

NEW HORIZONS

Richard Green meets Jonathan Standen, the incoming headmaster of Harrow International School Bangkok, who talks about his move to Thailand and the next chapter in the school's evolution

Now in its 21st year in the Thai capital, Harrow International School Bangkok has truly matured. Its ambitious redevelopment programme nears completion and students consistently achieve outstanding examination results and university places. New opportunities beckoned for the former headmaster Michael Farley and his departure has seen the arrival of a new leader in the form of experienced teacher Jonathan Standen. Here we find out a little about his credentials and educational ethos.

Standen has had successful headships of two schools in the United Kingdom. First, a high-achieving grammar school which, under his leadership, was rated as outstanding by Ofsted (the UK's Office for Standards in Education) and became a teaching school while Standen himself was named a National Leader of Education. Most recently he was headmaster of Plymouth College. Both schools boast excellent academic results and renowned sports programmes that produce world champions and Olympic medal winners. Prior to these headships, Standen taught history and government and politics having earned a degree in ancient history and history at Nottingham University as a young man.

What prompted your move to Harrow Bangkok? After two very successful headships in the UK, I felt it was time to move on. Suzie, my wife, and I have loved the international flavour of Plymouth College with boarders from 30 countries around the world. So I began thinking I'd love to be head of an international school. But not any international school. So when Harrow Bangkok, one of the best schools in the world, announced they needed a new head, it was such an attractive post to apply for.

What are your first impressions of Harrow Bangkok? My first impression was of the fabulous facilities—they are world class. As you walk into the campus it takes your breath away. I've taught in really good schools in the UK and Harrow Bangkok's facilities are truly impressive. But

buildings on their own can be cold places. What really matters is the people inside them. So on my visits, it's been lovely to have been welcomed so warmly by staff and children.

What do you think makes a school world class? Naturally, you want students to achieve excellent exam results and enter prestigious universities but I believe they are not the only measure of a truly great school. World class schools should strive to develop students who can communicate well, empathise, lead and are team players. I think a great school sets you up for life, developing skills you can refer back to when in challenging situations and overcome them. They develop people who go on to have successful careers but also, I hope, contribute positively to the world itself. For schools to be truly world class they also have to have the very best staff, so a great school invests a huge amount into nurturing and developing its teachers.

What do you plan to achieve in your first term being headmaster? I'm going to spend a lot of time listening to people, walking around, observing and getting a feel for the school. I don't think it's a good thing for a headmaster to come in and do things instantly. So my first days might be a little less active than some people might think but I'll be very active, getting out there, looking first hand at what's going on in my school.

What do you think are the biggest challenges facing students today? In the last 10 years as a head I've seen the pressures on young children grow. There is pressure to do well in exams and then there's social media—it is so hard to switch the world off and the modern world wants an instant response to everything. That makes life very tough for young people and they have to buy themselves breathing space. One of the most important skills schools can help young people with is to not react instantly; to give themselves a bit of time before they send the photo or say something they might later regret. Helping students develop resilience is really important. ■

