it has been extended



**Yew Chung is committed to educating the whole person, from infancy through secondary education**

CATHY BEN-DAVID

to not only cover external and potential secondary school candidates, but to also provide this support for multiple years.

To retain a multi-year scholarship, students must maintain a good attendance record and display a commitment to the school community, as well as to their own studies.

Beyond scholarships, families that encounter the type of financial difficulties which could jeopardise their child's ability to attend school, can seek assistance.

When it comes to making an application for a place at YCIS, Ben-David has some words of advice for parents.

"We encourage the parents of prospective students to join one of our Secondary Information Sessions, or a private tour, to ensure they are well informed about our school philosophy, expectations and school community. We value home-school partnerships throughout the learning journey of the child; hence, we are eager to encourage the start of this partnership."



Cathy Ben-David