



Why UK independent schools are in demand in China

Britain's independent schools are gathering strength in China, says Richard Gaskell, Schools Director at ISC Research



ABOVE: Richard Gaskell: "The development of international Chinese private schools aligned to reputable independent school brands from Britain looks highly likely to expand"

The desire for children to learn a British-style of education in the language of English is a growing phenomenon amongst aspirational Chinese parents. However, no longer are they turning to traditional boarding options overseas for their youngsters. Instead, they are seeking out the private international schools that are opening throughout China.

The wealthiest parents, and those who want the academic prestige and extensive opportunities that a British independent school brand can give to its students, are signing their child up to the likes of Wellington College Bilingual Shanghai the moment they are born.

Only a few years ago, such a possibility was unheard of as Western schools in China were restricted to expatriates and Chinese children holding foreign passports. Today, the potential for local Chinese children to study A-levels and Western-style learning skills at a reputable school in a growing number of cities throughout China is now a possibility. New regulations issued last year (2017) suggest that the Chinese Government is embracing private education for the first time and enabling more opportunities for foreign investment of private international education to occur.

Although still heavily regulated and segmented, the development of international Chinese private schools aligned to reputable independent school brands from Britain looks highly likely to expand.

A number of new British independent schools already under construction provide evidence of this. Due to open this year (September 2018) is Durham School in Tianjin, St Bee's School in Shenzhen, Adcote School (and Myddelton College) in Shanghai, Nanwai King's College School in Wuxi, Lucton School in Shanghai, and Wycombe Abbey International School in Hangzhou. Uppingham School is due to open in 2019, and Westminster School in 2020. All of these schools will be set up to accept Chinese children.

This February, Prime Minister Theresa May's trip to China saw several school developments announced.

A new partnership was formalised between Malvern College International and authorities in Chengdu where Malvern will open its sixth international school in 2019.

In another agreement during the trade visit, Reigate Grammar School signed a partnership to open five K-12 boarding schools for local Chinese children. These schools, the first of which will be in Nanjing in 2020, will teach China's national curriculum followed by A-levels in both Chinese and English languages, enriched with a British ethos. Reigate Grammar School will provide the educational expertise and quality assurance; a partnership model that has already been adopted by several independent schools from Britain. Hurtwood House, for example, already operates similar management support for HD Ningbo which has three private bilingual schools for Chinese children in Zhejiang, Beijing and Shanghai.

Britain's largest independent pre-school provider, Busy Bees, also announced a new agreement to open 32 British-style nurseries in China by 2023. The first Busy Bees nursery opened there in September 2017 and five more will open this year in partnership with China's Oriental Cambridge Education Group. With limited restrictions on schooling under the age of five, many local Chinese parents are grabbing this opportunity for their children to develop their English language and Western learning skills from an early age. As a result, demand at all international pre-schools is high.

Nevertheless, this appears to be just the start. The 2018 ISC Research Global Opportunities Report, which identifies countries with significant investment and development potential for international schools, predicts dramatic growth for China. In its forecasts, ISC says that the number of students studying at English-medium, international schools in China will increase from 475,000 (September 2017) to 881,000 within just five years, and that total annual income from tuition fees will increase from USD \$6bn today to at least USD \$9bn over that same time. **IE**

E: richard.gaskell@iscresearch.com
W: iscresearch.com