

# Education

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**H**ow wonderful it would be if your children could have an opportunity to learn at least four languages in school.

Today, many Thai parents in Bangkok who aim to provide their offspring with an education that affords them the opportunity to master foreign-language skills and develop a global mindset — the prime requirements for success in the current competitive global environment — can choose from a large number of international schools.

Among these academic institutions, many of which have only recently sprung up in rapid succession, there is one that has been following the Swiss curriculum for 46 years.

"We are the only school in Thailand that provides perhaps the best education using the German language [as the medium of instruction]," Dr Daniel Halter, director of Ruamrudee International School Swiss Section, says proudly.

Originally founded as Deutschsprachige Schule Bangkok in 1963, the facility was integrated with Ruamrudee International School (RIS) in 1984 to become Ruamrudee International School Swiss Section. Its motto is "Qualität, Kompetenz, Motivation", or "Quality, Competency, Motivation" in English.

The school is officially recognised as a private school under the Swiss Federation's laws and is under the supervision of the Canton of Lucerne, Switzerland. Germany supports the school financially by officially providing and sponsoring four teachers. The school is part of the global networks of Swiss Schools Abroad and German Schools Abroad and is managed by the Swiss Educational Association, Bangkok. All degrees provided by the school are recognised in the Swiss and German education systems and worldwide.

Currently, the school has approximately 250 students and 40 teachers, plus about 20 afternoon-course teachers.

## Learning opportunities

"It is an advantage for Thailand to have [a different] international curriculum here to provide [Thai] parents with an option. Primarily, we are a school for German-speaking parents or German speaking-students, but we would like to attract more Thai students as well," says Mr Halter.

"The main advantage of our curriculum is that students get a diploma upon completion of Grade 12, which can be used in support of an application to enter any university in the world. In particular, the diploma is unconditionally recognised by all the universities in Germany, Switzerland and Austria, and the holders do not have to pass a special examination to gain entry," he says.

The students at RIS Swiss Section are required to study at least three languages: German, English and French. In addition, it is compulsory for students of Thai nationality to learn Thai.

"We have German as our first language, English as the second language, French as a mandatory language, and all Thai students have to learn Thai. On top of these languages, we offer Mandarin, Spanish and Latin," explains Mr Halter. He says the school also provides extra classes and extra teachers to tutor students who may find German a bit difficult.

The school director discloses further that the school employs an approach in education that is different from those of most Asian schools. For example, the teaching and learning process encour-



Under the close supervision of Esther Lehmann, students at Ruamrudee International School Swiss Section work on an assignment during a mathematics class.

## Germanic delight

The RIS Swiss Section offers a unique opportunity for students to master multiple European languages

Story and photo by PURICH TRIVITAYAKHUN

ages students to develop and form liberal thinking and critical thinking, as well as encourages them to have a high level of confidence at an early age.

"Since we're a small school, sometimes kindergarten children study together with students in Grade 12. In this way, our children learn to be self-responsible and helpful, and to support each other," says Esther Lehmann, a teacher at RIS Swiss Section.

Stefan Nyffenegger, another teacher, says the curriculum employs a holistic approach whereby students do not only develop their cognitive abilities, but also benefit from the school's focus on art, handicrafts and music. The curriculum develops the student's "heart, hands and soul", says the teacher.

## Study path

RIS Swiss Section provides five levels of education — kindergarten, basic level, primary school, Secondary I and Secondary II.

Students can either start school at the age of three at the kindergarten level or proceed to the basic level at the age of five. Thereafter, they progress on to primary school — Grades 2 to 6.

After students complete primary school, they enter Secondary I (Grades 7 to 10), which is divided into three programmes: Realschule, Sekundarschule and Untergymnasium.

Students are eligible to take one of these programmes in accordance with their academic performance while in Grades 5 and 6.

Realschule (Grades 7 to 9) prepares students to move on to vocational or professional training. The programme is for students who love the practical side of education. In Sekundarschule (Grades 7 to 10), students prepare to enrol in vocational and professional training courses, with a view to moving on to a college later. This second programme is for students who are competent in both theory and practice and possess a high motivation for self-learning.

According to Mr Halter, after graduation from Realschule and Sekundarschule, students can choose to go to Europe and pursue an education in a profession, transfer to neighbouring RIS or other international schools, or take the GED (General Educational Development) exam, which opens up the way to Thai universities and some US universities.

They can also repeat Grade 10 and try to pass the criteria for Gymnasium.

Finally, Untergymnasium (Grades 7 and 8) readies students for Gymnasium, or Secondary II. This programme is for students with university in mind. They must be highly intelligent and motivated to engage in independent study.

At Secondary II, or Gymnasium, (Grades 9 to 12), students have to indicate their preference for either another language or mathematics.

Their curriculum at this stage includes mandatory minors in five other subjects. After they graduate from Grade 12, they are awarded the "Bilingual Swiss Maturity", a certificate issued by the Swiss

Ministry of Education, which they can use to apply for enrolment in any university in the Western world.

## Broad knowledge

"Unlike the US curriculum where students can reduce the number of subjects towards the end according to their wishes or their talents, students in the Swiss curriculum are not allowed to do so," says Mr Halter.

Students are required to study a variety of subjects towards the end of their school days. "School is a great chance in life to widen horizons. Students can learn a lot of things up until the end of Grade 12, and then leave school with a broad range of knowledge and talents," Mr Halter suggests.

He adds that under this system, students are able to identify their strengths and weaknesses accurately. Students need to learn to deal with difficulties at an early age and not ignore them, especially if they have a really hard problem with their weak subjects.

"I think this system will create an advantage for all students," he says.

## Parents' perspectives

"Knowing only the English language is like looking at only half of the world. If we want to complete the cycle, we have to give equal attention to other prominent Western languages, too," says Vichien Nantasaksem, a father of two students enrolled in the RIS Swiss Section.

He enthusiastically encourages his children to explore the rest of the Western

world by letting them learn German and French.

"The school uses German as the primary language of instruction, accompanied by English. In the future, students will be able to learn French and Spanish, too. Thus, language diversity is one advantage for the students in the Swiss Section. In the future, other international students will only be able to use English, but my children will have unique language skills that would be very beneficial," says Suchart Chongkavinit.

Both of Mr Suchart's daughters are studying at the school. He anticipates sending them to continue their studies in a European country in the future.

One of his children used to study bilingual courses at a Thai school. "Now my children have more interest in learning, and they have more confidence in expressing themselves, compared to when they were at their old school," Mr Suchart comments.

"If parents want their children to have a multilingual capability and are looking for a small-scale, family-oriented school, I strongly recommend this school," Mr Suchart suggests.

Mr Vichien added that students do not necessarily have to continue their education overseas.

Their multiple-language skills and overall academic competence combine to give them ample opportunities to study at good institutions in Thailand as well.

For more information, visit [www.dssb.org](http://www.dssb.org).