



Going to work in Kazakhstan

From Southend to central Asia. ACT member, Peter Tryon, describes moving outside his comfort zone to a former Soviet republic and ninth largest country in the world.

Tien Shan International School, TSIS, is in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The school provides low cost, high quality education for the children of expatriate families who work in the region. TSIS has an excellent reputation as an academic school, and has a strong philosophy of leadership and character development. The school currently has just under two hundred students on roll, from reception to year twelve.

Why did I choose to teach overseas?

Before I started my PGCE, I had a desire to use teaching to serve God overseas. I believe God's calling was revealed in my desires and interests. I love meeting people, going on adventures and experiencing different cultures. After completing my PGCE, I spent two years teaching at Southend High School for Girls, Essex. I really enjoyed working at this school. However, I knew it was the right time to act on God's calling. I handed in my notice of resignation before having the necessary funding to go overseas, and God showed His faithfulness, as within five months I had received generous support from friends, family and colleagues. I actually

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received more money than I needed for one year, so I am now in my second year.

What has teaching at TSIS been like?

Serving at TSIS has been an enriching experience. Since teaching at the school, I have developed more as a professional than I have in any other stage of my career. As a science teacher, I enjoy practical work. However, money, resources and facilities are available, but they are limited. This has provided an excellent challenge to deliver engaging lessons, along with the opportunity to carry out more dangerous experiments. I have found it challenging to adapt to an American-based curriculum used at the school. One of the most striking differences is the high expectation of parents and students. For example, the grade boundary for an A is 90–100%. This does not necessarily mean the standards are lower in British schools, because assessment is a very different process. Teachers design the tests used for assessment. When students graduate from the school, they receive a document called the school transcript that lists their grades in specific subjects and this serves as evidence to gain university places. The advantage of this system is that teachers are able to assess specific learning objectives fairly and at a level that is appropriate to the students in the class. The disadvantage, however, is that assessment is not standardised with other schools.

The atmosphere amongst staff and the wider community is encouraging and inclusive. I have been able to build many relationships with people from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds and enjoyed some really good food too! The community is comprised of Koreans, Americans, Canadians, Australians and South Africans. Most importantly, I have found it necessary to depend on God in many ways and I have been able to witness God's faithfulness in my life. As well as meeting my financial needs, God has also given me many opportunities to build great friendships and become involved in other exciting ministries such as helping at a special needs orphanage and teaching at a Bible study for young professionals.

Where next for me?

Malaysia has been on my heart for some time and just recently God has opened the door for me to work there. In August 2010, I am undertaking a head of chemistry position at an international school in Malaysia. This is a secular school and a paid position. I am hoping to save money in order to attend Bible College.

Would you be interested in teaching at Tien Shan?

I would strongly recommend TSIS to anyone who is prepared to serve God overseas. The school recruits qualified Christian teachers from around the world, all of whom serve as volunteers. If you would like to work in a dynamic, exciting and caring, international community please contact recruitment@tienshanschool.org

What institutional challenges is TSIS facing?

We are in the ongoing process of applying for accreditation with the Council of International Schools, CIS and the Association of Christian Schools International, ACSI. The process of



Snowboarding is a hobby Peter took up last winter and he loves it!

accreditation will ensure that the curriculum is recognised as valid when compared to other schools. In order to gain accreditation the school has to ensure, firstly, its curriculum is well documented and implemented, and, secondly, the school must upgrade its campus.

How does TSIS develop its curriculum?

It is essential for TSIS to have an internally standardised curriculum. An internally standardised curriculum means that all teachers in the school are teaching relevant concepts to an appropriate level and assessing these concepts in a fair and consistent way. Over the past years, teachers from around the world have been working on curriculum documents to ensure that the curriculum is internally standardised. I have enjoyed working with colleagues on staff training days to develop the curriculum documents and ensure that the programme of study is standardised across the school. The rich variety of teachers' educational backgrounds and experiences ensures that the curriculum is comprehensive, challenging and varied.

At TSIS we aim to integrate a Christian world-view into the curriculum. The real challenge for teachers is working out specifically what a 'Christian curriculum' entails. When I am involved in the process of lesson planning and curriculum design I find it helpful to consider three principles of Christian education:

- Christian education should encourage and guide the pursuit of truth in all academic disciplines. God has created a universe that is logical, ordered and comprehensible. Therefore all truth, not only theological truth, is valuable and worth learning about.
- Christian education should inspire a sense of excitement, awe and wonder in students. The Bible teaches that God's sovereign attributes



Peter grimaces as a butane rocket goes off with a bang!

are apparent in creation. Therefore studying the beauty and complexity of creation is also a process of learning about the Creator.

- Christian education should encourage the objective study of world-views that contradict Christian values, principles and beliefs. If students are to be prepared for success in a cynical world they need to learn to think for themselves and clearly communicate the reasons for their hope.

What is the building project?

T SIS is currently situated in a building that is short of space and does not meet earthquake safety regulations. The building also lacks facilities that are necessary for accreditation. However, the school is currently in the process of constructing a new building. Our current situation:

- Sold the current property and now renting it for school use.
- Purchased land outside the city as a site for the new school.
- Designing the building and campus.
- Started digging at the site.



The current campus is pleasant but crowded.

- There is enough money to build the main school campus.
- There is not enough money for staff housing, which is important since the school is a long way outside the city.
- There will also be great costs involved in furnishing and equipping the school.

If you would like to give financial support to the building project please contact: buildingcommittee@tienshanschool.org