

ISLAMIC SCHOOL IN HONG KONG

The impressive and imposing Masjid Structure in the heart of the shopping area and a very busy Nathan Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong, attracted us to offer our salaah there. We were also curious to walk through this masjid to learn of the religious services that it offers the Muslims living in this area. The five daily prayers are offered and the weekly Jummah is well attended. During Ramadan elaborate preparations are made for iftar and also providing supper to all those who will not reach home in time to break their fast.

Through the kind services of Dr Ali Jing Jiang, a retired Muslim educationist, living in Auckland, we were able to visit the only Muslim School in Hong Kong. We were dropped off by the taxi at the doors of the Islamic Kasim Tuet Memorial College, in the suburb of Chaiwan to be welcomed and warmly received by Br. Yusuf Yu, the Principal of this Islamic College. After the usual exchange of greetings and well wishing we were seated in the comfortable lounge area of his office. Over a delicious cup of Chinese tea we commenced posing the many questions to learn more about this Islamic School, its structure, the services, training and guidance that it offers the pupils living in that area.

Br. Yusuf please tell us something about the School buildings?

At the beginning of the school year in 1977 we moved into this beautiful, modern and spacious premises, which was built by the Government. You must have noticed that we do not have much land in Hong Kong, with the result our office blocks and housing stretch upwards towards the skies, ending in 30, 40 and 50 story buildings. Similarly, our 7-floor school building is dwarfed by the many high-rise apartments surrounding the school. We have 26 classrooms and 20 specialist rooms found in most of the secondary schools and still have sufficient space for playgrounds and open areas. All the rooms are air-conditioned and connected to the school computer server by broadband cables, enabling our students to have educational access to the world.

Tell us about your governing body and how are standards maintained?

The Chinese Muslim Cultural and Fraternal Association is responsible for the day to day running of the school. Their responsibility for the appointment of staff and the curricular development takes place within the core regulations of the government. They have also been instrumental in the raising of additional funds for additional programmes that would supplement and enhance the effectiveness of the tuition given in a classroom situation. Last year they raised an amount of 6 million H\$ for additional equipment for the school. The Parent-Teacher Association which was set up in 1996 has been making a concerted effort over the years in providing an all-round education to produce students who are fit to take up their responsible positions in this society. There is also a very active Islamic Affairs Committee responsible for promoting the Islamic lifestyle and its social values inside the school.

The Chinese Government has been very co-operative and supportive. All the salaries, the replacement of equipment are the responsibility of the Government. They have even gone to the extent of bearing all the cost of the initial set up of the school. The school has regular checks by the Education Management Board who conduct on site visits and inspections to evaluate the standard of the school. They have yearly visits to the school with a major inspection every 3 to 5 years. Their major inspections are very thorough. They even conduct discussions and interview with parents, pupils, the teaching staff, the administration team, the supervisor as well as the Principal. They also carry out lesson observations to proffer guidance to the teachers.

How large is your staff and what are their functions and qualifications?

In addition to the Principal, we have 2 Vice Principals, 63 Teachers (12 Panel Heads or Senior Teachers), 1 IT Co-ordinator, 6 Support Staff, and 4 Teacher assistants. In addition to the teaching staff we also have 6 Clerical Office staff and 13 Janitors. I have been blessed by having a well-trained and experienced staff to work with. This school is proud to announce that we have one person at Doctoral level, 10 at post graduate Masters level and the majority, that is, 66% of the staff have a Bachelors degree. The 11% with a teacher's certificate are also endeavouring to improve their qualifications. We are fortunate to have 58% of the staff with over 10 years of teaching experience, 11% with over 6 years experience and only 16% have between 1 to 5 years of teaching experience.

Is there a shortage of teachers in Hong Kong?

We did not experience a shortage of staff in the past as the teachers are well paid compared to what industry and commerce can offer. The teachers commence teaching with a monthly salary of H\$ 15,000 and within 17 years they can earn up to H\$35,000. Principals could earn from H\$ 50,000 to H\$ 60,000 per month depending on their qualifications and experience. The commercial world's starting wage is only H\$6,000 per month. The training colleges have a strict admission requirement as they are in the position to provide quality education to the more dedicated service provider.

Now tell us about your pupils?

This Islamic School serves this area and the pupils attending this school are from both Muslim and non-Muslim homes. Our non-Muslim population is larger than the Muslim pupils and similarly the greater number of staff members are non-Muslim. We only have 11 staff members who are Muslim. However we work in very close relationship with the rest of the staff and we have also developed a very cordial relationship with all the parents of our pupils.

In the mid year survey conducted by the Parent-Teacher's Association among the parents of the S1 or new entrants of the school reflected the following results. The parent perception of the school had become very positive, where 75% of the parents improved their perception of the school while 42% of the parents noted a marked improvement in the behaviour of their children and 44% of the parents admitted that their children were more hardworking and liked attending this school even for its after

curricular activities. The reasons for these positive results stemmed from a number of factors, such as, the caring nature of the teachers, their patience and fairness in dealing with all students, good communications with all parents, general attention to good discipline and the development of the whole person and the excellent facilities that are well maintained.

Although our school day stretches from 8.10 am to 4.15 pm, some children are allowed to remain at school under supervision until 6 pm, when most of the working parents would come home. They play sport or complete their homework. The parents appreciate this additional helpful facility as the parents are aware that their children are in caring, responsible hands instead of aimlessly hanging around street corners or gaming shops.

Do you have a discipline problem?

We do have a few discipline problems by attention seekers. We nip this in the bud with the willing help and cooperation of parents who follow up and stress the true value of strict discipline. We need all our pupils to have a positive outlook on life, and a keen sense of self worth. For 4 days our pupils participate in both individual and group activities at the Training Camp at Whampoa Liberation Army School. This vigorous activity gives them a taste of strenuous physical training and experience a discipline under a very strict regime. Here they not only learn the importance of discipline but also acquire useful skills which boosts their self-confidence.

What curricular subjects do you offer your students?

The following curricular subjects are compulsory and have to be taken by all students from S1 to the final year in S7: Islam, Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics, Applied and Pure Mathematics in year S6 and S7 and Physical Education. The other subjects taken at different levels are: Computer Science, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Integrated Science, Chinese History, History, Economics, Geography, Social Studies, Music, art and Putonghua.

There are also a number of educational programs we purchased to supplement and enhance the various curricular subjects. Teachers are encouraged to use IT in teaching; the Parent Teacher Association have spent H\$ 100,000 in purchasing a user licence for the popular SuccessMaker English program; pupils are also involved in a reading culture so that they acquire the habit of reading to learn and project learning assignments where the pupils' interest is aroused in learning, as well as develop the ability to manage their own learning.

What Extra Curricular subjects are you students engaged in?

We have a variety of extra Curricular activities, as we firmly believe that we need to develop a child that would be capable of fitting into this hard working society and be able to contribute towards its welfare.

We get pupils involved in actual community service projects such as the Junior Police Call, Volunteers Club, Red Cross and Community Youth Clubs. Their actual participation in the community gives them a greater sense of responsibility to the bigger society. They are encouraged to take part in competitions and exhibitions to give them greater confidence and awareness of what is happening in their environment. Their participation in the Horticultural Exhibition and Environmental Protection Club created that additional care and respect of their environment.

What about sporting activities for your students?

The pupils have found the adventure based activities very stimulating in leadership development, team spirit bonding, building of confidence and respect for all. The annual sports day and the weekly sports activities are aimed at developing a sense of personal fulfilment, increased self-confidence and the rewarding results of good team work. They also sharpen their competitive skills. Their muscular co-ordination results in increased reaction time and they develop a sporting discipline of respecting your opponent.

How is Islam taught in your school?

The Islamic Affairs Committee has been very active in compiling 3 Text books which are used in the secondary school. These text books titled "The Knowledge of Islam" cover topics of a general nature and are taught to all students. In volume 1 the following topics are handled: General Survey on Islam; The Connotation of Islam; Muslim Community in Hong Kong; The Oneness of the Creator of the Universe; Allah and His Prophets; Allah and His Last Prophet; The Fundamentals of Islamic Belief; Adam the Ancestor of Human Race; Prophet Nur; Prophet Ibrahim and Prophet Ismail.

In the second Volume we have: Islam Found Its Way to China; Prophet Musa; Prophet Isa; The Last Prophet of Allah: Muhammed; (Pictures: Hajj in Makkah and the Ten Ethnic Groups of Muslims in China); The Formation of Qur'an; The Five Pillars of Islamic Rituals; The Islamic Way of Life for Muslims and Piety and Respect to Parents.

The third volume deals with a: Brief History of Islam; The First Khalifah Abu Bakr (632-634); The Second Khalifah Omar (634-644); The Third Khalifah Othman (644-656); The Forth Khalifah Ali (656-661); The Umayyads Dynasty (661-750); The Abbas Dynasty (750-1258); The Turkish Othman Empire (1290-1922); Muslim Resistance to Colonialism during the 20th Century and The Islamic Contributions to World Civilization

During Ramadan the Muslim children would observe all their fast days. However, during one day in the month of Ramadan all students of the school will be required to fast or go hungry for 7 hours. This act is to physically make all of them aware of the pangs of hunger that the poor and less privilege feel on a

hungry stomach. This day is also used to collect funds for the poorer children living on the outskirts, to pay their school fees . In the poorer areas it cost H\$150 ((NZ\$30) to keep one child at school for the whole year. When all the money is collected, a lump sum amount is passed on to the school in the poorer areas. In return the recipient school would get their children to make a flag of goodwill and thanks. Over 20 flags of goodwill were found in the foyer of the school building to be a constant reminder to all the pupils of their valuable contribution to the needy, as well as the many children they helped to get some formal education.

A room is set-aside in the school for prayers, where the Muslim children offer their prayers and also to attend the weekly congregational Jummah Salat. In addition to the above curriculum, we also have other religious activities such as the visit to the Mosque and a fun fare day to celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr.

The Islamic Affairs Committee contributes to the educational content of the Islamic Website called the "Light of Islam". The teachers and helpers are very involved in updating this website as well as provide Chinese translations to international audio and sub-titles to video programs on Islam. This site has become very popular as they get about 900 hits on their website per day.

Are you fulfilling the school's mission from an Islamic perspective?

The schools motto consists of four key Chinese characters, namely, Prolific, Academic, Affectionate and Co-operate. As you are aware, these basic principles fit in very well with the peace- loving spirit of Islamic teachings.