



**ISEB**  
Independent Schools  
Examinations Board

# CASE STUDY

## IPQ AT HILLCREST INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS, KENYA: BUILDING RESILIENCE AND CRITICAL THINKING

*"We realised that these pupils had developed a love of learning that we had not seen before,"*

**Surbhi Sharma Vashisht, Head Teacher, Preparatory and Early Years, Hillcrest International Schools**

### WHAT IS THE IPQ?

The iPQ is a research-based project qualification that is carefully constructed to teach and assess essential independent learning skills. It is divided into five sections: Define, Research and Review, Discuss and Develop, Reflect and Present.



### HOW IS THE IPQ USED AT HILLCREST INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS?

As an international school accepting pupils throughout the academic year from various education systems, the staff at Hillcrest International Schools decided that they needed a replacement for Common Entrance for its Year 8 pupils that would both assess them on their skills and give them something tangible that they could feel proud of and celebrate.

"As they were coming in at different times of the year and from different systems, it was really difficult for most of them to access Common Entrance, and we ended up having our own internal assessments for

them," explains Surbhi Sharma Vashisht, Head Teacher of Preparatory and Early Years.

"So we thought, why not employ something that could enhance those critical thinking skills? Then students could build on the knowledge they already have and feel proud of an outcome certification as well."

Initially, Hillcrest only used the iPQ for pupils who joined after the start of the academic year, before introducing it to those who the school felt would not benefit from a written examination but would really shine in a project-based setting. This allowed them to "show what they have learned in their own way and take ownership of their learning".

"We realised that these pupils had developed a love of learning which we hadn't seen before [as a result of the iPQ]," says Surbhi. The school therefore decided to replace Common Entrance with the iPQ.

### PUPIL-LED LEARNING AND DEVELOPING ESSENTIAL SKILLS

As Hillcrest prefers its lessons to be child-led, the school saw the iPQ as the perfect assessment: led by the pupil with the teacher as facilitator.

In the 2023-24 academic year, Year 8 pupils could choose either to do Common Entrance for the full five subjects on offer, to do only the iPQ, or to choose Common Entrance for only the core subjects as well as an iPQ. Twelve pupils chose the full iPQ, four chose the hybrid model, and the rest took Common Entrance. From 2024 onwards, all pupils will take the iPQ.

"Our parents are on board, our pupils are excited," says Surbhi. "The teachers really want to do it too, because it integrates so well with pupil wellbeing initiatives".



Before starting the iPQ, the pupils practise argumentative writing and are shown previous pupils' project titles in order to develop an understanding of iPQ work. They are then asked to identify a problem in their surroundings.

Teachers will explain and identify which skills and improvements the pupils may need to implement for the best outcome. For example, in the initial stages of implementing the iPQ, Hillcrest teachers noticed that the pupils did not have a sufficient understanding of more advanced concepts like plagiarism. Alongside the iPQ specification, Hillcrest created a scheme of work for pupils to complete before they start their project, including training on plagiarism, paraphrasing, and citations.

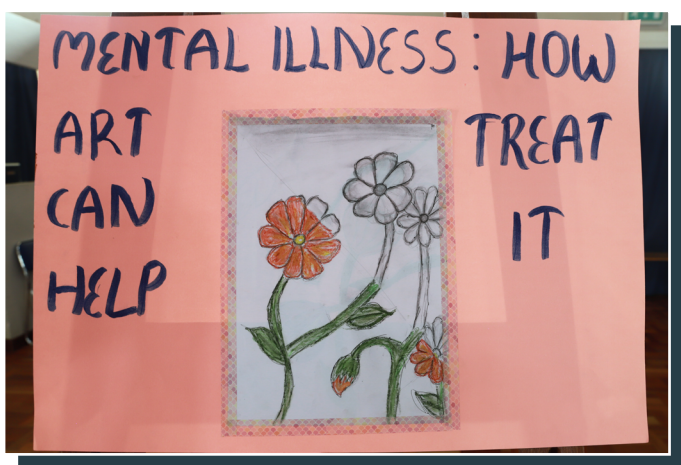
Surbhi encourages any schools adopting the iPQ to start as early as possible.

## WHY THE IPQ?

Surbhi explains that Hillcrest encourages its pupils to "think outside the box" when it comes to their iPQ project. "We wanted to challenge them and didn't want the old run-of-the-mill PowerPoint or a coursework-style booklet," she says.

This approach led to an incredible variety of projects, including a documentary in the style of National Geographic, and an investigation into why the main road outside school did not have a bicycle lane.

One pupil asked 'Does art help with mental health?' and created an art gallery with her own paintings. Prior to her project work, this pupil was still developing confidence in sharing her views, particularly when they differed from those of her peers.



"When she did her art gallery, it included 18 canvases; she took the mic, and without any paper or any help, she spoke for 15 minutes, walking from one canvas to the other," explains Surbhi.

"We wanted to give more pupils the opportunity to take this kind of ownership and take that deep dive into what they're learning. It also empowers them and might inspire them to make a change."

## BUILDING RESILIENCE AND UNDERSTANDING

Surbhi explains how the project work teaches pupils research skills that they may not otherwise encounter at this stage in their academic career. The pupil who investigated bicycle lanes in the main road had to work out who had jurisdiction over the issue, how to contact them and how to write a proper email.

"[The iPQ] also teaches children to accept that things might not happen in the time period they want them to happen," she says. "Some things are beyond their control." Encountering this reality builds resilience in pupils and engenders a growth mindset: "You can write a few emails to the government, and you might not hear from them, so you have to find alternate ways. Or, most importantly, you may discover that what you thought would be the answer may not be the answer." Pupils then gain a valuable understanding that research can be inconclusive or create more questions than when the project began.

Surbhi says that she would absolutely recommend the iPQ to other schools. "The iPQ is the best way for the children to show their learning. They can take ownership. I would one hundred percent say that this is the best way to give them those critical thinking and problem-solving skills."

To find out more about the ISEB Project Qualification that is inspiring staff and pupils alike, visit the ISEB website, [www.iseb.co.uk/iPQ](http://www.iseb.co.uk/iPQ)

For the Notting Hill Prep School website, visit: [www.hillcrest.bham.sch.uk](http://www.hillcrest.bham.sch.uk)

To read about the success of the iPQ at Cottesmore School, visit: [iPQ Hillcrest International School](http://iPQ Hillcrest International School)