Australian International School

The *essential* Parent Guide to early years



The power of a strong start:

A parent's guide to early education and lifelong learning



Why the first years *shape* a lifetime

Early childhood is not just the beginning of learning, it's the blueprint for lifelong growth. Neuroscience tells us that 95% of brain development occurs by age six. What happens during these years shapes everything from literacy and emotional wellbeing to how a child will navigate challenges as an adult.

At the Australian International School in Singapore (AIS), we don't just offer an Early Years program, we offer a foundation for life. Our approach is guided by global research, a deep respect for childhood, and decades of experience nurturing capable, compassionate learners.

This guide is here to help you:



Understand why the Early Years matter



Know what to look for in a quality Early Years program



Discover how AIS helps children thrive in these formative years

The early years *build* the foundations for education

*Did you know that 95% of your child's brain growth happens before the age of six?**

During these formative years, children develop the foundations for future learning, wellbeing and development. What those foundations are built on is shaped through the experiences that happen every day. How children learn to pay attention, recover from frustration, ask questions, communicate their thinking and keep trying when something feels difficult develops through daily interactions, relationships and learning experiences.

At AIS, thoughtfully designed learning spaces, combined with highly skilled educators and a clear educational vision, create the conditions for children to feel seen, supported and inspired to learn.

> The experiences children have in the earliest years of life are deeply embedded in the architecture of the brain.
>
> **Harvard center on the developing child**

Source:

- Harvard Center on the Developing Child (million-connections-per-second figure);
- Lenroot & Giedd (2006) MRI research on brain volume, source of the nine-tenths-of-adult-size figure.



95%

of brain development happens before the age of six



The classroom SPACE makes all the *difference*

Research continues to highlight the role learning environments play in children's progress and wellbeing. At AIS, every Early Years space has been deliberately designed to support exploration, collaboration, creativity and independence. Teachers view the environment as the "third teacher" and continually adapt spaces based on children's interests, developmental needs and emerging learning.

Source:

- The finding comes from the University of Salford's HEAD Project (Barrett et al., 2015), a study of 3,766 pupils across 153 classrooms that found learning environments can improve student progress by up to 16%.

Did you know that *'Play'* is the faster route to academic readiness?

At AIS, play is one of the most powerful vehicles for learning. Through purposeful, guided play, children develop language, problem-solving, creativity skills, as well as critical self-regulation and social capabilities that underpin future academic success.

Our approach combines:

Reggio Emilia

The leading early-childhood education philosophy — influences how we teach.

Australian Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)

The EYLF supports our understanding of child development.

International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program (IB PYP)

The IB PYP provides the framework for inquiry.





Play is not less learning, it is how young brains learn best

Our Early Years educators are rigorously trained specifically in Early Years education. An example of this is that all teachers are qualified in the Stuart Shanker approach to self-regulation. This ensures that classroom environments are calm, highly responsive and centred on each child.

Targeted specialist support across the EY means that all children are provided with appropriate support, and where necessary early intervention is provided.

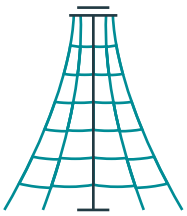
Source:

- Skene et al. (2022): Guided play can strengthen learning outcomes while preserving the benefits of play-based learning.
- Sylva et al. (2014): EPPSE Study: High-quality early childhood education is linked to long-term academic and social benefits.
- Moffitt et al. (2011) Dunedin Study: Strong self-regulation in childhood predicts better health, educational and life outcomes.

What the *right* SPACE actually buys

more opportunities to learn outdoors

Outdoor learning creates opportunities for physical development, creativity, collaboration and discovery. Studies show that active play and movement support attention, self-regulation, executive function and school readiness, laying important foundations for future academic success. That's why AIS has been intentionally designed to create more space for exploration every day. Free-flow balconies, outdoor learning areas and a 1,500m² UV-protected covered playground allow children to move easily between indoor and outdoor environments, regardless of weather conditions.





Children also benefit from regular swimming experiences in our fully covered 22m pool, purpose-built for young learners with age-appropriate depths and a sheltered environment. This supports water confidence, physical development and early skill acquisition. Together, these spaces encourage children to move, explore and grow, helping them develop the confidence and capabilities to thrive.

Source:

- Research by Ulset, V., Vitaro, F., Brendgen, M., Bekkhus, M., & Borge, A. I. H. (2017),
- Dankiw, K. A., Tsiros, M. D., Baldock, K. L., & Kumar, S. (2020) and
- Griffith University highlights the developmental benefits of outdoor play, nature-based learning and early swimming experiences.





SPACE that *nurture*

belonging, confidence and growth

Among the most important features of a high-quality Early Years experience are the everyday interactions children have with the adults around them. AIS environments support an 'Observe, Recognise, Respond' approach creating psychological safety and educational progress. Teachers observe children across multiple contexts, recognise strengths and next steps, and respond immediately with appropriate resources, questions, and learning opportunities.

Teacher-to-student ratios

1:4	1:5	1:7
Infant care (2 - 18 months)	Preschool 1 & 2 (18 months - 3 Years)	Preschool 3 & 4 (Ages 3 - 4)

Small class sizes means that there is more 1:1 time with teachers, while still strong connections with other students. Additionally, our Mandarin program is delivered four times each week in classroom environments, allowing children to develop bilingual advantages in familiar settings.

We observe that by week six, our students begin to own the environment rather than simply move through it. While seperation anxiety is a common issue in early years, we see growing confidence, initiative, and lasting belonging and joy in learning established from the very start.

Source:

- OECD (2021) found that the quality of teacher-child interactions is one of the strongest predictors of children's current and future learning outcomes.
- Romeo et al. (2018) found that conversational engagement is associated with stronger language development and brain function.

Transition to Elementary Years

The right SPACE for every stage

With lots of global families, approximately 80% of Preschool 4 children continue into AIS Elementary School. We view transition as something we do with children, not something children need to go through alone. Our intentional transition program focuses on belonging, continuity and confidence, so that the academic foundations can be built on in the next chapter.

Extended care

3 - 6pm

Learning and support doesn't stop just because the school day does, and for many busy parents we know this can be a challenge. AIS Families can also benefit from our complimentary Extended Care program, available from 3pm to 6pm everyday. Led by Early Years educators who already know the children well, we create the right space for students, and our parents.

This continuity extends beyond the classroom too. Giving children the space to explore new interests from an early age helps them discover strengths, build confidence and develop skills that support future learning. From sport and swimming to music, language and the performing arts, our extensive range of Early Years co-curricular activities gives children the opportunity to discover what excites and inspires them.



80% of Preshool 4 children continue into AIS Elementary School

Voices from the *community*

After 30 years in education including 19 leading schools I have learned that in the early years, **the environment is not simply where learning happens; it is part of how learning happens.**

The right space helps children feel safe, valued and that they belong. It promotes **independence and agency**, allowing children to make choices, explore ideas and take ownership of their learning. Thoughtfully designed spaces also spark **curiosity and creativity**, encouraging children to investigate, experiment and problem-solve.

Young children need different spaces for different needs- places to move and collaborate, alongside quieter areas to read, think and regulate.

It is about intentionality. When educators thoughtfully design environments around how young children learn, the space itself becomes another educator- communicating that children are capable, their ideas matter, and learning is something to approach with confidence and joy.



Stuart Armistead
Head of Early Years



The Early Learning Village has many excellent facilities, which my son loves. The water play area, sand-pit, scooters, and playgrounds are suitable for his age group. He has also made many friends and loves attending school daily.

The O'Sullivan Family

Having worked at the Australian International School for the past nine years, I have seen how the right environment can shape a child's confidence, curiosity and love of learning.

For young children, the environment is much more than a classroom. It is where they feel safe, valued and inspired to explore. When children feel a sense of belonging, they are more willing to take risks, ask questions and share their ideas.

Thoughtfully designed spaces, with open-ended materials, natural elements and meaningful provocations, invite children to investigate, create, and make sense of the world through play. When resources are accessible and organised with intention, children can make choices, solve problems and become more independent in their learning.

The most meaningful learning happens when children are curious, engaged and connected. A well-designed environment encourages these moments every day, while recognising that every child learns differently.
When we create spaces with children at the heart of every decision, the environment becomes a partner in learning, nurturing confident, capable and joyful learners.



Kathy Timbas
Head of Year (Preschool 3)



The teachers work hand in hand with parents and listen to every concern.

If you want a child-led environment where your child's voice matters, this is the place. Children are truly respected and valued at AIS preschool in Singapore.

Faris, Fadhilah and Fayra



The *right* **SPACE**
at the *right* stage

Australian International School

Discover the Early Years Program at AIS

When children feel known, supported and inspired to explore, remarkable things begin to happen. That's what the right space makes possible.

Location

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WE ARE AN ACCREDITED SCHOOL

Book a visit
or join our upcoming Open House to see our programs in action