

TRAILBLAZER IN ISTANBUL

THE KOÇ SCHOOL IS AT THE FOREFRONT OF EDUCATION IN TURKEY, REFLECTING THE COUNTRY'S EMERGING STRENGTH AS A MODERN, DIVERSIFIED ECONOMY



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STUDENT SUPPORT

Many students at the Koç School get support from the foundation's scholarship fund, receiving vital help throughout their education

The Koç School was established in the vibrant city of Istanbul 24 years ago by the Vehbi Koç Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Koç Holding, one of the largest business conglomerates in the world. In addition to the school, the foundation has also built and continues to support a hospital and a university, as well several museums and schools of nursing.

A 'K-12' (kindergarten to Year 12) institution, comprising both an elementary school and a high school, teaching boys and girls aged 5–19, the school is situated on a large rural campus – with extensive, modern facilities – some 23 km east of the city. Koç has more than 2,000 students, of whom about 200 are boarders. Although the majority travel in daily from Istanbul, a significant number is drawn from the wider region. Indeed, the student community includes children from more than 40 Turkish cities.

INTERNATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

'The school offers the best of Turkish and international education through both the Turkish national curriculum and the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma programme,' says Head Teacher Robert Lennox. 'Every year, it sends a large proportion of its graduates to the most prestigious universities, both overseas and in Turkey.' A high percentage of these obtain places at Ivy League institutions in the United States, although a recent trend has also seen significant numbers opting for comparative places in Canada, the UK and European countries.

The school is looking to build its academic reputation around the world by hosting prestigious international forums, such as the European Youth Parliament (EYP), the Model United Nations Development Programme (MUNDP) and International Schools Theatre Association (ISTA) events. It also hosts international conferences for students and teachers, and is involved in exchanges and cooperative projects with schools and communities across the globe. Additionally, it is trying

to live up to the International Baccalaureate's mission statement, known as its 'learner profile', to establish a recognisable common educational framework. As part of this, all students start learning English immediately on arriving at the school. One of the school's main goals is to develop bilingualism in Turkish and English. All students can also take a third language chosen from French, German or Spanish.

MODERN TEACHING

The school has introduced teaching and learning strategies which have significantly improved both results and the general classroom experience. 'The school has appointed a number of "teacher mentors",' explains Robert. 'These are experienced, respected teachers who provide day-by-day support to their colleagues by watching lessons, discussing teaching approaches and giving feedback.' The theory is that positive changes are more likely to occur when ongoing support is provided rather than as a result of 'one-off' initiatives or conferences, or short-term programmes by 'brought-in' specialists. These kinds of activities are used however to support the permanent mentor programme. 'Initially the scheme started with just a single mentor in the high school mathematics department of 18 teachers and its success led to its expansion into the science and English departments,' Robert adds. 'As well as having an impact on individual performance, the programme has improved teamwork and started an ongoing daily debate about the art of teaching.' The scheme is being carefully monitored and developed to see if it could have wider applications, but its initial success is encouraging.

With greater numbers of students studying abroad after graduating, the Koç School has an increasingly international outlook, making contributions both to the local community and globally. Robert is confident that The Koç School will continue to forge Turkey's international identity in the future.