

Lukenya Academy British Curriculum School

Machakos County, Kenya

We are an international-system school that offers the IGCSE qualification, with a view to expanding to A Levels in the near future. Our diverse-community pupils come predominantly from Kenya and the wider East African region, although we also receive excellent pupils from parents and guardians in the Kenyan diaspora – for example, from the USA and, sometimes, the UK.

While academics are always the key focus at Lukenya, we take pride in our deliberate 'Uniquenesses' in relation to many other Kenyan schools. Firstly, we're a mixed-gender boarding school, which is quite rare in the country, and we think this is important in a clearly patriarchal society. Secondly, we're consciously mixed ability, unlike many schools, which seek to be highly selective in the private sector – and indeed we've won national prizes for our Value Added. Thirdly, we're entirely democratic on the level of student governance – pupils vote for their leaders who, through consultation, work to shape all aspects of school life from co-curricular to academics; and our student leaders receive absolutely no privileges over and above other pupils. We're also especially pleased with our growing focus on the environment in our semi-arid part of Kenya, and with our highly competitive, yet fun, House system, which permeates everywhere from the classroom to the sports fields. Another uniqueness is our increasing focus on the mental health of children and young adults, and we've started to train a range of staff in specific areas of counselling as well as inviting in external expertise of a sort that's usually more fun than intimidating – mental health games and yoga, for example.

A middle-to-low cost British National Curriculum school, we are deliberately hybrid and respectful of the country's own education system. This hybridity is clear through our curriculum, where we teach solid British Curriculum skills and understanding, but this as much as possible through East African contexts, twisting the curriculum to student needs and parental requests. Our hybridity is also clear in the manner in which we expect students to participate in certain activities that many Kenyan-system schools also promote, such as the cleaning of classrooms or their own dormitories and clothing – we think this is a vital way of ensuring that our pupils aren't taught away from the world in which they live. It's also clear in our policy of not employing large numbers of expatriate staff – we have only one, from the UK – but rather of retraining Kenyan-trained teachers in the ways of the international system.

Increasingly, in a culture where terminal qualifications ('the certificate') have historically been the driving force for education, we make it clear that our IGCSEs are merely one stepping stone, and we try to prepare our pupils for a future of lifelong learning – but learning that can be fun as well as a workplace obligation. While preparing pupils for higher education and work, we're sceptical of 'teaching for the workplace only', and try to instil in our pupils the ability to creatively reflect on sociocultural issues, and to engage for the benefit of society, changing the world where necessary. This is evident in the curriculum where, alongside traditionally 'academic' IGCSE subjects, we also offer Global Perspectives and Environmental

Management. It is evident outside the taught curriculum through our various debates and other weekend boarding events.

Although not a high-cost school, we are certainly a school possessed of a proud community that works together to ensure success on all levels, and which admires the involvement of its students, all of whom are valued for their diverse gifts and talents.