

Admissions FAQ

1. What is the main difference between IB and A levels and which is better for access to university?

- For IB, students study six subjects from different categories. These will include English, Mathematics, and Science but there is an element of choice across subjects and in terms of level within each subject. There is also a Theory of Knowledge paper and a central Research Essay or project.
- At A level, students typically study three or four subjects.
- A levels suit those who want to focus on particular areas. The IB is wider and suits those who want to have that broader academic education.
- Universities are familiar with both systems and there is no real advantage in taking one rather than the other route. Both are accepted by the top UK universities.

2. What do the entry tests for UK schools involve?

This varies with each age group. Many now use a UK-designed standardised test as part of the initial process. This is age-adjusted and adaptive. It covers Verbal Reasoning, Mathematical Reasoning, and Non-Verbal (spatial awareness). It also includes a short English essay.

Then schools will ask for school reports and a report from us.

After that the younger students will typically have to take the ISEB Common Pre-test or an individual assessment. Some of these can be taken in Hong Kong but a number of schools expect you to visit.

Some schools will make a decision based on these tests, while others will have specific subject-based exam.

At 16+ the entry route is simpler; either common tests in English, Maths, Science etc or else a choice of two or three subjects, typically those being studied at A level or at Higher Level of the IB.

3. How does the style of boarding vary from school to school?

Some schools offer “full-boarding”, i.e. all students will stay in the school for the full 7-day week. Others will offer 5-day boarding where most of the UK-based pupils go home for weekends. There are also lots that have a flexible approach whereby pupils can go home or stay with relatives on occasional weekends.

The quality of boarding facilities has improved hugely in recent years but there is still a big difference between schools.

The quality of food has also improved greatly!

4. How is bullying and safety dealt with in schools?

Schools are very sensitive to the well-being of pupils and there is zero-tolerance of bullying while all schools recognise that there is always the potential for it to happen. Pastoral support by pupils and staff is part of every school’s policy and schools put a lot of time and resources into this area. As a result, bullying is not a major issue in UK schools and the Pastoral team can then focus on the wider happiness and well-being of their pupils. Every boarding House will have a Housemaster or Housemistress and a team of ‘Tutors’ who are academic members of staff specifically tasked with looking after a group of pupils. Older pupils will also act as mentors. Every Boarding House will also have a Matron who looks after everything from medical issue to laundry, cleaning etc.

In the US, schools are located in very safe areas and security is the first priority for all boarding schools. Boarding students have to sign in and out to leave school only with a list of people who are approved beforehand by the parents. Each dorm has multiple members of faculty and student leaders who are there to support students and ensure their wellbeing and happiness.

5. Are single sex schools better than mixed/co-ed schools?

The short answer is no. There are excellent examples of both. The choice is often governed by parents but we would encourage families to consider both.

6. What type of student are schools looking for?

They want variety and diversity, i.e. students who will contribute to the wider community of the school, engage with what is on offer, and add to the culture of the school. They are always hunting for students who have a passion or a genuine interest in something or some activity. This could be sport, Art, Music, hobbies, drama, building things, making films.....anything. They want more than simply highly-trained pupils. Even in the world of music they will be hunting for real musicality rather than just qualifications. A passion or love of some activity is often more important than qualifications.

7. Can my child take classes or enroll in programs outside of school?

As community is a big part of the boarding school experience, classes and extracurricular commitments that take up significant time outside of school is frowned upon. Some schools do partner with outside organizations for school sponsored activities so be sure to ask about those if it fits in with your child's interests and passions.