HELP International School is located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The school was opened in 2014 as a result of government deregulation of education, creating increased opportunities for international schools. HELP International School offers the British curriculum from pre-school to A levels and appeals to middle income Malaysian families. Approximately 90% of its students are Malaysian, 10% are expatriate children, mostly from Indonesia, Thailand, Korea, India, Japan and Europe.

HELP International School is part of the HELP Group which also includes HELP University, HELP Academy, HELP College of Arts and Technology. The group takes a distinctly holistic approach to learning development and psychology.

Davina McCarthy is the Principal of HELP International School and she describes the reason why IPC is a part of the school:

Why IPC for HELP?

We considered a number of different curricula for HELP International School before it opened, but I had worked with the IPC in an international school in Kuwait and was able to explain to our board how much the children and teachers at my previous school had loved it and benefited from it. So, the IPC was with us as we prepared to open the school.

Knowing the IPC meant that I could talk openly to prospective parents about what a game-changer it was for my school in Kuwait. It became a big selling point for HELP, particularly amongst parents who want to educate their children in a way they themselves weren’t educated.

In our first year we had 500 students enrol, and in the second we had 1,000! We were, and continue to be, the fastest growing school in Kuala Lumpur as word spreads about what we do and how children learn.

We have now completed three years with the IPC and every year we’re getting better in the way we use it. In our second year of operation, we were inspected by SKIPS, Malaysia’s quality standards award for private education institutions and received the highest possible rating. It was such a surprise because we were such a new school. Amongst other things, the inspection team observed IPC lessons and loved what they saw.
In our school we celebrate and focus on learning skills as well as knowledge, and we do this using the IPC. It’s a learning approach that is very different to Malaysia’s state education system which is knowledge-based.

The IPC has brought relevance to all learning. The IPC themes help children to relate their learning to their life at home and to the wider world. It helps them to connect their learning to the big picture of their life and then expand upon that. The IPC is helping our children to really, really enjoy school; they are so enthusiastic!

The IPC gives students such a big skill set. They develop so many important soft skills such as collaboration, resilience, the ability to research effectively and in multiple ways, the skills of presenting. All these skills are constantly being practised within the IPC learning tasks.

The IPC also helps every child to develop self-confidence. Most Malaysian state schools revolve around a teacher-led environment. The IPC encourages children to think out-of-the-box, to share their ideas and to nurture them. These are all crucial soft skills that students will need throughout their future, and that universities today are looking for.

With the IPC, our students develop their own sense of the world and their place in it. It encourages them to form their own opinions, and to believe that they can make a positive change in the world. This comes directly from the work they do in the IPC units. For example, during the Habitats unit, the children learnt about unique habitats in their local area as well as in other areas of the world. The children used their knowledge and skills from the Habitats unit and other IPC units to plan and run a world wildlife event. It was entirely student led, involved the parents, and raised a huge amount of money.

The IPC has given the children a maturity to be able to think, plan and make such things happen, and an enthusiasm and sense of responsibility about their world. We embrace and celebrate every culture in a positive way and are very much an international school.

Learning to learn has become a culture in the school. We are gradually moving everyone; children, teachers and parents away from ‘who’s the best’ to ‘beginning, developing and mastering’. We have a lot of peer observation and sharing of best practice, both at student and teacher level.

I knew my staff would catch the IPC bug! Many of the teachers who have come to work at the school have
The core team makes the selection, and then the teachers assistants and language and specialist teachers join them for planning each half term.

**IPC within a blend of curricula**

We offer Cambridge Primary Curriculum for English, Maths and Science and make links to the IPC themes whenever we can. It's very easy to link literacy to IPC. Our library now buys books and resources relevant to our chosen units. It sets up a book corner for each year relevant to their current IPC theme. The children love this. We timetable Science from Year 4 for Cambridge, in addition to IPC as we take the Cambridge Checkpoint at the end of Year 6 and again in Year 9.

Our languages include Mandarin and Bahasa Malaysia. We offer Mandarin because we believe in a blend of Eastern and Western education philosophy. Parents are looking for a different way of education for their child, one that helps prepare them for higher education overseas. Here in Malaysia, we are required to teach Bahasa Malaysia (the Malaysian language). This follows a very flexible government curriculum which means we can link it to many of our IPC units. Getting our language teachers on board with the IPC themes was challenging in the first year but now, three years on, they like integrating the language learning wherever they can.

We have holistic approach to learning here at HELP and so we also offer the students lots of opportunities for Dance, Art, Drama and PE. Like the language teachers, we try to make our specialist teachers aware of the IPC themes each year group will be following and encourage them to link the learning whenever they can. For example, when our children worked on the IPC Myths and Legends unit, our drama teacher was often out in our amphitheatre doing Greek tragedies and stories with the children.

We have grown from 50 to 150 staff in just two years, and this year we're expanding again. In our first year, some teachers saw it as a risk coming to work with us, but this year it's been easy to recruit really good staff. Now teachers want to come and work at the school. Many have spotted our posts on Facebook showing IPC learning in action and can see that there's some great teaching and learning going on here.

**Connecting globally**

The IPC has helped our staff to think creatively and to think big in the way that we teach and learn. The core team makes the selection, and then the teachers assistants and language and specialist teachers join them for planning each half term.

**Teaching with the IPC**

We have 50% expatriate teachers and 50% Malaysian teachers here at HELP. Some of the expat teachers are quite new to the IPC but are British curriculum trained. Our local teachers have really embraced IPC because, with it, they have seen an engagement with students that they've never experienced before. Following the IPC learning approach has moved them away from the old-fashioned style of standing at the front of the classroom talking at the students, to enabling the students to lead their own learning. The IPC has shifted the role of the teacher to that of a facilitator placing the responsibility of the learning with the students.

We team up our teachers; two local teachers with two expatriate teachers for mentoring. Every week they sit down and plan together which is fantastic. The expat teachers are able to decipher the planning and explain it in a way that's accessible for the local teachers, while the Malaysian teachers are able to enrich the cultural experience and make sure the learning is relevant for the local students.

We have an open door policy about teachers coming into each other's classrooms. This took a while for some of the teachers to get used to, as originally they thought they were being inspected. But working together with the IPC is helping our staff to focus on the teaching and learning; coaching each other to be better professionals. It's a great thing to share good practice. The teachers also love planning the entry and exit points together and there have been some great ideas as a result!

Every year we have new staff, so we've had to train them pretty quickly in the IPC way of learning. That's where good year teams have been essential. The IPC units are chosen every year and at the end of the year they are reviewed. We ask the teachers whether they want a unit change and if they want to try something new.

The IPC has helped our staff to think creatively and to think big in the way that we teach and learn.
The International Primary Curriculum’s growing learning community includes schools in more than 90 countries around the world. Learning with the IPC means that children focus on a combination of academic, personal and international learning that is both exciting and challenging.

The aim of the IPC is to help every child enjoy learning a wide range of subjects and to develop an enquiring mind, the personal attributes that will help throughout teenage and adult years, and to develop a sense of their own nationality and culture, whilst developing a profound respect for the nationalities and cultures of others. Through the IPC approach to learning, children develop the knowledge, skills and understanding necessary to confidently face the world of tomorrow.

The IPC was introduced in 2000 and its continued development today ensures that children are learning a current and highly relevant curriculum based on the very latest research and understanding of how children learn.

The IPC is a part of Fieldwork Education which, since 1984, has been helping schools all around the world to develop children’s learning. For more information about the International Primary Curriculum visit www.greatlearning.com/ipc
Through technology and with the IPC, we are linking up with other people and communities in the world. And by working together as a staff, sharing our IPC teaching and learning experiences, we are all realising the global learning that is possible.

For example, as part of the IPC Migration unit one of our teachers organised a Skype for his class with another school in a mystery country (it was actually a school in the United States). The children had to ask children at the mystery school questions about their country and then try and work out what country they were in. It was a very positive way of children learning from their peers around the world. On another occasion, as part of the IPC Adventurers and Explorers unit, the teacher arranged to Skype with an Antarctic explorer so that the children could interview him personally. It was fantastic and very memorable learning!

We have also connected with a few IPC member schools within Malaysia and Singapore to enable our teachers to share best practice. We really value these opportunities and the teachers typically come back buzzing with ideas from these visits.

Looking to the future, we are hoping to link with other IPC member schools to focus on sustainability and ecological issues.

**Training teachers through the IPC**

We take a lot of fresh graduates from HELP University (and other local universities) as teaching assistants for the school, with the expectation that we will train them up ready for their teaching qualification within two years. This approach has been really successful for the students as well as the school. The teacher training happens in primary with the IPC. This gives the trainee teachers such a good launch into teaching because IPC is student-focused, and centres around enquiry and activity-based learning.

Many of our trainees then go off and do their PGCE with the University of Nottingham in Selangor and fly through it with merit. That’s partly down to what we do with them here, because the IPC approach is what educators like; they like the pedagogy behind it, and we do too!

As a result, we try and involve our families as much as possible so that they can see the learning in action. Exit points to each IPC unit are fantastic opportunities for parents to witness how their child has been developing skills and knowledge. It also helps them to realise that there are many different ways for children to record their work; not just writing in exercise books.

When parents come in to school for the exit points, they might see models that have been made, films that have been produced, or presentations by the children to record their learning. For example, as an exit point to the IPC Habitats unit, we held an exhibition where the Year 3 and 4 children explained to the parents the different habitat models that they had made. They talked about how they had researched the habitats and how they had created their models to scale. This way of involving the parents helps them to see not only the academic learning, but also how confident and excited the children are about the learning they have been doing. Most of our parents attended schools where they had a quite formal, traditional education, so seeing 8 and 9 year olds talking passionately about their learning really impresses them!

To involve the parents even more, we are also posting photographs of our learning in action online. This helps the parents because, even though most of them speak English as one of their main languages, there is sometimes a disconnect through the written word. It helps to supplement this with strong visual content. By seeing pictures of what their children are doing, they understand better and, as a result, more parents are able to talk to their children about their learning.

**Assessing for learning progress**

Parents can be very focused on assessment of learning and I am frequently asked: “how does my child rank in the year group?” We hold a number of parent workshops about how we assess for learning with the IPC, and how we know each child is making appropriate progress. A big learning curve for parents is that assessment can be done in many different ways and that there is real value in children peer-assessing each other.

It doesn’t take long for many of our parents to start commenting about how their child talks about their IPC learning. They like that the children tell them about the different ways they learn and often comment about how the children are learning together. This is very different to their own experience of school.
IPC students develop many soft skills. They develop the skills to support others, and to take various leadership roles within a group. They learn to make valued judgements of what they and their peers have done. These skills all come from learning in a collaborative way and parents quickly see the benefits of this.

There’s a positive buzz around the school because our children are so happy and contented. But we continually make sure that we developing our students academically too. Now some parents are sending their child to our school because other parents have told them about us and our way of learning.

**Advice for schools considering IPC**

For schools that are considering the IPC as a curriculum choice, particularly those international schools like us with a high percentage of children of local families, I’d say don’t be scared. Your parents will love the IPC once they understand it and start seeing it in action. Get them involved as much as you can.

Your success will only come from team effort. You need some great, open-minded teachers to get the IPC started. I’ve also got a very supportive board who are educationalists and like the ethos of the IPC.

Some schools choose IPC because it’s less expensive than other programmes. We chose it because we like the ethos, it links with the British curriculum, and the thematic approach is great; it takes the best of pedagogy and mixes it up. It also gives our children the confidence to work with, as well as stand out from their peers.

I can’t tell you how much we have enjoyed growing as a school with the IPC. It makes learning relevant for our children so they enjoy their education exponentially. It’s given them a real passion for learning.

**IPC and students with special education needs**

As an inclusive international school we have a significant intake of children with special education needs (SEN), including high-functioning autistic students and students with ADHD and dyslexia. IPC works well for high-functioning SEN students because much of the learning is collaborative which helps everyone to be involved.

IPC also encourages research and recording in ways that suit the needs and preferences of each student, including the use of technology. If an SEN student requires extra support, a teacher’s assistant will step in but we can see that all of our children, including those with special educational needs, benefit from and enjoy learning with the IPC.

Our Year 7’s have had three years of learning with the IPC in primary, and they want to continue with this approach into the high school. We can see how it has had a big impact on their ownership of their learning, and their engagement in learning.

We have also seen the impact on previous Year 7 children of going from a thematic learning approach to single-subject siloed studying. It is hard on the students and we believe they should be able to benefit from a more thematic, engaging approach to learning during their early secondary years.

It is for these reasons that we are now introducing this way of learning into Year 7 using the International Middle Years Curriculum. We trialled an IMYC unit and some of our teachers have had training too and are very enthusiastic. There aren’t many schools in South East Asia following the IMYC yet and we are very excited to be trail-blazing it in Kuala Lumpur.

We’re also excited to be working towards IPC accreditation. We see accreditation as a route towards a rigorous common goal for the school, providing clearly defined training and development opportunities for the staff and a focus to help us continually improve.