



CAULFIELD GRAMMAR SCHOOL

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School travel risk mitigation

International travel is a core component of extra-curricular learning for both students and teachers today. Affordable flights, the strong Australian dollar and an understanding of the value of experiencing other cultures first-hand mean schools are now expected to provide such opportunities.

At Caulfield Grammar, an exclusive school in Melbourne’s east, students have had such opportunities for the last 16 years with the establishment of the school’s first off-shore campus in Nanjing, China in 1998.

With a group of Australian teachers based permanently at the campus, and others travelling each year accompanying over 400 students annually participating in experiential learning and intensive language programs, mitigating medical and security risks has been critical.

Deputy Principal, Rowen Lewis, has been involved with the Nanjing program since 2001 when he was appointed as Deputy Head of the Nanjing Campus. He credits the school’s ongoing partnership with International SOS as an important factor in its success.

Industry: Private School
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Service: Comprehensive Membership
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Location: East Melbourne, Australia and Nanjing, China

“Having a partnership with International SOS gave us confidence and a level of security in taking students overseas that we wouldn’t have had otherwise,” he said.

“Reputation and capacity to deal with incidents are important to us and we know that International SOS meets both requirements. We need to know there’s a one stop shop where we can deal with all the medical and security risks, which often go hand in hand, that we might face.”

From broken limbs and appendicitis through to dealing with pandemics

Over the years the types of incidents the school has faced affecting students and staff has ranged from broken limbs and appendicitis through to dealing with SARS.

“Before setting up we had anticipated likely scenarios and many of those have eventuated. Having access to doctors at home who can liaise with doctors on the ground provides huge relief for parents when incidents do happen – however minor,” Mr. Lewis said.

One scenario that could not have been anticipated was the impact of SARS and Avian Flu.

“We were hugely affected by SARS and ended up evacuating. Knowing that International SOS was behind us during the SARS pandemic gave us peace of mind during what was a very uncertain period. What we learned from this was the importance of being prepared and having a plan B – and a plan C!”

A moral and legal duty of care

With new global viruses on the rise, preparation is vital and never more so than when taking groups of teachers and underage students out of Australia. Ensuring a safe environment and access to quality healthcare is both a moral and legal duty of care. Under new workplace health and safety legislation employers have obligations to ensure travelling staff have the same protections as those in their home country. This includes using quality and timely information sources.

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Timely and targeted information

“We get information from DFAT and the news but find the daily alerts from International SOS are far more timely and targeted. DFAT’s information tends to be slower and broad-brushstrokes. We use International SOS alerts for validation and context to gain greater perspective related to issues as they arise,” Mr Lewis said.

“During the SARS crisis we evacuated our whole team from China to Thailand, intending to run a six-month program from there. The day we arrived in Thailand DFAT issued a warning about terrorist threats against Australian interests. We found out from International SOS the threat was in the south, not in the north where we were going, but based on the DFAT warning many parents were still concerned and we had to cancel the program.”

Today security incidents on one side of the world can have ripple effects on the other side of the world. “Incidents like the US bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in 1999 caused a great deal of anti-western sentiment in the country, causing us to need to take greater security precautions.”

Another increasingly important issue is air pollution. “After attending a local briefing by International SOS we now have

plans in place to monitor and respond to changing air quality in China day by day. We now consult websites daily on the Nanjing air quality, as well as Beijing and Shanghai, and where necessary minimise time outdoors.”

“Air quality is particularly important for students with respiratory diseases like asthma, which is common in young Australians, and we have to be conscious of the needs of staff or their partners who are pregnant.” Caulfield Grammar needs medical plans in place to support all staff whilst at the off-site campus or travelling in their professional capacity.

Looking after staff, students and parents

Through careful preparation and planning, every staff member and student can enjoy the opportunities that international travel brings.

Most important is that parents receive the right information and have peace of mind that their child will be in good hands while away from home.

