

Education

International standards



Top achiever Gary Ho has proven that principal Paul Cho's belief in free choice yields good academic results.

Kelis Wong

FOR HONG KONG students, the two magic letters are IB. International Baccalaureate, to be precise. This year, a record 1,938 students took the IB diploma program.

Sebastien Barnard, who oversees the regional communications arm of International Baccalaureate Organization, has noticed a jump in Asian students taking its diploma program.

"We are seeing more and more schools adopting the IB program," he said. "Unlike other international examination boards, the IB gives the grades the students attained in their exams and coursework. Their score is their score. There are no limits set."

This year, 14 students achieved perfect scores. This may be a drop compared with 21 students last year but Hongkongers performed better than their peers worldwide — they had a pass rate of 96.54 percent and an average score of 35.21 out of the full 45.

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School in Sham Shui Po bagged two scholars with full marks — an impressive achievement considering it's only the second year that it is teaching the IB program.

Head principal Lau Siu-ling helped found the school in 2002. Having spent her whole career in public schools, Lau wanted to build a quality one — but she didn't plan to have the IB originally. She decided to give it a try because she felt it was in line with the teaching principles she wanted the school to have.

The school neither ranks its students in examinations, nor groups them into classes according to ability. Teachers rarely give out marks.

"It's pointless to force teachers to give out a 100 or 98 to tell the parents their children are doing well," Lau said. "You should trust your kids. We give out pop quizzes, but we don't let the parents know."

Lau invests much effort to keep the classes small. There are 56 students taking the IB program this year. The teaching staff to student ratio is one to two.

The benefits of small class teaching appeal to parents. Winston Wu Ying-jie's Australian-Chinese parents wanted their son to study at a more international school so they admitted him to Year Four after finding a public school in Tuen Mun not to their taste.

"I lagged behind especially in English. It took some time before I could do better," said Wu, who

found reading most challenging after the school switch. "Because the other students started reading English books very young, they had a higher level in terms of understanding."

The 17-year-old achieved the perfect mark and has been accepted by the University of Warwick to study international business management.

Wu's schoolmate, Adrian Ho Yik-sau, 18, got 43 marks and will be going to the University of Hong Kong to do medicine.

Ho, the son of Hong Kong parents, credits his good results to his teachers. "My friends who go to an English school can write reasonably well on Facebook, but they can't speak well," he said.

"IB doesn't recommend memorizing. The questions are not straightforward. They want you to think and check if you know the curriculum."

Hong Kong Chinese Christian Churches Union Logos Academy in Tseung Kwan O also bagged one full-mark student, two years into adopting the IB program. The school offers both the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education and the IB curricula. Its students are allowed to choose and this May, 26 selected the IB.

"When kids can choose what they want to learn, they will choose what they like most. This leads to a sense of ownership and better performance," said principal Paul Cho Hee-chuen.

The school has a relatively large class size — one teaching staff to 12 students, but most of the teachers have master or doctorate degrees.

The staff teach both HKDSE and the IB curricula, taking in the strengths of both systems and preparing the children for their first public exams.

Cho explained: "We drill them on past papers. When the teachers set the questions, they will also make reference to the past papers. But it's very important that the students feel confident in the school and in themselves."



Winston Wu, left, who achieved perfect scores, and schoolmate Adrian Ho, who got 44 marks, have both been accepted by top universities.

Gary Ho Han-chung, 17, had second thoughts when choosing the IB program two years ago because of the constant school assessments. "Assessment begins the moment you take IB. You need to submit assignments for internal assessment. For example, when you take the Chinese exam at an assessment center, it accounts only 60 percent of your final mark. The rest has already been completed at school."

But he persevered, believing that he had a better chance in the IB. He scored 44 marks and will be going to HKU to study medicine.

"I can choose to do each subject at a higher or lower level. Subjects that I'm good at, like mathematics or science, I can do a higher level. Subjects that I'm weak at, I can choose a standard level. I feel more at ease with the IB compared to the HKDSE, which forces everyone to take the same level."

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The right resume



Brighten Youth Education Centre

IN THE PAST couple of months high school and college graduation ceremonies have effectively unleashed millions of new graduates into the world of employment.

For many, it's time to face the real world of work for the first time.

Given such a scary prospect, we thought it would be a good idea to give all those eager new employees a hand with writing a brilliant resume. These techniques can also be of use to current students applying for internships, part-time jobs and other exciting opportunities.

New research has revealed that when a recruiter first looks at a resume, they spend an average of just six seconds scanning for key information (www.businessinsider.com/hiring-recruiters-read-resumes-2014-5).

In that brief period, what recruiters are looking for is your name, your current company and position, your start date at that company, your previous positions and dates, and your education information.

Your task is present the data in a clear and appealing way.

In order to do so, keep a visual hierarchy, ensure the resume is clear and concise, and avoid images or photographs (unless specifically requested by an employer) as they add nothing and disrupt the flow of the text.

While there may be no right or wrong way to compile a CV, certain details are essential including appropriate personal and contact information, education and qualifications, work history or experience, relevant skills for the job, references and, if space permits, other achievements, interests and hobbies.

Your references should come from previous employers or teachers if you have never had a job before, and it is polite to ask permission before using an individual as a referee.

All this data should run to no more than two sides of an A4 sheet of paper.

Employers don't want to know everything about you and nobody is so accomplished that they can't fit all this information succinctly and elegantly into the required space.

When writing your resume, understand the job description you are applying for and tailor-make your CV. This can be as simple as changing a few relevant areas but don't merely send the same document for different roles at different companies and hope recruiters won't notice.

This method is lazy and a waste of time as you almost certainly won't get the job.

Many people capable of working in different roles actually maintain different CVs as starting templates, which should be kept updated at all times.

There's a lot of fantastic further advice online for those compiling a CV for the first time (for example, career-advice.monster.co.uk/cvs-applications/cv-advice/what-are-the-classic-cv-mistakes-to-avoid/article.aspx), so do your research and put the time in.

Time spent now is a smart investment as you won't have to do application after application when you are continually rejected due to poor resume writing.

If you have any questions about our column, or the issues raised within it, please e-mail them to us: enquiry@englishlearning.edu.hk