

Identifying Quality: Finding The Best International School For Expatriate Children

As professionals in the global mobility sector will agree, selecting a school for the children of expatriate parents is usually a high-priority task. Highlighting a list of international schools in any one destination is sometimes straightforward, but 'finding the right fit' and ensuring that the school is suitable for the needs of the child or children can be more challenging. Minimal disruption ensuring education continuity should be the ultimate goal but naturally parents will also want to ensure future academic excellence for their children.

Shared Characteristics

The international schools sector has grown and evolved at a fast rate, meaning typical host destinations will have a range of schools that offer the same curriculum as the child or children of an expat family has been studying in their previous country. This will make for a smoother transition to a new school as the student does not have to come to terms with a completely new syllabus. However, a school offering the UK curriculum, for example, does not necessarily mean that it matches up to a good independent school in the UK in terms of quality. Beyond curriculum, and the national ethos of the school, there are some benchmarks that you can look out for to help you make the right choice especially if you are looking for a quality international school that is distinctively British.

The independent school model, popular throughout the UK, has been exported with success around the world. Well-known British independent schools like Harrow, Dulwich and Wycombe Abbey have all opened franchises internationally (according to the UK Independent Schools Council, 46 campuses overseas are operated by ISC schools). Other standalone British international schools, establishing their presence in the market for the first time, tend to follow this model. Typically, a quality British school overseas will be characterised by the implementation of

a house system, high levels of safeguarding, the provision of a first-class pastoral care system and access to a wide range of co-curricular activities for students. Schools that are members of the Council of British International Schools (COBIS) are a mix of EYFS, Primary, Secondary, Cross-Phase or even Sixth Form so one size does not fit all. Like UK independent schools, COBIS schools have a keen focus on the development of the whole child and this certainly goes a long way to develop and nurture qualities such as resilience, adaptability, self-confidence, tolerance and internationally mindedness.

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Obviously, these are all valuable skills and attributes in an ever increasingly fast-paced and competitive world.

High Achievers

To become a member of COBIS, schools must either offer the National Curriculum for England and Wales or the International Baccalaureate (IB). As well as access to a high-level of pastoral care and co-curricular activities, academic excellence is encouraged and nurtured with British schools overseas regularly featuring in the list of top 20 independent schools by exam results for both GCSEs and A-levels. Of those that responded to the 2016 COBIS Annual Research Survey, 95% of 2015/16 leavers went on to study at university with more than 50% of those leavers choosing to study in a UK university.

Of responding schools, the average GCSE A*/A pass rate was 52% and the A*-C pass rate was 92%, considerably higher when compared to the average rates of 22% (A*/A) and 70.8% (A*-C) in schools in England. In schools that offer the IB, results are similarly impressive. The IB pass rate for responding COBIS schools in our latest research survey was 96% and the average score 33.8. 13% of students passed the IB Diploma with a score of 40 points or more. To put this into context, the average pass rate for all schools taking the IB Diploma worldwide was 80.8%.

A Global Outlook

While COBIS schools are committed to instilling a British ethos and an understanding of British culture in the classroom, less and less students who choose to attend a British international school overseas consider themselves British and 'third culture kids' are common. International schools were once known for exclusively hosting the children of expatriates but more and more student bodies are dominated by children native to the host country whose affluent parents see a British school, for example, as a gateway to a British university. The number of nationalities within any individual school ranges from 2 to 99, according to the COBIS Annual Research Survey and on average, 62% of students in responding COBIS schools do not have English as their mother tongue. With that in mind, support for EAL (English as an Additional Language) students is strong and 86% of COBIS schools worldwide

have provisions for non-native speakers of English. We want to eventually ensure that this figure stands at 100% as it is generally accepted that the identification of talented and gifted students can sometimes be hampered if English is not their first language. That's why our new accreditation system, The Patron's Accreditation and Compliance, specifically asks schools to ensure that curricula benefits students with learning difficulties as well as those students who are gifted and talented.

Parents can be sure that any school that holds 'Member' status with COBIS is compliant with our standards for recruitment, student welfare, facilities, governance, ethos and values, and if applicable, boarding.

A Mark Of Quality

The introduction of a new accreditation scheme this year by COBIS for the best British international schools is part of our efforts to ensure families who are relocating do not have a challenging or difficult decision to make when it comes to choosing the most suitable British school for their children. We are delighted that The Patron's Accreditation and Compliance scheme bears the name of our Patron, HRH The Duke of York, KG and over the course of the next five years every COBIS school will have been through the process. The new scheme focuses heavily on school development and improvement rather than a reliance on the one-off snapshot inspection model. Parents can be sure that any school that holds 'Member' status with COBIS is compliant with our standards for recruitment, student welfare, facilities, governance, ethos and values, and if applicable, boarding. In addition, schools that

Country	Number of COBIS schools	Country	Number of COBIS schools
Ascension Island	1	Morocco	1
Azerbaijan	2	Myanmar	1
Bangladesh	1	Nepal	1
Belgium	4	Netherlands	2
Bermuda	1	Nigeria	45
Brazil	2	Norway	2
Brunei	1	Oman	2
Bulgaria	5	Pakistan	1
Cameroon	1	Panama	1
China	8	Philippines	2
Croatia	2	Poland	9
Cyprus	1	Portugal	3
Czech Republic	10	Qatar	5
Denmark	1	Republic of Congo	1
Egypt	7	Republic of Korea	1
France	2	Romania	13
Georgia	2	Russia	4
Germany	2	Saudi Arabia	1
Greece	4	Serbia	2
Hong Kong	1	Sierra Leone	1
Hungary	3	Slovakia	1
India	2	Slovenia	1
Indonesia	1	Spain	14
Italy	6	Sweden	1
Japan	2	Switzerland	6
Kazakhstan	2	Tanzania	1
Kenya	7	Thailand	1
Kingdom of Bahrain	1	Tunisia	1
Kuwait	4	Turkey	3
Kyrgyzstan	1	USA	4
Luxembourg	1	Uganda	1
Madagascar	1	Ukraine	1
Malawi	2	United Arab Emirates	16
Malaysia	4	United Kingdom	8
Mauritius	1	Uzbekistan	1
Mexico	1	Venezuela	1
Mongolia	2	Vietnam	2
Montenegro	1	Zambia	5

Where British international schools that are members of COBIS are located.
Source: COBIS Annual Research Survey 2016

are 'Patron's Accredited' members of COBIS will have been tested against those standards but also against standards in learning and teaching, leadership, communication, and extra-curricular activities. Schools that have achieved a successful report following a BSO (British Schools Overseas) inspection, the inspection scheme run by the UK Department for Education (DfE), are known as 'Accredited Members' of COBIS. The BSO reports of all COBIS schools to have participated in the scheme are available to read on the COBIS website.

Our website, www.cobis.org.uk, lists all of our member schools by category so you can search for COBIS schools in your chosen country and then filter by our membership tiers; 'Patron's Accredited', 'COBIS Member' and 'Accredited (BSO)'. Further information on COBIS and its family of schools can be found on social media via Twitter (@cobisorg), Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram. Although COBIS is the only global association for international British schools overseas, there are other like-minded associations operating in the sector and membership of bodies such as FOBISIA, CIS and BSME alongside COBIS membership can signal that the school's quality is widely recognised.



COLIN BELL

Colin Bell is CEO at the Council of British International Schools (COBIS), the global association for international British schools overseas. COBIS exists to serve and support British schools in 80 countries worldwide spread throughout 5 continents. The association also helps commercial companies such as global mobility firms to connect with schools via the COBIS Supporting Membership subscription service which offers introductions and digital marketing opportunities. More information can be found at www.cobis.org.uk. Colin tweets @COBIS_CEO