

## INDIAN COMMUNITY



Advertorial

# Holistic education aimed at shaping great characters

**N**owadays, more and more education practitioners, experts and even parents are of the view that placing emphasis on cognitive and intellectual skills only in a didactic system is no longer enough – these things have to be complemented with social, emotional as well as spiritual skills.

This explains why a holistic education combining knowledge with real-life experiences and social engagement is gaining popularity these days.

The Gandhi Memorial Intercontinental School (GMIS) in Jakarta is one school offering such holistic education to its students.

Through this approach, GMIS nurtures not only students' minds but also their empathy and social engagement, using not just textbooks and conventional classroom teaching, but also a practicum and even monthly stage plays performed by all grades, from preschool to grade 12.

GMIS' tradition in carrying out this mission goes a long way: The school was established under the name Gandhi Memorial International School in 1950, and it is the oldest international school in the country, set up just before another one, called Jakarta International School (now called Jakarta Intercultural School) was established in 1951.

Initially, GMIS was founded to cater to children of diplomats, United Nation officials, government

officials and expatriates. Around 1998, the Indonesian government liberalized international education and allowed students from Indonesian parents to also enroll at international schools.

"It's actually beneficial for the country. Wealthy parents could send their children to Europe, Australia, the United States, Singapore and Hong Kong. But the middle class, who might not be able to afford the education, could get international-class education here," GMIS principal Ashok Pal Singh told *The Jakarta Post* in a recent interview.

The school changed its name to itself Gandhi Memorial Intercontinental School recently, in compliance with Education and Culture Ministerial Decree No. 31/2014 on the cooperation and management of foreign education institutions, which prohibits schools from using the label 'international.'

The school offers all four International Baccalaureate programs authorized by Geneva, along with complete Cambridge and National examinations and Higher Secondary school certification from India.

The school is truly global in its outlook. It is a non-denominational school, meaning that it is not based on tenets from any particular religion. GMIS, however, encourages its students to appreciate the traditions of all religions.

"We celebrate Idul Fitri and Christmas. We also celebrate the



Gandhi Memorial Intercultural School principal Ashok Pal Singh.

Chinese New Year with the lion dance and encourage students to give *angpaos* (money enclosed in envelopes) to the dancers. We are preparing them to become global citizens who think globally," Singh explained.

#### INDONESIAN CULTURAL ROOTS

Meanwhile, Indonesian cultural roots are also retained by the school.

"We teach Pancasila (the state ideology), and also encourage our students to practice their mother tongues," Singh said. Quite different from certain schools that do not allow their students to speak their mother tongues and make English their default, mandatory language. This is why, when you visit GMIS and immerse yourself in it, you will soon become aware that most students there are fluent in a minimum of three languages.

According to Singh, these practices are based on a Gandhian motto: "Allow the wind of all cultures to blow in my house, I will keep the windows of my house open. I allow the wind of all the cultures to come in and I respect that. But I keep my feet firmly planted on the ground, because I don't want to be blown away by any cultures, either Western



Gandhi Memorial Intercultural School principal Ashok Pal Singh poses for a photograph with his students.

or Eastern".

In order to instill critical thinking skills, the school always encourages its students to ask questions, but sometimes in an unconventional way. Students who might be shy, for example, are encouraged to just send the questions through the WhatsApp messenger, emails or even Post-it sticky notes that are stuck on the classroom whiteboards.

"Teachers have to honor the students' questions and they cannot be angry, 'why are you asking so many questions?'" the principal said, while laughing.

Furthermore, the principal explained he believed education should not be confined to textbooks but must go further than that through wisdom attained directly from real-life experiences. This is where the school's prolific Community Service and Personal Projects come into play.

For the school's monthly plays, where students from preschool to grade 12 mesmerize the audience by bringing complex works, such as Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Bumi Manusia* (This Earth of Mankind) and Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*, to life onstage, they also raise funds to donate necessary materials to those

in need.

The school also sends these students to orphanages or houses where social services are being rendered to assess the needs of those who live there. Students often donate wheelchairs or many other things, based on their need assessment.

"We are also supporting foundations like the Nurul Falah orphanage, the Rawinala school for multiple disabilities, and many more. They're our friends," Singh said.

The most moving experience was on Aug. 10 last year during the Never Give Up charity concert featuring excellent musicians from the Rawinala school, to whom they donated Rp 64 million (US\$ 4,784.69). The students from preschool to grade 12 were so moved by the musicians' performance at their school that they decided to purchase some high-quality instruments for these performers, who were relying on low-quality ones.

When these musicians returned to the school to perform with their newly acquired musical instruments, they brought tears to everyone's eyes, because those present felt so good by doing good to others in need.

The students also took part in 'Clean Up Jakarta drive,' where they cleared city streets of trash. They were also once asked to help an old man on the street and assess his needs. They returned to the school with the idea of buying the old man a bike, some instant coffee and even a gallon of water for him to make a living of 'Starbikes,' selling coffee on the streets to people stuck in traffic.

"This is how we help students understand the difficulties of life, rather than allow them to just stay in their comfort zone. We also encourage them to live simple lives instead of lavish ones," Singh said.

The compassion and connection with other human beings eventually extends to these children reaching out to protect the environment and animals. They embody the Gandhian motto of 'simple living, high thinking.' And they do, they reach out to those closest to them. For instance, they now prepare cat food across the school compound, because they have noticed that there are many stray cats roaming around the area," he said.

"Character-building is very important. We are constantly working on that," Singh concluded.



Gandhi Memorial Intercultural School principal Ashok Pal Singh poses for a photograph with students from different countries.

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