

This Week in Asia/ People

## Singapore schools offer ‘safety and security’ for families leaving Hong Kong protests behind

At Singapore’s ISS, inquiries from Hong Kong parents have increased 60 per cent from previous years. And it’s not alone

Hong Kong’s ongoing unrest is one reason but parents are also attracted to Singapore’s bilingual system and highly rated universities



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Singapore’s school system makes the assimilation of new students a priority, and there is also no “singular dominant nationality”, Henry from GEMS World Academy says. Photo: Handout

When Singapore’s ISS International School held a community event last month, a concerned Hong Kong family approached the school’s admissions department. They wanted to discuss the growing network of Hong Kong-based parents considering sending their children to study in [Singapore](#).

“They wanted to assist their colleagues and friends in Hong Kong to be able to admit their children should they feel ... relocating out of Hong Kong to Singapore developed from a conversation into a reality,” said Paul Adamberry, director of marketing communications and admissions, adding that inquiries from Hong Kong parents have increased 60 per cent from previous years.

The [international school](#) is not alone. More than seven international schools and relocation consultants reported a steady surge in inquiries since anti-government [protests broke out in Hong Kong](#) last June.

Singapore’s schools are not the only sector reporting increased interest from Hong Kong: there has also been an increased interest from wealthy families who want to shift assets from Hong Kong to Singapore and asset managers looking to open offices in the city state, according to a *Bloomberg* report.



“We have not seen a sudden surge of interest of this nature from one particular city except during the global financial crisis,” said Tan Woon Hum, a lawyer who heads his firm’s specialised funds management practice in Singapore.

Hong Kong families are “investigating alternative choices” as a result of the protests’ social and economic impact, said Adamberry, who added that inquiries were from both Hongkongers and Hong Kong-based expatriates.

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Former Hong Kong chief executive Tung Chee-hwa has blamed the liberal studies curriculum at Hong Kong’s secondary schools for misleading young people, who form the majority of the city’s black-clad protesters. About 40 per cent of those arrested were students, according to a December statement by Hong Kong officials.

Tung is vice-chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, the nation’s top political advisory body. He was quoted by *China Daily* as describing Hong Kong’s curriculum as a “failure” and one of the reasons for the city’s “youth problems”.

Singapore-based relocation consultancy OCSC Global said political uncertainty and violence in Hong Kong remain the main motivation for Hong Kong families looking at options abroad.

Its director, Philip Ng, said families mostly inquired about requirements for permanent residency in Singapore, and the steps needed to send their children to study there or to move some parts of their business operations.



The playground of Singapore International School in Aberdeen, Hong Kong. Photo: SCMP Pictures

Other international schools received similar feedback from families. Richard Henry, head of school of GEMS World Academy (Singapore), also said Singapore appealed to those seeking a “stable environment”. Inquiries from Hongkongers doubled since November last year, he said, and 2 per cent of the academy’s current enrolment of 1,000 students are from families who moved from Hong Kong to Singapore.

Etonhouse International School, which has six campuses in Singapore, reported a recent surge in interest, and said curriculums including Mandarin and maths were particularly popular among Singapore’s expatriate community.

Hong Kong parents planning to move to Singapore regard the bilingual education system as a “real advantage”, said John Hu, the founder and principal consultant of John Hu Migration Consulting.

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“The other thing is that the Chinese government is trying to exercise more control over the education system so some of the parents feel that they would like to have their children educated abroad,” said Hu, who also noted the appeal of Singapore’s universities.

Cressida Martin, a British national who moved to Hong Kong in 2014 before leaving for Singapore last year, cited other reasons for her family’s relocation.

“Hong Kong is too polluted and not child-friendly,” she said. “My son’s asthma has also almost gone away in Singapore as there is little pollution here.”

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Singapore’s school system also makes the assimilation of new students a priority. Henry from GEMS World Academy said curriculum typically includes topics of migration and third-culture identity. There is also no “singular dominant nationality”, he said.

For Paul Adamberry at ISS International School, appealing to families relocating from Hong Kong requires a multifaceted, ongoing consultative approach.

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“We have discussed with partners and vendors ... how to make Hong Kong families aware that we are happy to welcome and include their child and families into the community should they have to make the difficult decision to leave Hong Kong for Singapore,” he said.

“Families and investors are attracted to Singapore for the fact it is predictable in its safety and security. The issues being faced currently in Hong Kong are not really a social issue we must be concerned with in Singapore.”