

International Schools Yet To Score

EVEN AS PARENTS LAVISH MONEY ON A GLOBAL EDUCATION FOR THEIR WARDS, QUALITY REMAINS A BIG CONCERN

M Ramya / TNN

Chennai: Online discussion threads on several social networking sites connecting **expatriates** in Chennai are filled with queries from anxious parents about the right type of school for their children. And while there are **a handful of international schools** that claim to provide global education for children from various cultural backgrounds, **only a few make the cut**, expats feel. Most feel there aren't many alternatives to the American International School (AIS) and the **newer German International School**. Delpha Thomas, who works in a private architecture firm, says: "We have lived here for three years. Most expats who can afford it go to the American International School. Other schools tried out by people I know have turned out to be unpleasant, as our children could not adapt to the Indian system after attending school back home. They could not adjust well to the exam-based system and large class sizes." She sends her eight-year-old son to AIS. A spokesperson for the school said, the school has more than 800 students on roll, most of them foreign nationals, a number much higher than in any international school in the city. Since 1996, when auto major Hyundai entered the city, the size of the expat population in Chennai has only been growing. For instance, Chennai is now home to more than 2,000 Koreans. Most members of the community prefer to send their children to AIS. "We don't have much of a choice beyond The American International School. In the other international schools in the city the main focus is only on Indian children who are willing to go abroad for higher studies," said K H Shin, chairman of the Korean



CLOSER HOME: Expats seek a fruitful learning experience for their children even as they try to imbibe an alien culture

Association, that helps the community get settled in the city.

But foreign nationals in the city now have an alternative in the newly-established **Deutsche Schule in Neelankarai**, which offers the International Baccalaureate

program. "We differ from AIS as we offer a **bilingual program** in English and German. **Our teachers come from Germany** and other European countries with working experience in various fields of education, which allow them to spot the individuality of each child. **They are trained in social and**

psychological aspects of the children in group dynamics, body language, anti-aggression training, autogenic training, autism, ADHD, even physical therapy. Our main focus is to let the child **experience the joy of learning**," said school principal Thomas A. Pallushek. The school has 12 children, two of them half-German and two Indians, while the others are from Finland, France and South Africa.

The need for more schools that are truly international in not just name but also in character can be seen in the fact that even Indians, who lived abroad for a few years and came back as the industrial climate improved say that schooling in the city is a disappointing experience. Most are international only in name, said Kareena Johnson, whose son completed his nursery schooling in the US.

Educational consultant K R Maalathi says, **"Fancy buildings and air-conditioned classrooms alone don't make a school international. The curriculum, students and the faculty too should be international. The entire climate of the school should have a global edge to it starting from secularism to international-mindedness of the students."**

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