

There are various ways which a school can approach the matter of education. Some of them emphasise the discipline of learning and the importance of passing exams. Others are considered more radical in that they encourage their 'students' to decide what they want to learn about or be involved in. On the right there are the traditionalists with their rigid approach and discipline. And, on the left, an almost experimental approach that places value on letting young children make their own choices.

# MAKING

A broad and aware approach to education

Between these two extremes are a hundred shades of grey. But the majority of schools sensibly settle a little to the right or left of centre. And don't forget this is Thailand. Not only do international schools have to satisfy the explicit conditions for Thai registration but they also have to take on board all the requirements to qualify for international standing, too. One such school is the Samui Centre of Learning, in Lamai. And when you discover that their motto is 'Educating the Mind, Nurturing the Soul', then you'll get a good idea of what their particular approach to education is all about.



It's a bright and sunny school, currently catering for children between 2 and 14 years of age. Younger children follow a play-based curriculum that's firmly-rooted in the British Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (EYFS) which provides them with a nurturing learning environment within which they feel happy and secure.

And as the students progress there's a seamless move towards the English National Curriculum (Key Stages 1, 2 and 3). The framework of

# THE GRADE

at the **Samui Centre of Learning.**

the school's overall curriculum is clearly-defined and well-established. But the nature of any framework is that it demands to be built upon. And the approach to this is what makes one school differ from another.

For example, every school has separate departments: English, Maths, Science and so on. But the Samui Centre of Learning has not only the expected English Department but there's also an 'EAL' Department – English And Languages. This is where students receive one-on-one help to strengthen their language skills. And you'll find English, French, Thai and Mandarin incorporated into the teaching.





*The old swimming pool is being converted into a greenhouse filled with organic compost, with recycled plastic bottles forming a translucent roof.*

And then there's the aspect that might, for the sake of convenience, be called 'Green'. It's a small word in itself but is, as the school's Managing Director, Emma Dyas, explained, a vital element in the curriculum. "It's really important that children grow up to be not only aware of themselves but also to be equally aware of the world around them. To begin with, we're in Thailand and so all children are taught the Thai language and learn about Thai culture and traditions. But we need to increase global awareness, too. All of us have a part to play in working towards the conservation of natural resources. And so we've now integrated two related areas of study into our curriculum – these are being introduced across the board; from maths to science, from art to ICT. The first is the awareness of what harm is being done to our marine environment; Samui is an island, after all. And the second is an entire program of conservation and recycling activities in line with the 'Eco Schools' project."

This is an international movement that's driven by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE). It's a detailed approach to integrating environmental awareness into a school's curriculum, and with a rigorous program in seven stages. "We set off in this direction about two years ago," Emma revealed, "when we subscribed to 'Project Aware', the movement to improve our marine environment. But now we've expanded this. The Eco Schools project could easily form the basis for the teaching of every subject. But one step at a time! We're now in the process of knitting selective aspects of this into the overall curriculum as a permanent and ongoing part of each child's education. And in the future this will expand and be developed further."

Every student has a 'Green Pack'. It's full of information, tasks and projects and with goals that need to be achieved. Natural waste-products are composted in



stages. The old swimming pool is being converted into a greenhouse filled with organic compost, with recycled plastic bottles forming a translucent roof. There's an organic vegetable garden. Scrap tyres are being collected and recycled into planters. The long wall that borders the play area is being transformed into an extensive mural made from woven strips of discarded plastic carrier bags. Waste paper is being collected and recycled. There's even a plan to convert used cooking oil into bio-diesel fuel. And students are documenting their progress by creating regular pod-casts as well as contributing to an ongoing BLOG.

But they're not working in isolation. John Ens is chairman of the 'Green Committee', an offshoot of the Koh Samui branch of the Thai Hotels Association, which runs and supports various eco-projects. And he's



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also an admirer of what's going on at the Samui Centre of Learning. "The only effective way to contend with our ever-increasing domestic and commercial waste production is to reduce it, not try to find ways to get rid of it," John proclaimed. "It's the 'three Rs' of conservation: Reduce, Re-use and Recycle. And the way to do this is through education, which we wholeheartedly support."

Which, to many of us, is the essence of common sense. However, in this case there's a snag. Gaining full admission to the FEE's Eco Schools' project is a classic 'Catch 22' situation. Applications for new membership can only occur in a country where there is already at least one established Eco Schools' member. There are none at all in Thailand. Therefore, how could there ever be any? But Emma and her staff are not deterred.

"We're going ahead regardless," she said with a purposeful gleam in her eye. "We'll continue to expand this environmental awareness into our overall curriculum. We'll subscribe to every stage that's outlined by the FEE and continue to press them for membership. But the philosophy of it all is just too important to turn our backs on, just for the sake of an extra stamp on our letterhead. Above and beyond all of this we have to aim to educate our children so that they grow up with this awareness."

We can only bow our heads and applaud. When it comes to education, and to the curriculum decided upon by a school, there are indeed many shades of grey. But the Samui Centre of Learning has a firm foundation and a child-centred approach. And so perhaps in their case we should instead talk about their 'many shades of green'?

*Rob De Wet*

For further information, telephone 0 7741 8789 or visit their website: [www.samuicentreoflearning.com](http://www.samuicentreoflearning.com)