

International Schools

Fresh start: former senior staff from Canadian International School of Hong Kong bounce back with playgroup

Tin Hau campus offers first level of planned through-train education to grade 12 with lower fees

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Peace Chiu

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Two former senior staff of the Canadian International School of Hong Kong are heading a new non-profit school that offers parents significantly lower fees.

Dave McMaster left as headmaster of Canadian International School in Aberdeen at the end of his contract in 2014, citing a “consistent pattern” of interference from the chairman of the school governors and an “increasingly hostile environment”.

Kathy Nutting, former vice-principal of the primary section, was dismissed in 2015 after speaking out against management. She later filed a complaint at the Labour Tribunal against the school’s handling of her dismissal.



The pair now lead Fairchild Junior Academy, a playgroup in Tin Hau that offers the first level of a planned through-train education to grade 12.

A kindergarten in Sai Ying Pun is scheduled to open in the autumn pending licensing approval, followed by a primary school in two or three years, McMaster revealed, while a secondary school was also in the works.

McMaster, the academy’s head of school, said the fee for a three-year-old was HK\$70,000 for 10 months of classes. That compares to HK\$94,120 per year at Canadian International School.

While Fairchild currently does not have debentures, McMaster noted that it might consider this option at a later date if needed.

He said the playgroup promoted play and inquiry-based learning to children aged six months to four years.

The planned through-train format was intended to remove the stress of applying to various levels that was common in Hong Kong and to provide stability that might not be evident in some international schools currently.

He attributed the lower fees to financial backing by Fairchild Group, founded by Hong Kong-born Canadian businessman Thomas Fung Wing-fat, the eldest son of Fung King-hey, a co-founder of Sun Hung Kai & Co. McMaster added that the school was not looking to make profits but to give back to Hong Kong through education.

The fees were set to ensure high-quality staffing and infrastructure, while allowing the group to break even eventually, he explained. While staff were not the highest paid in Hong Kong they were compensated fairly, he added.

According to McMaster, the campus is on private land, but he had not responded to further questions about rental arrangements at the time of writing.

A spokeswoman for the Canadian International School said: “We wish Mr McMaster and his team well with his kindergartens, and we applaud him for creating new opportunities for children and educators in Hong Kong.”

She added that Canadian International School had always maintained a collaborative relationship with both international and local schools in Hong Kong.

When asked about competition from other schools, McMaster noted that Fairchild was not seeking to draw students from any schools at this stage.

Lawmaker Dr Kenneth Chan Ka-lok welcomed the addition to Hong Kong’s school scene as it offered more choices to pupils in terms of curriculum, expertise and mode of operation.

However, he noted that being non-profit was not equivalent to being affordable, and more information was necessary before passing judgment on the school.