

POSITIVE RELOCATION

Riviera Insider talks to two of the region's leading institutions for children aged between three and 18: Mougins School and the International School of Monaco.

By ELSA CARPENTER

How a school can help a whole family settle in

It could be just a few kilometres or maybe you've moved from the other side of the world, but whatever the distance and regardless of the reason, changing schools will almost certainly shake up the routine of any child.

"That's why choosing the right international school when relocating is of prime importance," says the headmaster of Mougins School, Brian Hickmore. "[The school] should give a child the ability to pursue their education within a familiar curriculum, despite changing countries, and allow them to retain a certain stability whilst adapting to a new environment." Angela Godfrey, the Head of Admissions for the International School of Monaco, strongly encourages visiting a prospective school: "It is a vital part of the admissions process and virtually all new students and their parents visit ISM well before enrolment. You will see learning going on in the classrooms and get a feel for the very dynamic atmosphere as well as the culture and philosophy of our school. It's important for prospective parents that they feel our school is right for their child."

A visit to a school is, of course, the best way to 'judge if it will suit your child', as Mougins School's headmaster agrees, but there are also some core questions that he believes should be asked in person or by correspondence if you are unable to make the trip.

"So much depends on the atmosphere amongst the staff and students, and the welcome one receives," he explains. "Does the admissions department spend time with the family, show an interest in the student as an individual and give realistic answers to any questions they may have? Is the headmaster prepared to take the time to see you? Are you able to see classes at work and view the facilities? Is extra tuition given to students for whom English is a second language or who have learning difficulties? How much importance is placed on subjects that are not purely academic, such as sport, music, art, theatre? Although the academic achievements of a student are important, it's vital to remember that other qualities will form the confident young adult ready to face the challenges that lie ahead." Measuring one school's academic success record against another's may seem like an obvious indicator of its quality as an education establishment, but it isn't always as simple as that.

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ISM, for example, expects all applicants (except the youngest) to sit a placement test.

"This helps us to get to know the student better, plan for any additional support he or she might need and find out what interests them," says ISM Director Francis Gianni. "The IGCSE and IB Diploma programmes in the Secondary School are rigorous courses of study and an entrance test is essential. However, we are not a selective school, even though our students obtain grades well above average. The interviews are helpful for both parties as sometime students discover new courses they hadn't thought of studying, and the aim is to get the best possible 'fit' for the student, especially for the IB Diploma courses."

Mougins School's headmaster says, "When researching

results it is worth bearing in mind that, at an international school, students may not be studying in their maternal language. Most schools will ask for previous student reports in order to assess the child, who may also need to do written tests. Some are selective, only admitting students of a certain academic level, which tends to assure excellent results. On the other hand, non-selective schools will accept students of varying academic levels and excellent results from these institutions would indicate dedicated teaching.” He argues that learning a new language – and thus the ability to communicate in two, three or even four languages – is an ‘important facet of international education’.

“Receiving an education in an international environment teaches a child that there should be no racial barriers or discrimination, and that it’s our differences which make each and every one of us special,” he continues. “The experience opens up the world as children learn about cultures other than their own and become the ‘global nomads’ of today.”

Like ISM, Mougins School is certainly well-versed in receiving children of different cultures and backgrounds, but its headmaster and board are also conscious of helping parents settle in: “Any choice of school needs careful thought as it can have an impact on the whole family. Children have a facility to adapt that does not always come so easily to adults and the change can be challenging for parents who are busy dealing with the daily hurdles of life in a foreign language with which they may not be familiar. A welcoming community where parents can have social interaction – and involvement in the activities of the school – can facilitate that integration.”

Both Mougins School and ISM run parent teacher associations, enabling parents new to the school environment to meet with their peers and become an active part of student life. At ISM, all parents are automatically members of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and are encouraged to become active participants by becoming a Class Representative, for example, or by helping out on the Welcome Committee and Library Committee, and by volunteering at the many events run by the PTA, such as a holiday crafts fairs, and many social events, explains Godfrey.

“Our annual Summer Fête rounds off the year with a wonderful international buffet catered by the parents with delicious goodies from all over the world. Our parents can also lend their professional expertise as guest speakers, notably at the annual Careers Day when they come and inspire our students in a whole range of future careers they might not yet have thought about. Our PTA’s Welcome Team speaks many different languages, which helps new parents settle in and reassures our immensely diverse international families. Early in the school year, we organise a series of coffee mornings and a very popular ‘Happy Hour’ – an informal cocktail party for staff and parents where newcomers quickly make new friends. They also meet our Board of Trustees in an informal setting. Really, there are lots of ways to become involved!” ▀

STUDENT & STAFF WELL-BEING

The International School of Monaco’s Lindsay Mackenzie-Wright talks about her role as Director of Student and Staff Well-being.



Why is it important to have a member of the faculty dedicated to student and staff well-being?

In our school community we believe in developing trust and empathy with students, parents and staff and we work effectively in a spirit of collaboration with all members of the school community. This is important that students know they have a support network where they have a voice, and a professional body that not only supports their academic progress, but also their welfare and psychological wellbeing. These two elements go hand-in-hand with helping students achieve the very best they can. Students are at the heart of everything we do at ISM.

How are you supporting students and staff in their day-to-day?

Our students have a positive, nurturing atmosphere in which they learn. They have teachers who provide a strong academic programme, but yet balance that with a supportive and encouraging environment whereby all students can excel. We have a school-wide Personal, Social & Health

Education programme in which thematic topics are taught and embedded into our school curriculum. These topics can include healthy living, responsibility, internet awareness, bullying, peer pressure and many more topical issues. Our teachers are supported through professional development, both internal and external, and are supported with their classroom learning in a very well-resourced school.

What about children who are new to the school, having perhaps just started out or recently transferred?

New students have an induction day when they visit the school to meet with their teachers and other new students. Therefore, when they arrive on their first day, they feel more prepared and have met some other students in the same position. We also provide ‘buddies’ for new students, who take care of them during this transitional period. All teachers are on-hand to help new students settle in, and communication is frequent between home and school. In an international setting such as ours, our students are open-minded and excited to welcome new children into our ISM school community.

How important is it for parents to be communicating with their child’s school?

We believe that all students have the possibility to shine, whether academically, through the arts, sports or through our Enrichment programme. At ISM, we foster an inclusive education where communication is paramount to the progress of the child. It is only with this partnership between school and home that the potential of all our students can be met. The support network at school promotes positive interactions between school and the student, which is equally as important as between school and home. Any child who may not be meeting their expected potential will have this support network to help put strategies in place to ensure the child has the right learning approaches to ensure their best work.