



Hiroshima International School in 2010-2011

(revised : September 2010)

You are reading this because you are wondering about working at HIS. What follows is intended to help you build up a picture of the school that will help you decide whether or not it is what you are looking for.

The school was founded in 1962. In 1986 it moved to its current location in a suburban area towards to the north of the city. (If you have Google Earth, it's at 34° 28'21.90" N / 132° 31'54.65" E.)

About a third of the teaching staff live within walking distance of the school. The others live closer to the centre of the city and then have something like a thirty-minute commute each way. There are regular public buses but some teachers choose to cycle to work. Others come by car.

The school premises are in pretty good shape. We have recently completed a rolling programme of redecoration and renovation which has seen (almost!) every room in the school acquiring a fresh coat of paint, new wallpaper, a new carpet and so on. The school is air-conditioned throughout. (And if you've been in Japan in the summer you'll know why.) The major headache is space. Usable land in Japan is very limited and expansive playgrounds and sports fields are impossible luxuries.

Happily, the school was purpose-designed and the design is still very effective. The Library is a bit small but the Gym is excellent for a school of this size. A purpose-built Music Room, a large Art Room (of 100 m²), a well-equipped IT Lab, a Dance Studio and a Science Lab are the principal specialist rooms. But, for all its qualities, the school population has outgrown the 1986 building and in 2005 an (ugly) temporary prefabricated building was erected at the edge of the playground. A second temporary building (just as ugly) was built in August 2007. Both are perfectly comfortable and functional but they were never intended to be a long-term solution. What will replace both will be a new – permanent – wing but it will be a few more years before we can afford that.

The school tries to be an *authentic* international school. In other words, we don't want to be an American or British (or anyone else's) school abroad. Of course, the expatriate teachers come from the UK, Australia, the US, Canada and New Zealand (at the last count) but we hope the prevailing ethos is international rather than being beholden to any one national educational tradition.

HIS has been authorised to offer the IB PYP and Diploma programmes since 2005 and we introduced IGCSEs in 2007. We are accredited by CIS and NEASC. Many years ago HIS was a founding member of the Japan Council of International Schools (JCIS).

The school has never been large but it passed the 150 student mark for the first time in January 2007 and this reflected pretty steady growth over recent years. In fact, the school almost doubled in size during the first half of this decade. Part of this was due to the addition of High School Grades but there was also steady organic growth in the younger age groups. But the 2008-2009 worldwide economic recession hit us quite hard and enrolment fell in 2010. We hope – and expect – that it will rise again.

At the time of writing there are almost twenty nationalities represented within the student body. A largest minority is Japanese and they make up a third of our numbers. Another third or so have one Japanese parent and another from elsewhere. Unsurprisingly, there are many students from Korea and then we have the familiar spectrum of expatriate children from all over the world. Most families – both local and expatriate – are involved in commerce and manufacturing although Hiroshima is a major university town and several parents are in academia.

In terms of governance, the school actually has two Boards – a Board of Directors and a Board of Trustees. This is required by the legal framework under which the school was established. A minority of members (of each Board) are parents. Four members of the Board of Trustees are elected by the teaching staff. The school is a non-profit making foundation.

The management and administration of the school consists of a Principal (Head of School), an Operations Manager and three full-time Japanese support staff. The Principal (who is British) joined the school in August 2006 and the Operations Manager (who is Japanese) has worked in the school in various capacities for many years.

There are currently seventeen full-time teachers, two part-time teachers and two teacher assistants. Turnover is usually unexceptional and in 2010 was very low. (Two teachers left; two were hired.)

Recent challenges for the school have included developing the PYP and Diploma programmes and establishing IGCSEs. We are also still in the early years of having a High School and establishing the necessary curriculum and ethos. The school's first graduating class sat our first ever IB Diploma exams in May of 2007 and by now four cohorts have successfully graduated. (In fact, this year – 2010 – our first High School graduates have successfully graduated from university. Time flies!)

The Primary School is far more established. The first half of this decade was a period of considerable change and transition as we implemented the IB PYP. But that is largely behind us and we are enjoying a period of consolidation. No further significant initiatives are planned for the immediate future. Rather, we are concentrating on doing well what it is we do.

Hiroshima is a charming city in which to live. Although the population is more than one million it feels like a much smaller and more intimate town. It is quite 'green' with numerous parks and broad avenues. There are several art galleries, numerous musical venues and lots of sporting opportunities including professional baseball and football (soccer) teams. English-language films are shown widely but the city lacks a good English-language bookshop. You can eat extremely well and there is lots of nightlife for those who want it. An excellent English-language website www.gethiroshima.com lets you know what's on. Between ten and twenty thousand expatriates live in the city and teachers can easily establish a social life independent of the school. In the winter there is skiing just an hour out of town and in the summer there are beaches (including some good surfing) an easy drive away. The crime rate is very low, the air is clean and the climate is very hot and humid in the summer, cold (though not bitterly so) in winter and quite delightful at all other times. The sun shines a lot (even in winter) and it doesn't rain excessively.

The danger of earthquakes cannot be ignored but Hiroshima is not considered to be a high-risk area by Japanese standards. Each year two or three typhoons pass through but, with a bit of common sense, they are not dangerous. There are bears, wild boars and snakes in the forests but you would have to be very unlucky or very stupid to be injured by them. All in all, life here is very, very safe.

English is not very widely spoken (don't assume that a waitress, taxi driver or even hotel receptionist will understand you) but that's a good motivation to learn a bit of Japanese – which is actually not as hard as might be assumed. But, with or without a common language, you'll find that the people of Hiroshima are among the most polite, courteous, generous, patient, helpful and charming you have ever encountered. It is really a pleasure and a privilege to live and work here.

Peter MacKenzie
Principal