

LES PETITS LASCARS DE DB is now 5!

Photos by LPLDDB



In March, DB French School, Les Petits Lascars de DB, celebrated their 5th Anniversary! We met with Dominique & Christian Chasset, the people behind this school to find out more

Dominique & Christian are the founders and directors of HK Institute of Languages / HK Kidz - a key reference for language education in Hong Kong and within the French community. Both of them are French teachers with over 30 years experience each, and they have been living in DB for over 22 years.

IDB: What is Les Petits Lascars de DB?

Les Petits Lascars is a non-profit association which oversees a local DB French school. The school is fully supported by the French Consulate and by the French Government which has been subsidizing the project.

IDB: Who is Les Petits Lascars for?

Les Petits Lascars was set up to provide DB French-speaking families with a place to school their children in French - whether fulltime (kindergarten class) or after regular school hours, with lessons delivered by qualified and experienced French native teachers.

It primarily caters for two types of families - families who intend to school their

child at French International School in the long-term but feel that their child is too young to travel every day from DB and back - these parents usually opt for our kindergarten class in the morning which offers a thru train to Grande Section (P1) at French International School.

And families, often bi-national, who intend to school or are schooling their child at DBIS, Discovery College or Lantau International yet still want their child to grow up as a fluent French speaker, also able to read and write the language - these parents may opt for our kindergarten class in the morning and then extra-curricular Mother Tongue support classes in the afternoons from P1, or for our extra-curricular Mother Tongue support classes from the beginning.

We also offer homework assistance classes for children schooled at French International School who need help with their homework.



IDB: How many children do you actually teach?

When we first started back in March 2006, we had about 12 pupils. Today we have 42.

IDB: How old are the children?

At present, they range from 18 months to about 11 years old. However we are currently working on setting up a special class for teens who may want to take the IB bilingual (English/French) Diploma in the future.

IDB: How did you come up with this idea of opening a French school in DB?

Actually it was not our idea. For a few years, French friends and acquaintances had been asking us to set up some French classes for their children in DB. We had always been very reluctant to do so as we knew that it would be very difficult for such classes to be viable.

One of our friends in particular was very persistent - he had 2 daughters by then (now he has 4!) who spoke Japanese with their mother, English with their helper or at school - but none of them was really speaking any French. His eldest having just turned 5, he was getting really worried that they would never be able to speak their "Mother" tongue. He was looking for a DB based solution to have his children learn

French with a qualified French teacher.

So, we told him: If you find us enough French or French-speaking families interested in such classes, and enough children to form them, then we will set up the classes for you... And he did!

So in March 2006, a group of parents and us got together and a non-profit association in the name of "Les Petits Lascars de DB" was set up. Les Petits Lascars de DB was officially born!

At first we were fortunate enough to be allowed to run the classes after school at DBIS premises. However because of time and space constraints we soon realised that it was far from ideal, so we eventually decided to open our own school.

It was however not as easy as we had originally thought and we had to overcome a lot of problems, but finally by September 2006 we were able to enter our new premises - which were to be the school home for the next 4 years. In September, we moved to larger premises to accommodate growing demand - which was really a very happy moment for everyone.

IDB: Earlier you talked about subsidies from the French Government, how did this happen?

Despite our careful planning, the school was operating at a loss. By March, the loss had become quite large and we were facing a real dilemma: closing or pursuing.

Fortunately, and with the strong support of Jean-Pierre Thébault, French Consul General, Jacques Soullou, French Cultural Consul, Sylvie Tourpin French Cultural Attaché, and Mr François Genu, Principal of French International School, the leading parents presented our case to the French Government for a FLAM (Français Langue Maternelle - French as a Mother Tongue) subsidy.

The problem however still remained as we would not be able to know until October-November if the subsidy had been granted or not, and if so what amount we would be receiving. As we were told at the time, the chances were very small, with so many requests from all over the world and only so much money available...

Finally we could not find the heart to let

everyone down. We decided that after so much time, effort and good faith had been put into this project from all sides, we owed it to everyone to continue even if that meant having to put even more of our personal money into the project.

The good news came in November 2007: out of so many hundreds of projects, ours had been chosen as a leading project and we had been granted a much larger than expected subsidy from the French government! The cultural attaché, Sylvie Tourpin, was so excited that she personally called us to break the news.

Since then the project has grown from strength to strength.

IDB: Do your programmes carry any kind of accreditation?

Yes they do. Getting the support from the French Consulate and this subsidy from the French Government also meant another thing: that our school was fully recognised by the French Government. All our FLAM programmes are recognised by AEFÉ (Agence pour l'Enseignement Français à l'Étranger), the Agency for French Instruction Abroad who oversees all French schools abroad. Apart from French International School, we are the only school to benefit from such accreditation in Hong Kong.

IDB: How did you feel celebrating the school 5th Anniversary?

We felt overjoyed and proud - even more so as many parents and children turned up for the celebration, even some who have since left the school.

Today the school has grown with two other sites at Central and at Sai Kung. And another school is due to open in September 2011 in Macau.

This project was a great show of how good will put together can overcome obstacles. We personally think that it is the parents who ought to be thanked, as without them, Les Petits Lascars de DB would have never been. In particular, we would like to thank Mr & Mrs Guiral for their insistence in opening the school as well as Mr & Mrs Pringle, for since Day 1 they have been the pillars behind Les Petits Lascars de DB and have never faltered since".

Les Petits Lascars de DB are now accepting enrolment for the school year 2011-2012. You can contact them at: lascarsdb@hklanguages.com or by phone on 2526 8892 / 9198 0810. You may also visit their website: www.lespetitslascars.com