

## LEADING EDGE

Jon Standen, headmaster of **Harrow International School Bangkok**, is focused on producing future generations of leaders through a holistic approach to education

Arriving in Thailand in January of this year, Jon Standen, headmaster of Harrow International School Bangkok, and his wife Suzie are still buzzing about the country. “It’s a wonderful place,” Standen says with enthusiasm. “Suzie and I have settled in well but Bangkok and the rest of the country is still so new and interesting. I love the people, the rich culture and, of course, the food. We have had the opportunity to do some exploring but there is so much more out there to discover. We’re very happy here.”

Having moved 5,900 miles across the globe to Thailand, Standen admits he was pleasantly surprised when he took up his post at Harrow Bangkok. “The first thing that struck me were the fabulous facilities—they are world class. But buildings on their own can be cold places. What really matters is



**EXPLORING LIFE** (Clockwise from top) Jon and Suzie Standen; the headmaster with a group of Harrow Bangkok’s future leaders; and celebrating World Book Day by reading to some of his younger charges



the people who use them. I have to say that the attitude of the students here is one of sheer hard work. Listening to them, their teachers and their parents has given me a better understanding of our strengths and also the small areas where I think we can improve.”

Although the headmaster pinpoints academic excellence as a major goal, he also says that a good education goes well beyond the classroom. “Naturally you want students to achieve top examination results, such as our record-breaking 67 per cent IGCSE and 60 A Level A\* and A grades this year, and go on to prestigious universities—our students received 175 offers for the world’s top universities in 2019—but I believe

they are not the only measure of academic success. The really great schools look to develop students holistically and we do that in our Leadership in Action programme. It gives the students a great range of opportunities to develop their personal skills, soft skills, leadership qualities, teamwork and character.”

An example of this exposure to the wider challenges of life can be seen in a recent trip taken by Harrow Bangkok students and teachers to a border refugee camp at Mae Sot. “Our team went up to the Thai-Myanmar border and helped to build a school. In doing so, the students were exposed to issues well beyond the normal parameters of their comfortable lives. Such

programmes help to promote a social conscience and a resilience so needed in the wider world,” Standen says.

Harrow Bangkok’s prestigious UK namesake has been producing leading statesmen, captains of industry, scientists and artists for over 450 years, and although the school in Thailand is much younger at just 22 years old, it is built on the same principle: a mission to develop students who can communicate well, empathise with and lead others but also be good team players.

“We already have a track record of excellence here and our aim is that future generations of our students will go on and contribute to society as leaders for a better world, alongside

fulfilling their personal goals,” the headmaster says. “Academics are a priority, of course, but we try to help our young learners apply their knowledge with compassion and creativity. In the last 10 years as a headmaster I’ve seen the pressures on young people grow and grow. There is pressure to do well in exams, peer pressure and the influence of things like social media. So one of the most important things schools can help students to develop is resilience—the ability to cope when things come along that might knock them back. True leaders have that resilience, the fortitude of character not to let a problem beat them but to find a solution and bounce back.”