



# Tanarata International School (TiS) - A school in an oil palm plantation

Update (Dec. 14, 2012): [Read my review of this school after one school term.](#)

International schools in Malaysia are expected to grow, so says M. Bakri Musa in his article [“The impact of growth in international schools”](#) (The Malaysian Insider, June 4, 2012). The Malaysian government has lifted the quota on the number of local students who can study in international schools, as well as granting tax and other incentives to promote the growth of these schools. Some private schools like Sri Sempurna School and some Beaconhouse school outlets are starting to offer international programmes. The reversion from English to Malay language as the medium of instruction in schools would further promote the growth of international schools — and the increase abandonment of national schools in Malaysia.



Finding the right school for our children can be a daunting and stressful challenge to us parents

(photo from  
ordinarypoet.blogspot.com)

The major selling point of international schools, M. Bakri Musa writes, is not that they are “international”. But it is rather that these schools offer English as a medium of instruction and they follow a Western curriculum. Chinese and Indonesian International Schools, in contrast, would see no rush of registration — with quota or no.

Questions about schools are important for my wife and me now. Our only son, Zachary, is five years old this year, and we are looking for the right school for him. There are several factors for us to consider: the school’s environment and facilities, the distance we have to travel to send Zachary to that school, and, of course, the school fees.

We identified some schools to visit: none of them is public schools. Although my wife and I attended public schools, we know public schools, with all their infamous problems, are not right for Zachary. Our son would probably find public school too boring and stifling.

My wife and I visited several private schools: some of which impressed us, and some, not so much. For instance, we went to one international school that felt more like a Chinese school! During our walkabouts in that school, we failed to find a single child talking in English! That school was also too crowded. And in another school, the teacher who entertained us during our visit could barely speak in English! No wonder then those two schools were struck out our list pretty quickly.

At the end, we narrowed in on [Tanarata International School \(TiS\)](#) at Kajang. My wife and I were impressed with the school’s environment. The school is located in the midst of an oil palm plantation! Greenery was everywhere. This was very unlike other schools that had more concrete than greenery. The teachers at TiS spoke English brilliantly, so as the students. The school was also not crowded. In fact, it felt like it was a school holiday! The classroom size is small. Although the limit is 20 students per class, the classes we saw had fewer students than this limit.



Administration building of Tanarata International School (TiS)



Lots of greenery in Tanarata International School (TiS). The school is located in an oil palm plantation.



Fancy a dip under

swaying palm trees? The swimming pool in Tanarata International School (TiS).

TiS is not perfect of course. For one, I am disappointed by their library. I doubt even 50 students can sit inside the library, and I think Zachary and I have more books than TiS's library.

TiS has a [website](#) and a [site on Facebook](#), but I was not depending on them for my reconnaissance work on TiS. I was more interested in frank and impartial feedback on TiS. I managed to find and contact [one parent](#) who has a child at TiS. Fortunately, this parent was also very willing to share her opinions with us on TiS. She spoke to my wife on the phone for about 20 minutes! She has nothing but praises for TiS. This was the deal clincher for my wife and me.



The school field of Tanarata International School (TiS). The field is surrounded by greenery.



A tennis court doubling up as a basketball court in Tanarata International School (TiS)



A treehouse in Tanarata International School (TiS)

So, yesterday on Thursday (Jun 14, 2012), we sent Zachary for his school entrance exam. *Blimey*, an exam just to determine if a child could enter Year 1. I think I must have been more nervous than Zachary. Like a trooper, Zachary was actually excited and looking forward to sitting the exam!

My wife and I had very little idea on what topics Zachary would be tested on except that they would be on English and Maths. My wife was in charge of English and me on Maths. My wife ensured he could remember and write his ABCs well. We also found several websites that have a list of words a Year 1 student should know. We printed out the list and made sure he could read and

understand these words. To our delight, he could read 95% of these must-know words. I like to believe Zachary's vocabulary is a product of the [Read Aloud system](#) which we have teaching Zachary since he was only a few months old.

On my part, I made sure he could count from 0 to 100. I also made sure Zachary could add and subtract numbers, as well as do simple math word problems such as "The tree has 11 apples. Four apples dropped from the tree. How many apples does the tree have?"

I taught Zachary how to read the time from a clock down to every 5 minutes (such as being able to tell time if the clock showed 11:35). Lastly, I taught him a little "algebra" such as solving:  $(10 + ? = 13)$  and  $(8 - ? = 5)$ .

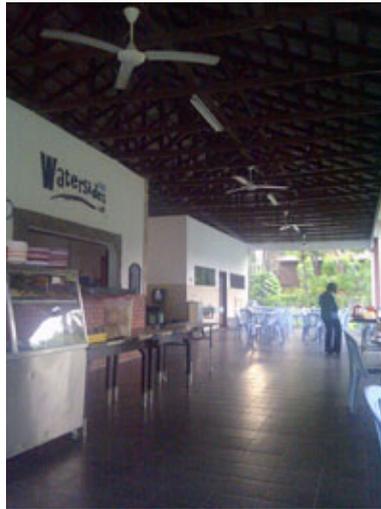
Zachary could do these math problems very well. But I was worried about cramming too much within a short period. I was afraid how well he could keep all that he has learned coherently in his mind. Would all come unfurling during the test? When I was Zachary's age, I could not even add or subtract numbers, let alone do:  $(12 - ? = 7)$ . In contrast, Zachary could add large numbers like:  $389 + 458$ .

I am glad to report that Zachary took only 45 minutes to complete the two-hour exam. The better news is that the school later called us to say that Zachary has been accepted in TiS! Boy, it felt good. It was as if it was I who took the exam. But the best news is that the school further reported that Zachary had a perfect score for English and Maths! In other words, our boy wonder Zachary scored 100% in English and 100% in Maths. No wonder then the school was so quick to offer him a place (within a day)!



Classroom building of Tanarata

## International School (TiS)



The school canteen in  
Tanarata International  
School (TiS)

My wife and I know that sending Zachary to TiS does not mean the end of our part. Whichever school Zachary attends, we must be involved in his learning experience, to ensure he learns well and, most of all, enjoys learning. Finding the right school for Zachary is only the beginning. It is interesting to read in M. Bakri Musa's article that research shows the most important factor in a successful child isn't in the size of the classroom but the amount of parental involvement in the children's education.