

HOW DOES A DP SCHOOL MANAGE TO BE BOTH TIGHTLY FOCUSED AND HIGHLY FLEXIBLE?

By concentrating on the needs of each DP student, Cathedral Vidya School, Lonavala, has served them well—and helped its programme attract more students.

As a good Diploma Programme coordinator, Biju Baby asks as many parents as possible about why they are interested in sending their children to his school, Cathedral Vidya School (CVSL) in Lonavala, India. One of the responses he remembers best is a parent who told the story of a neighbor's daughter. The child would not talk much to anyone and seemed to lack self-confidence. After two years in CVSL's Diploma Programme, she became active in the community and went out of her way to talk with people. The parent was impressed and thought the DP would be good for his child, too.

Throughout India, Baby says, more people are aware of the DP and the well-rounded education it provides. Ten years ago, that wasn't the case, he notes. The school encourages such interest with DP orientations, presentations in Mumbai that showcase students' artworks and prominent emphasis on where its students go to university.

Because the DP is different from other academic pathways, the school makes a point of offering extra support to new students. Many students have learned in programs where the teacher takes charge of everything, Baby says, unlike the DP, where teachers want students to take the lead. That's why CVSL teachers conduct what they call a bridging course that covers literary devices, scientific methods, mathematical modeling, researching skills, literary skills and other topics. The goal is to move new students slowly toward a more student-centred way of learning.

For students who are already at CVSL in grade 8 and plan on entering the Diploma Programme, the school does career counseling to align the DP subjects they would study with their professional/career interests. The school also offers internships over summer and winter break that fit with a number of career choices.

**Cathedral Vidya School,
Lonavala (private):
grades 4-12**

**First offered the Diploma
Programme:**
2009

Total number of students:
approximately 300

**Vice Principal and
DP coordinator:**
Biju Baby

Head of School:
Aninda Chatterji

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— BIJU BABY,
VICE PRINCIPAL, CATHEDRAL
VIDYA SCHOOL, LONAVALA

Another way that CVSL supports career choices and benefits from the flexibility of the Diploma Programme is by offering subjects that students express interest in, such as computer science, psychology and sports, exercise and health science (SEHS). The school even hired a part-time teacher of Japanese. "We are very open to what students want," Baby says.

Being responsive when students ask for courses benefits the school, too. "There are times when students transferring from other countries are not being accommodated in schools due to the mismatch of courses being offered," Baby says. "Cathedral has always helped students as much as possible with their smooth induction into our system by providing part-time teachers. This has definitely helped with our student numbers." There were 22 students registered for the first DP exams; the current 11th and 12th grades have a total of 60 DP students.

As important as academics are, the Diploma Programme also emphasizes developing emotionally and ethically. Baby says the DP at his school attracts students who are inquisitive, want to learn self-management skills and how to work collaboratively and intend to be more compassionate. Some of their parents, he adds, "are more keen about life skills, more than academics, as they believe that succeeding in life is more than just academic achievements."

The Vice Principal agrees with that assessment. "I think the DP is the only programme to help students learn to be compassionate members of society," he says.

While most other curricula overemphasize scores and grades, Baby says, "the DP is not just learning for a living, it is learning for life itself." He remembers his education as being more traditional, with a lot of focus on the final exam. "DP students work with others and learn from each other. They share ideas with others. That fits very well with what is required in the 21st century."

The experiences of three Cathedral Vidya School, Lonavala, alumni illustrate the deep impact of its Diploma Programme.

One student, Vice Principal and coordinator Biju Baby remembers, had been interested in literature and language since she was a child. While she was a student at CVSL, she published a novel and completed language-related online courses from Cambridge University; the University of California, Berkeley; and Harvard University. Afterward, she went to Princeton University, where she is writing for the Daily Princetonian and majoring in international economics and psychology.

Another student studied visual arts while at CVSL in order to polish his photography skills. Since earning his Diploma, he has been an assistant director for a Bollywood movie and won admission to Syracuse University, where he is majoring in cinematography and film/video production.

The third student published a book of poems and paintings while she was in the Diploma Programme, Baby says. The poetry and art reflect problems that people around the world face. "She navigated the dark world of slavery, illiteracy, love, holocaust, environmental degradation and ... showed a road map of hope," he says. She graduated early from Babson College and is now an analyst at a management consulting firm.

