



PROUD TO BE DIFFERENT

In 2012, TNS Beaconhouse DHA made the bold move to offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Years Programme (MYP) in a bid to stand out from other schools in Pakistan, a country where both the government and learning communities favour other educational offerings, and emphasis is placed on examinations and grades. In 2015, the school piloted the MYP eAssessment and found that MYP eAssessments not only provided the rigour of an examination but at the same time allowed the school to focus on developing critical thinking, deeper conceptual understanding, and communication; most importantly the skill of transferring knowledge, skills and understanding acquired in the classroom to familiar and unfamiliar situations, a highly desirable 21st century trait.

“In order to differentiate the school from others in Pakistan, we decided to take the draconian step of moving away from iGCSEs and only offer the MYP to a community that had a lack of awareness about the programme and in particular, this new style of assessment. We knew that it was a risky yet brave decision to make; a decision that meant we would lose students in the process, but we were looking forward to the future and what would be the right decision for our learning community moving forwards.” said Clive Barnes, head of school.

One of the biggest challenges that the school had to overcome was ensuring that the parent community felt confident in the school’s teaching and leadership. Rashid Khalid, deputy head of school and Diploma Programme (DP) coordinator explained: “We have some parents who are IB graduates themselves, which worked in our favour as it wasn’t selling the IB that was the obstacle; they knew the limitations of A Levels and wanted a holistic education for their children. It was proving that we were capable of delivering the programme that was the real challenge. We were fortunate that because we initially had a small cohort, we were able to give students lots of attention and parents could see the efforts that we were putting in to make this a success”.

Overcoming challenges of eAssessment implementation

After a year of piloting the eAssessment, TNS Beaconhouse DHA decided to take a year-long break and move back to iGCSEs to give the teaching and leadership teams time to plan and prepare to re-introduce the eAssessment. “This gave us a window of opportunity to research and thoroughly plan ahead for what the teaching and learning of the MYP and the implementation of the eAssessment would look like in our school. We made it very clear to our parent community that from 2017 there would be no more iGCSEs, and we put a lot of time and effort into involving parents on our journey.” said Rashid Khalid.

The school hosted a number of education seminars to ensure that the parent community knew their voices and concerns were being heard, and, in turn, the school gained respect and confidence. To further put parents’ minds at ease, TNS Beaconhouse DHA also sent 42 of its teachers to numerous professional development workshops.

TNS Beaconhouse DHA, Pakistan

First offered the Middle Years Programme (MYP):

2012

Total number of students:

797

Head of school:

Mr Clive Barnes

Middle Years Programme coordinator:

Ms Hina Chaudhry

Clive Barnes said: "It was the first set of eAssessment results that gave our parent community confidence that the teaching staff and school leadership were dedicated enough to support the students in this new way of learning and assessment. This drew families back to us, and it is when we started to see growth in cohort sizes, and satisfaction amongst our parent community."

Ali Khan, a parent of an IB student at TNS Beaconhouse DHA, explained that it was the philosophy of the IB that appeals to parents in Pakistan: "The fact that the philosophy is embedded in everything that the school does is what makes the MYP great for our daughter. She has become an independent learner and has been coping well with online learning in this COVID-19 phase. We chose TNS Beaconhouse DHA because of the quality of their teachers, helpfulness of their administration staff and the nurturing learning environment. Over the past year, we have come across many reasons to confirm that we made the right choice."

Not only did the school have to overcome challenges with its parent and student community, but it had to ensure that it was adhering to the government's regulations too; offering the compulsory subjects of Pakistan Studies, Urdu and Islamiyat in order for students to be able to progress to higher education. "In Pakistan, educational programmes have to undergo a government process called equivalence whereby the government regulates education minimal requirements for a candidate to be eligible for higher education." said Rashid Khalid.

In addition to this, if students in Pakistan want to study the MYP, they must undertake the eAssessment. In recent years, legislation has shown some flexibility in bringing the number of eAssessment subjects that students must sit down to five (originally eight), and they must also complete the MYP project work on top of this. Due to these regulations, TNS Beaconhouse DHA was not in a position to be able to cherry-pick what subjects students sat for their eAssessment.

The impact of eAssessment

In addition to focusing on the development of deeper conceptual understanding of the subject matter, the school also used a number of platforms and familiarization tools to make students comfortable with integrating technology in their day to day learning. Hina Chaudhry, MYP coordinator, said: "We introduce our students to the eAssessment-like tasks from MYP Year 3 (Grade 8), and they practise the on-screen examinations twice a year so that they do not feel daunted by the prospect of examinations, and it feels more normal to them." Using the familiarization tools has provided clarity and structure to the school's classes and has also helped them to overcome the challenges of parent uncertainty to a great extent.

TNS Beaconhouse DHA has also seen great improvements in classroom teaching and learning and assessment practices. Hina Chaudhry further explained: "The eAssessment has provided us

with a great structure and an end goal to the five years of the MYP. Through the introduction of the eAssessment, we have seen that students are more committed to learning and are more engaged with the skills-based tasks that we set, as they are more interactive and require the use of technology. Introducing the eAssessment has further encouraged our teachers to ensure they use vocabulary such as the MYP command terms and the language used in the MYP criteria consistently so that students are continuously familiarizing themselves with the functionalities of the eAssessment."

Since the introduction of the eAssessment, teachers have seen an enormous uplift in creativity and reflective practices. The holistic approach of the MYP and its eAssessment ensures that students at the school are developing 21st century skills, which are vital to solve real world problems. "A feature of the MYP that I personally adore is integrity and academic honesty. This feature provides our students with the room to practise creativity and challenge their own thinking process. They learn skills like ensuring they are not plagiarizing their work, which sets them up for success when studying the DP and when they go to university too." said Hina Chaudhry.

The feedback from the school community on the eAssessment has been extremely positive. Hina Chaudhry confirmed that teachers, parents and students at the school agree that the eAssessment: is more realistic and supports real life links; develops 21st century skills in students; helps students to become holistic learners; and provides students with an end goal to the five years of rigorous learning.

MYP student, Mishael Hyat Ayub, commented: "I loved the way learning and assessing was structured in the MYP. Whether it be eAssessments involving critical thinking and questions linked to the problems the world is facing today, or portfolios such as the personal project that allow you to pursue your unique interests, the MYP allows learners to develop into people who are equipped with the creative skills and independence they need to succeed at university and beyond. I hope that in the future, it continues to spread across Pakistan and indeed the world!"

Preparation for the DP

Teachers at TNS Beaconhouse DHA also believe that the eAssessment sufficiently prepares students for the DP compared to other educational streams. "When I look at students who have studied the MYP and are going on to study the DP, they are ready for the challenge and that is because they are already familiar with the IB's style of learning." said Rashid Khalid

Each year a number of students from other schools who have studied different educational programmes join TNS Beaconhouse DHA because they want an IB education. Rashid Khalid explained that all of the new students attending the school have achieved fantastic results pre-IB, and, in theory, should do well with the academic rigour the DP, but they haven't

yet developed the interpersonal skills to keep up with the pace of the programme: “We find that students who have studied the MYP have an appetite for lifelong learning and the resilience to keep going, which is down to the IB learner profile. We sometimes find that non-MYP students, who are studying the DP, compare themselves to A Level students who are studying three subjects and are looking for a short cut to universities; ignoring the bigger picture and the fundamental objective of the IB, which is holistic learning.”

Students at the school studying the DP must study the full Diploma, and teachers have noticed that MYP students are much better equipped to meet multiple deadlines, the levels of academic writing and critical thinking skills that are needed to thrive when studying the DP. Rashid Khalid said: “Without any doubt I am convinced that non-MYP students struggle with the DP rigour and give up very easily. MYP students have already developed the self-management, analytical and evaluative skills, and as such, are in a much better position to tackle the demands of the DP.”

Rashid Khalid believes it is because MYP students have experienced the rigour of the personal project and the open-ended questions of the eAssessment that they are in a better position to take on the DP: “MYP students are properly prepared for the core elements of the DP, like the extended essay and the theory of knowledge course, because they have already experienced academic writing and have developed a strong foundation for research skills. The nature of the eAssessment is open-ended questions, which fosters students’ thinking and communications skills and is very similar to the DP internal assessments that they will undertake.”

TNS Beaconhouse DHA now has 80 students in MYP Year 1 (Grade 6), all of whom will be undertaking the eAssessment in four years’ time. The school has long waiting lists, with parents wanting their children to study the MYP. Clive Barnes said: “Our full school name is TNS Beaconhouse DHA – a school without boundaries, and we are proud to be just that.”

For information about MYP eAssessment visit: www.ibo.org/e-assessment

