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JTES Boarding School Fair — Outdoor Edition 2025

Hosted by The Japan Times Education Services (JTES), the Boarding School Fair: Outdoor Learning Edition 2025 was held at the Akasaka Intercity Conference Center in Tokyo's Minato Ward on Oct. 25.

The event featured seven preparatory boarding schools from the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Malaysia and Japan, each presenting

Learning beyond the classroom

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A special session brought together representatives from the seven participating schools to discuss how outdoor education and boarding amid nature-rich environments contribute to holistic education.

Throughout the session, one belief echoed across every voice: Education extends far beyond the classroom. Though each school inhabits a different landscape, they are united by a shared conviction — that holistic education cannot be taught; it must be lived and experienced.

"We are not adding outdoor learning on top of the curriculum," said Andy Nuttall, headmaster of The Downs Malvern, where learning meets the outdoors. "It is fully integrated. When children explore outside, they develop resilience, collaboration and a 'yes'



Special session HARUO MOTOHASHI

mentality."

"We allow children to take their imaginations where they want to go. When they build, explore and create outdoors, that's when the deepest learning happens," said Christina Conner, deputy head at Cheltenham College Prep School. The essence of learning, she explained, lies in freedom — not imposing outdoor education on children, but allowing them to explore it in their own way.

Representatives from the Swiss Alps — Aiglon College and La Garenne — shared similar thoughts. Pretima Farrant of Aiglon described education as "mind, body and spirit in balance," a philosophy literally

concise seminars led by headmasters and admissions representatives introducing each school's philosophy, academic approach and boarding life. A highlight of the fair was the "three questions" session, where each school discussed its unique approach to outdoor learning — from the fields and hills of the U.K. to Swiss Alpine expeditions,

ence. "Outdoor education is really about life skills," he emphasized. "Sometimes you fail — and that's where the real learning begins."

WeeSim Lam, head of upper primary at JINIS, offered a perspective deeply rooted in gratitude. Surrounded by forests, temples and rice fields, her students learn by engaging with their community. "We cultivate the heart, the hand and the head," she said. "They learn through inquiry, act with compassion and grow into reflective, resilient young people."

Beyond outdoor learning, all agreed that boarding life amplifies these values. Living together allows students to turn empathy into habit and independence into responsibility.

Gareth Johns, headmaster of Bilton Grange, said, "We are boarding schools, not schools with beds." He explained that boarding is not defined by dormitories but by "the heartbeat of a community" that connects and protects childhood. "Boarding allows children to stay outdoors, play and grow together — something hard to replicate in a world dominated by screens," he said.

Through learning in nature and living together, children grow as whole individuals — discovering that true learning happens through life itself.

Malaysian tropical rainforests and Japan's four seasons — offering insight to families. Throughout the day, school booths were open for parents and children to speak directly with representatives, exploring how each school supports academic and personal growth and considering which path may best suit their child's future.

La Garenne International School

Perched in the Swiss Alps above the Rhone Valley, La Garenne International School turns the surrounding mountains into a living classroom. Established in 1947, the school welcomes students from kindergarten through high school and is mainly a boarding school, with 90% of its students living on campus.

Guided by the values of care, curiosity, resilience and impact, the school nurtures both intellect and character through life in nature.

Located in the resort town of Villars-sur-Ollon, La Garenne encourages year-round engagement with nature. Skiing and hiking are part of daily life, and many aim to climb all nearby peaks before graduation.



La Garenne International School (Switzerland) HARUO MOTOHASHI

Its four sports academies — in skiing, soccer, golf and go-karting — develop teamwork and leadership.

Students learn beyond the classroom through field trips and expeditions across the country and beyond — visiting glaciers to see the impact of climate change and studying forests and biodiversity firsthand. High school students also travel to destinations such as Thailand, Kenya and Morocco, gaining a wider global perspective.

The academic program combines the International Primary Curriculum, the IB Middle Years Programme and the IB Diploma, with IGCSEs offered in the first two years of high school. Students benefit from a low student-to-staff ratio of 2:1, receiving guidance from psychologists, teachers, tutors and house parents. Moreover, daily French lessons ensure bilingual graduates.

Winter and summer camps offer a first taste of boarding life, blending language study, STEM and outdoor adventure. Whether in class or on the slopes, La Garenne students learn that nature remains one of education's greatest teachers.



The Downs Malvern

Nestled at the foot of the beautiful Malvern Hills in England, The Downs Malvern is a traditional prep school celebrating its 125th anniversary this year. Guided by its motto, "Sapiens qui prospicit" ("Wise is he who looks ahead"), the school combines a rich heritage with a forward-looking spirit. The school has earned multiple national awards, including Small Independent School of the Year, in recognition of its excellence in education.

Outdoor education plays an important role at The Downs Malvern. The school's idyllic surroundings — forests, meadows and streams — serve as extensions of the classroom. Through its Forest School program, students learn from nature early on, engag-

ing in camping, hiking and outdoor exploration that build curiosity, teamwork and resilience. Children are encouraged to see themselves as explorers who take guided risks, collaborate and solve problems creatively.

The school's smallholding and market garden are also integral to learning. Students help care for chickens, quails, guinea fowl, sheep and pigs, gaining firsthand experience of food cycles and sustainability.

The long-standing Hobbies and Activities program, running since 1900, further encourages students to pursue their interests beyond the classroom — from engineering on the miniature railway to cooking, coding and the arts. These hands-on experiences foster confidence and independence, qualities reflected in academic performance.

Above all, happiness lies at the heart of life at The Downs Malvern. The school believes that children learn best when they are happy, and strives to create an environment where every student feels valued, supported and joyful in their learning.



The Downs Malvern (U.K.) HARUO MOTOHASHI



Aiglon College

Nestled in the Swiss Alps resort of Villars, Aiglon College offers a unique education inspired by its stunning mountain setting. Founded in 1949 by John Corlette, who came from Scotland's Gordonstoun School, it is a boarding international school guided by the enduring motto of "Mind, Body, and Spirit," offering a holistic education that balances academic achievement, physical activity and self-awareness.

Aiglon's diverse community of about 490 students represents 69 nationalities and speaks around 30 languages. About 80% of students board on campus, immersing themselves fully in an environment that promotes independence and shared responsibility.



Aiglon College (Switzerland) HARUO MOTOHASHI



As a nonprofit school, every cent earned is reinvested into strengthening academics, improving facilities and supporting students' well-being.

Outdoor education lies at the heart of Aiglon's philosophy. Students participate in three to four expeditions each term, designed to match the rhythm of the seasons: hiking and mountain climbing in autumn, ski touring and ice climbing in winter, and biking or water sports in spring. Even the junior students join Mountain School once a week, taking classroom learning outdoors to explore nature.

In addition to those experiences, students in years seven to nine take part in overseas school trips — from attending NASA Space Camp in the U.S. to discovering the Atlas Mountains in Morocco, sailing in Greece or exploring Costa Rica's rainforests — extending learning beyond the classroom and across continents. Through its outdoor education program, the school provides an environment where students challenge themselves, build resilience and create lasting memories — qualities that are deeply embedded in the school's DNA.

Bilton Grange

Located near Rugby School in the heart of England, Bilton Grange is a historic prep school belonging to the prestigious Rugby School Group. Set in 90 acres of beautiful countryside, the school offers an ideal environment for children to learn, play and explore, nurturing confidence, independence and joy in learning.

Blending heritage with innovation, the campus features the newly opened Earl House. At its center is a playful helter-skelter slide, where learning meets laughter. Bilton Grange embraces the concept of the "90-acre classroom," where learning extends far beyond the classroom walls. Through its extensive outdoor learning program, students engage in activities such as science



Bilton Grange (U.K.) HARUO MOTOHASHI

experiments, creative writing and drama in woodland spaces like the Wiggloo — a hand-built wooden igloo classroom. From year five, every student experiences camping within the school grounds, learning practical outdoor skills and teamwork.

Environmental education is also central to school life. Students take part in kitchen garden projects, wildlife conservation and rewilding efforts, earning Bilton Grange several national ecological awards. Sustainability and critical thinking are woven throughout the curriculum.

At the heart of the school's philosophy lies a culture of acknowledgment rather than judgment, encouraging students to take risks and learn without fear of mistakes. With small classes of around 14 to 16 students, teachers provide close support and guidance, helping each child grow in confidence and responsibility.

Bilton Grange's graduates go on to leading senior schools including Rugby, Eton, Harrow, Wycombe Abbey and Down House, carrying with them the kindness, creativity and curiosity that define the school's spirit.



Jinseki International School

Jinseki International School (JINIS), located in Hiroshima Prefecture, is Japan's only full-boarding primary school. Modeled after renowned British and Swiss boarding schools, it offers a small and supportive community that combines academic learning with residential life. Educational advisers include Michael Rob Gray, former headmaster of Le Rosey in Switzerland, and John Baugh, former headmaster of the Dragon School in Oxford, England.

Classes are conducted in both Japanese and English to help students maintain their Japanese identity while developing global communication skills. As an accredited school under Japan's national education

system, JINIS also adopts the International Primary Curriculum (IPC), following a learning cycle of researching, recording and reflecting to help children learn how to think, not what to think.

The school's rural location offers an environment where nature becomes a classroom. The campus features a Japanese garden, a farm, and nearby rice fields and cattle farms. Younger students learn how milk is produced and make pudding at a local dairy, while older ones join rice harvesting with local farmers, gaining appreciation for food and community. Learning also extends to residential and cultural trips, including skiing in Hokkaido, history and peace studies in Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and a service-learning program in Kenya before graduation.

Graduates advance to secondary schools in countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, Switzerland and Malaysia. Guided by four core values — "endeavor," "responsibility," "integrity" and "courage" — JINIS provides a foundation for children to grow into independent, globally minded learners.



Jinseki International School (Japan) HARUO MOTOHASHI



Cheltenham College Prep School

Founded in 1841, Cheltenham College is a historic full-boarding school located in the heart of Cheltenham, a beautiful town in the southwest of England. The school enjoys 90 acres of woodland and lakes, providing an ideal environment for both academic study and outdoor learning.

Cheltenham is a co-educational school offering full boarding from the Prep (ages 8 to 13) through to the Senior School (ages 13 to 18), with a total of around 1,100 students. International students are warmly welcomed at Cheltenham, which currently has students from 32 countries, including nine students from Japan.

Academically, Cheltenham College maintains an excellent record. This year,



Cheltenham College Prep School (U.K.) HARUO MOTOHASHI

82% of A Level grades and 76% of GCSE grades were awarded A-B, reflecting the school's high academic standards. The school prepares students for entry to top universities in the U.K. and overseas, including Oxbridge and other Russell Group institutions.

Outdoor education plays a key role in the curriculum. From an early age, students attend Forest School sessions in the school's own woodland. Some lessons — such as geography, English or mathematics — are occasionally held outdoors.

The purpose of this approach is to help students internalize what they learn through experience. By engaging all their senses, they develop a "muscle memory" that strengthens long-term understanding.

The school also offers a rich co-curricular life, including drama, orchestras and over 19 sports — from recreational to elite levels. Through this balance of academic excellence, outdoor adventure and creative expression, Cheltenham College nurtures confident, well-rounded young people ready to thrive in the world.



Epsom College in Malaysia

Epsom College Malaysia, established in 2014 as the sister campus of the long-established Epsom College in the U.K., offers a distinctive British boarding experience in Asia, bringing together students from more than 30 nationalities. The school is an accredited member of the Council of British International Schools (COBIS) and has received two Beacon School Awards, recognizing excellence in student welfare, well-being and leadership.

The school integrates outdoor learning into its British curriculum to cultivate curiosity, independence and leadership among students. Set on a 50-acre campus near Kuala Lumpur, it provides abundant opportunities for young learners to connect with the natural environment through both academic and



Epsom College (Malaysia) HARUO MOTOHASHI

extracurricular activities.

Learning at Epsom College Malaysia extends well beyond the classroom. The school regularly hosts Epsom Live Talks, inviting prominent figures to engage directly with students. These sessions encourage critical thinking and curiosity through open dialogue. To help students explore future career paths, Epsom also provides internship opportunities in fields such as medicine and law. Many students gain clarity about their passions and ambitions through these hands-on experiences. Experiential learning is further enriched through the Wild Minds program in the Borneo rainforest, where students explore sustainability, biodiversity and entrepreneurship, and at the school's enrichment center in Hakuba, Nagano Prefecture, which provides opportunities for fieldwork and environmental study in both winter and summer seasons.

Through a holistic approach that blends academic excellence with real-world and outdoor learning, Epsom College Malaysia prepares students to become confident, compassionate global citizens ready to make a difference in an ever-changing world.



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