Traditional education systems inherently contain many restrictions. Student development is stifled by an overemphasis on exams scores, classmate competition, and discipline-heavy learning methods. Increasingly however, such models are being supplemented, replaced and developed into progressive, forward-thinking education models that have more relevance in today’s society, and integrate experiential learning, topical subjects, inclusive activities, skills-oriented classes, and a focus on the individual child and developing their specific passion. Ultimately, this allows students to better adapt and grow in society, which benefits us all in the long run. And it’s not just a handful of schools integrating this – it’s becoming a favoured option, and the new norm. Often, progressive education pioneers are also proponents of environmental studies, and practical eco initiatives on the school grounds. The use of renewable energy, recycling, gardening, and even the use of sustainable construction materials are becoming more common, and help schools set a positive example for students. The following are a few leading examples in the region.

**EDUCATING GENERATION GREEN**

Progressive schools are breaking the norm and adopting a more holistic approach to education

*Words by Tessa Friend*
ENGLISH SCHOOLS FOUNDATION (ESF)

Location: Hong Kong, SAR China

The English Schools Foundation (ESF) is the largest organisation of schools providing an international education to both primary and secondary students in Hong Kong – meaning the effects of its environmental measures are hugely influential. ESF caters to 17,000 students, representing a total of 50 countries, and includes schools such as Beacon Hill School, Island School, and Shatin College.

ESF teaches the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme that focuses on physical, social, emotional and cultural growth. Additional components such as the Creativity, Action and Service programme and a Theory of Knowledge course encourage students to explore their interests and express their individuality.

Demonstrating leadership in Hong Kong’s educational sphere, ESF took an environmental pledge at this year’s first-ever Zero Waste Youth Conference, and have been working hard to achieve this goal. To this end ESF has established a new sustainability programme where schools are held responsible for their own resource usage. Seven ESF schools have opened a Student Environmental Forum that allows students to exchange green goals and motivate each other, and the forum is set to develop a new tracking system to monitor energy consumption and goals across all schools.

Minor changes are also being implemented to huge effect. Thirty ESF schools have now pledged to use recycled paper, a huge leap from last year’s total of 15. Many member schools have also totally removed bottled water from campus stores, and encourage students to use reusable bottles.

GREEN SCHOOL

Location: Bali, Indonesia

Green School provides children from early years through to high school with a natural, holistic and student-centred learning environment, one that strives to inspire creativity, innovation and empower leadership. The school’s founders have created a haven that surpasses the structural, conceptual and physical limitations of many traditional schools. Since opening in 2008, the school has been commended for its environmentally-focused philosophy, and in 2012 was awarded the Greenest School on Earth by the US Green Building Council’s Center for Green Schools.

The school has a diverse student body of children from over 40 countries. The atmosphere is conducive to acceptance and critical thinking, and employs hands-on experimental learning and analytical vigour through a well-rounded set of subjects. The curriculum provides a solid foundation of core academic subjects such as English, Maths and Science, whilst also allowing for learning to be enhanced by a practical Green Studies and expressive Creative Arts studies programme. Students also learn from real-life case studies such as the Begawan Foundation’s ‘Bali Starling’ project that highlights the struggles faced by this local endangered species, and engages the children in their protection. As part of this project, students not only learn about the birds but also take part in their release back into the wild.

The sustainable design of the campus instils a sense of harmony while maintaining a strong connection with nature. The open-air structures provide abundant natural light and ventilation. The buildings are constructed with sustainable materials, such as bamboo, alang-alang thatch, volcanic stone and traditional Balinese mud wall.

Green School grows all of its own food providing organic rice, fruit, and vegetables for healthy student meals. All classes plant, tend, and harvest their own veggie gardens and make their own compost. The school is currently planning to build solar, micro-hydropower, and biogas systems in order to run completely off grid.
GARDEN HOUSE PRE-SCHOOL AND KINDERGARTEN

Location: Clearwater Bay, Hong Kong, SAR China

Garden House Pre-School and Kindergarten employs ‘the Waldorf method’, used in over 1,000 schools worldwide. The Waldorf method is a holistic education framework that develops ‘capacities’ rather than ‘skills’. Whereas a skill is something one is good at, a capacity is our ability to exercise skills. In other words, the Waldorf method is about giving kids the confidence they need to apply their natural gifts to the world.

A non-profit institution, Garden House Pre-school and Kindergarten de-emphasises academics in the early years. The Waldorf method favours learning through play, stories, singing, and the arts. The later years do employ more ‘academics’, with kids typically reading by six years old. Waldorf believes electronics can wait, and foregoes them for social learning.

All classroom equipment in the Hong Kong School are made from sustainable organic materials, and a partnership with Teng Choi Conservation Organisation sees freshly picked veggies delivered straight to the school. The facilities also include a farm where students learn to garden and grow their own food.

HONG KONG ACADEMY

Location: Sai Kung, Hong Kong, SAR China

Hong Kong Academy is situated on the picturesque shores of Sai Kung. The newly renovated 20,000 sq m campus boasts world-class facilities including a 600-seat gymnasium, 350-seat auditorium with a recessed orchestra pit, and an 80-seat studio performance theatre.

Committed to protecting the surrounding environment, each of the campus buildings adhere to the Green Building Council’s BEAM Plus certification. The campus was constructed using recycled materials and those manufactured within 800 km. The building design minimises water usage by planting weather-tolerant native plants, and includes an air-conditioning system which is supplemented with flexible temperature controls allowing different areas of the building to be cooled by both aircon and natural ventilation. Many of these features are used as supplementary teaching tools, with students monitoring energy usage, and cost-savings.

Hong Kong Academy caters to students from preschool (age 3) through to secondary school. It was the first school in Hong Kong to offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme to primary students, and is now authorised to offer the IB Diploma Programme as well. Placing great importance on diversity and individualism, the school offers a wide range of co-curricular activities, including scuba diving, Global Issues Network, yoga and debate.

VAJRA ACADEMY

Location: Bagmati, Nepal

Vajra Academy is a day and boarding school founded by the Dutch Vajra Foundation – established in 1997 to help local communities and empower them with education.

Vajra Academy seeks to educate those from all castes, social classes and backgrounds so that they can live together harmoniously, and with an open mind. The school encourages creative thinking and intelligent self-expression among its students. It also aims to impart a liberal education, and develop the complete personality of the students to bring about healthy development of the body and mind.

Following the Nepalese School Leaving Certificate Board Curriculum, Vajra Academy offers classes available across most boards such as Maths, Science, and Foreign Languages, but additionally offers classes in Value Education, General Knowledge and Green Studies – with the latter being a course on global perspectives, life skills, alternative energy practices, and local applications.

Vajra Academy’s objective is not business-driven but genuinely impassioned by the development of local communities. The Vajra Foundation has an outstanding record of supplying and educating local communities with eco-friendly and sustainable ways to live, and it does the same with developing youths. A main objective here is to use the country’s natural resources and not to rely on outside help. Implementations of solar-steam kitchens and biogas stoves in the surrounding areas showcase the school’s outwards attitude to helping its community.
THE INTERNATIONAL MONTESSORI SCHOOL

Location: Hong Kong, SAR China
Opened in 2002 under the teaching methods of Italian Dr. Maria Montessori, The International Montessori School in Hong Kong aims to cater to the individual potential and organic development of each child.

The Montessori method was established in the early 20th century. It protests static one-way exchange of information from teacher to student, and instead sees the teacher observing and adapting to the interests and abilities of each student.

Students at The International Montessori School learn in mixed age groups in three learning programmes: Foundation, Casa Dei Bambini and Primary. The youngest students start in Foundation while Primary houses a typical ‘primary school’ age group. Within each programme, students are not referenced in relation to the rest of the group, eliminating the notion of being ‘ahead’ or ‘behind.’ At Montessori schools multiplication and geography are introduced much earlier than at other schools, and are taught when the group is considered ready.

From Foundation, children are taught Mandarin in a natural oral context that develops into other mediums as the students learn new skills. The focus of teachers is to foster self-discipline and create an encouraging environment rather than to ‘lay down the law’ themselves.

A non-profit school, The International Montessori School of Hong Kong has four separate campuses in the city with different programmes, including Mid Levels, Stanley, Tin Hau and South Horizons. The schools typically have a student-to-faculty ratio of 12.5:1 in the Casa and Primary programmes and an intimate 8:1 ratio in Foundation.

Successful Montessori Graduates
Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, author Julia Child, and Nobel Prize laureate Gabriel Garcia Márquez.

WOODSTOCK SCHOOL

Location: Mussoorie, Uttarakhand, India
Woodstock School is a mixed boarding school near the Himalayan Mountains in India, and includes ages 3-18 and students from over 25 countries. The school emphasises a caring and supportive approach to life. Community Engagement lessons encourage students to come up with solutions to improve the world around them; one student project recently developed lasting solutions to local litter problems.

Woodstock School offers both Cambridge iGCSE and Advanced Placement examinations, which are widely accepted for students heading to the US, UK or Australia for higher education. Students can also earn a Woodstock Diploma that enables admission to universities in India.

The school makes use of its natural surroundings through an Outdoor Learning programme that is taught out of the school’s Hanifl Centre. Activities include first aid courses, trek leaders’ courses, and lessons about how to integrate sustainable professions to a developing region. Other classes at Woodstock School include calligraphy, crocheting, chess, robotics, newspaper, rock climbing, and taekwondo.

The school also practices an inclusive spiritual approach to education through WS TRIBE, a programme that encourages students to explore spiritual and philosophical questions. In it, students visit diverse places of worship and learn about their significance and belief systems.