



# Where's French in an international school?

## Choosing secondary education in a foreign country is a unique challenge

Choosing the right secondary school is one of the most important decisions a parent will ever make. And expat parents have a unique question to face - do they send their child to a French school for complete immersion in their adopted country, or do they opt for an international school to maintain their native language while learning either an English-based curriculum or a mixture of the two?

What may come as a surprise to many (or to those who do not have school age children), is that French still plays a major role in international schools. For example, the International Bilingual School of Provence (IBS) follows the French National Curriculum in lower school in subjects like history, geography and biology, but they are taught bilingually in French and English. By the time students reach year 12 and 13, there are two sections: the French - which prepares

for the French Baccalauréat, and the English - which prepares for the International Baccalaureate (IB) section. "We are one of only 10 schools in France accredited to offer the IB and have had the programme in place for 11 years now with great success," says Christine Balandier-Brown, head of the lower school.

Similarly, EBICA provides the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) and A-Levels for the English programme, and the French National Curriculum for the French programme. From 2015, they too will be offering the IB curriculum.

Even if French does not form a major part of the curriculum, students still benefit from choice. According to the International School of Nice, "At the IBDP level, students who choose French or their native language as their first language are rewarded with a bilingual diploma."

The key words appear to be



choice and options.

School hours is also a hot topic at the moment, and unlike the 4.5 day at French schools, international secondary schools adhere to a traditional five-day school week.

"Bilingual curriculum is challenging and therefore our students are at school all week," says EBICA headmaster Andy Hill. "However, one must realise that the quality of education is more important than just hours in class and we use this time to engage students in a more holistic

understanding of local heritage, students participate in cultural visits and local and national excursions."

Fellow students also have an important role to play.

"As our student body consists of 50% French students, our international pupils have far more exposure to the culture in and out of school," says EBICA's Mr. Hill.

approach to education."

Meanwhile, there's a common misconception that students in international schools risk missing out on understanding the intricacies of the French culture in which they live. But the schools are quick to dismiss this.

"The students and staff at ISN often participate in French community activities such as the Jeux de Francophonie, La Semaine du Goût and la Téléthon," says David Johnson, Director of the International School of Nice (ISN). "To develop their

universities in Europe and North America."

"All of IBS students complete tertiary education, whether in a university or in a school (management, business etc.)," adds Mrs. Balandier-Brown.

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"Our school will offer the final year of high school in 2015, but it is a well-known fact that our students

"Our students gain a large portion of their social and cultural education thanks to the 50+ different nationalities which comprise our school community," agrees Mrs. Balandier-Brown from IBS. "We also provide school trips abroad, visits to museums and medieval villages, and we often host other schools and youth groups."

But surely the overriding concern parents have is their child's achievement. And this is where international school's stand out.

"Virtually all of ISN students go on to complete tertiary education," says Mr Johnson. "Most students choose to attend colleges and

who have transferred on have performed well in education systems and schools around the world," says Mr. Hill.

Similarly, Mougins School has a 100% pass rate at A-Level and enables entry into some of the most prestigious universities world-wide.

Living in a foreign country has its unique challenges, and choosing quality secondary education is right up there with employment and health. Schools are quick to reassure parents that an international education does not come at a risk to students' cultural growth. In fact, they say, it is quite the opposite.

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