

Why Yokohama?

—Company Interview Series—

Deutsche Schule Tokyo Yokohama

Our school's presence has become a great strength for expatriates living in Japan



Dr. Detlef Fechner, School Principal



Kindergarten, primary, and secondary education for 460 students from almost 20 countries

The Deutsche Schule Tokyo Yokohama was opened in 1904 with a private residence initially serving as a schoolhouse for nine students. We are the oldest overseas German school in East Asia. The school was relocated to its current site in Chigasaki (TsuZuki Ward) in 1991. We had received an offer from the City of Yokohama, which was looking to develop the area, so we erected a new school building here. Suitable learning environments have been created for students from kindergarten through secondary education, and we presently have 460 students from nearly 20 countries, including Switzerland, Austria, and Japan as well as Germany. The qualifications they earn will allow them to continue on to university in Germany, of course, and in Japan. Classes are generally conducted in German, but classes taught in other foreign languages were introduced for some subjects in the 2012/2013 academic year, and English lessons taught by native speakers as well as TOEFL preparatory classes were begun in the 2013/2014 academic year, giving the school an even more international flavor.

The community formed around the school enriches expatriates' social interactions

When a foreign employee of a foreign company is assigned to that company's Japan office, the greatest concern is likely about adapting to life in a country with a completely different culture and living habits. This concern is even more serious when children are involved. The choice of schooling while abroad has a significant impact on a child's future, so it is an issue that would trouble any parent. Yokohama is home to the Japan offices of quite a few German companies, and the children of many of the parents working here attend our school. There are also a number of employees with jobs in Tokyo who choose to live in Yokohama, so the children in their families also go to our school. Our PTA members enjoy a great deal of interaction, with voluntary "start-up groups" and other approaches available to support families. BBQ parties are held to welcome new arrivals, and the locally popular Oktoberfest has become an annual event. It seems that many of the parents have Japanese partners, but such exchange transcends language and racial barriers. Exchange with the local community has picked up in particular since the Great East Japan Earthquake. In addition to working more closely with city and ward offices, the police, and other administrative organizations, we have been actively pursuing ties with the community through such efforts as volunteer work at retirement homes. Most of our graduates go on to German universities, but many of them become so attached to Japan that they later return, and there are even cases in which both the parent and the child have attended our school. I understand that students familiar with both Japanese and German culture have become valuable assets for their companies. There are several other international schools in Yokohama besides our own, so in this sense I think the city provides an environment very appealing for foreign companies looking to set up a Japan office.

Interviewed by Yokohama World Business Support Center, 2/1/2017