

# Challenging and Empowering

Experienced educator SHARON SOLOMON chats with *EL* about why she founded **The Winstedt School**, and why children are able to excel in its learning environment.

## What motivated you to establish The Winstedt School?

Going to school in Singapore was a nightmare for me, as well as for the teacher; I was an attention deficit disorder (ADD) student in a classroom of 40. Once I was sent to a private school overseas, with fewer than 15 students in a class, I loved school and excelled academically. It was a journey of self-awareness and discovery, with excellent teachers who were passionate and brought out the best in every student.

If that worked for me, it can certainly work for the many students who fall through the cracks – those who learn and think differently, or who don't like school. School is a child's second home. How can they be expected to endure 12 years of school while dreading it? It's torturous, and it saps every ounce of spirit. That's not the way it should be.

At Winstedt I set out to redefine the concept of school and learning. We stepped away from the "silo mentality" and broke down all walls; we see every learner as a rightful stakeholder. Winstedt is specialised, individualised and a step away from traditional classroom settings. There are no short cuts. Just a rigorous curriculum delivered to engage and motivate our students to reach their full potential as independent thinkers who are empowered, innovative and creative.

## What's different about Winstedt?

Winstedt is not like any other school. We're an open, inclusive, international school from preschool to Year 6, offering a mainstream British curriculum. Our classrooms have two teachers and up to 15 students (which research has defined as an optimal class size). This allows us to cater to the learner that our school focuses on: someone with an average to above average IQ, who learns and thinks differently.

Children with learning challenges such as dyslexia or ADD, for example, have their needs met here. Our school is built around them and for them. In addition to the classwork, additional support is built into the class and school environment. Other mainstream schools cannot provide this.

## And what about parents and students? What do they say sets Winstedt apart from other schools?

Parents tell me they finally feel that not only are their kids' needs understood, but they as parents are understood too. Sometimes we forget that parents of kids with various learning needs find themselves in a very lonely place. Oftentimes, parents don't know where to turn to, or who to talk to, when they suspect that "something is off".

The children often say that they finally feel truly accepted, not just tolerated. This marks the beginning of a successful journey in learning and self-esteem.

## What are your future plans and dreams for Winstedt?

I would like every student to reach the finish line, which is graduation from high school and university entry. Our big goal is to acquire a larger campus; we are growing, so we need more space. What's more, I'd like to give these kids a voice in an educational community that for too long has drowned them out. Our responsibility as a school is also to become the advocates that the children rightfully deserve. 



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