

The re-opening of international schools

Dilemmas for parents & educators this academic year

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ISC Research, which produces market data and intelligence on the world's English-speaking international schools market, has tracked — and continues to track — the impact of COVID-19 on international schools throughout the pandemic. The country that has been watched most closely by the rest of the world is China as it was the first to face each new stage of the pandemic. As schools in China began to carefully and, in a phased approach, re-open their doors to students, there were several key concerns and challenges they faced, some of which they continue to face.

ISC Research field researchers based in China have been gathering intelligence from the international and private bilingual schools regularly to understand how reopening after coronavirus has impacted them. They were, to some extent, a laboratory for schools in the rest of the world. What schools in China faced, so many schools around the world faced a few weeks later.

PREPARING SAFE SPACES

Most international and private bilingual schools in China prepared their re-opening plans with significant changes to facilities management. These included the introduction of systems limiting campus access such as temperature checks and green QR health codes, heightened cleaning and sanitizing

regimes, systems to manage pupil gatherings such as staggered dining and online assemblies broadcast to classrooms, protocols for managing suspected virus cases during the school day, and changes to school transport plans.

GAPS IN LEARNING

There was an impact on learning for every child, whatever their age. The cancellation of public examinations created many concerns for students and their parents.

“Many parents of younger primary age children were just as concerned about lost learning in the earlier years, as were parents with older students facing exams.”

Despite the significant efforts of teachers, students, and their parents, online learning, regardless of how well it was planned and executed, could not replicate the classroom experience. Many opportunities had been missed and this impacted



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how parents viewed their school needs; some wanting extended learning days, reduced fees or rebates, and clear understanding of how the school would support their child's needs. Many schools have worked closely with parents to provide them and their children with the supplementary support and the clear communication that was essential during this time.

IMPACT ON WELLBEING CONTINUES

Concerns for the wellbeing of students, staff, and the wider school community will continue for an extended period. Schools are talking about how they are supporting those students and their families (as well as teaching staff) who have felt particularly isolated and lonely, those who have financial worries, those who will have medical concerns and a new fear of becoming ill, those who are mourning the death of a loved one whose funeral they were unable to attend due to the pandemic restrictions, and those who missed a significant family event such as a postponed wedding, a deferred graduation ceremony, or other major event. For an extended period, there will still be limited opportunities to mix and socialise and this too will have an impact on people's wellbeing.

Children will continue to be limited in their activities in the school setting as some restrictions remain. So much of the non-academic enriching curriculum, such as school productions and sports competitions which are at the centre of developing 'the whole child', may be missing for a time as some restrictions remain in place.

keep their child with them at, or close to home and sending them to their local international or private school instead.

Most schools have given serious consideration to their education continuity plans for the future.

Many schools have identified the online platforms that work best for them, and have now developed systems, structures, and practices to ensure that all members of their school community are well-placed should there be any form of disruption to learning in the future.

ISC Research continues to gather data about the impact of COVID-19 on international schools including school enrolments for the 2020-2021 academic year. Full analysis of enrolment data will be released by ISC Research in January which will show how the international schools market has fared in the short-term. As this school year continues, more understanding of the full impact of campus closures on students and their learning will be collected. This, plus the impact on local economies, will inform the future prospects for international schools.

More information about the impact of coronavirus on international schools is available from ISC Research at www.iscresearch.com

WILL INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS SURVIVE?

Some school leaders questioned how many families will still be able to afford premium international and private school fees, but the research collected so far this year indicates a strong confidence within international school enrolments, with some schools seeing increased enrolment.

Several international schools were highlighted by the global media for their ability to respond quickly and flexibly when their campuses closed and to deliver exceptional standards of distance learning which has raised awareness of the calibre of international schools. Also, as a result of the coronavirus, some families, particularly in China, have been more cautious about sending their child to an overseas boarding school, preferring to