

Schools in Canada

Applying to study at a high school in Canada is a relatively simple process for international students, although many institutions prefer them to apply through an education consultant. Amy Baker reports.

Going to a high school overseas can mean graduating with a good education as well as fluency in a foreign language. Canada is one country with a good reputation for its education system, and many schools there have developed application systems that enable overseas students to either apply directly or via an education consultant.

Online application for students is a new service at many schools. Mike Polan at School District no. 42, based in Maple Ridge, BC, explains, "We accept Internet-based bookings for international students, provided that we receive an original application form in the post at some point. We have only offered this service since 2003."

Iris Leung, who represents the Vancouver School Board (VSB), which covers 19 secondary schools and over 90 elementary schools, says students have been able to apply online to VSB since 2002, although the application is not complete unless certified copies and English translations of school reports for the last two years are received.

At Sedbergh School in Montebello, QB, Doug Wetherill explains that students can request to begin the application procedure via email contact. "However, before a student can enrol," he points out, "he or she must complete an application form – including two reference forms from teachers – provide copies of grade reports and have an interview." He adds that the interview can be done by telephone if necessary.

Wetherill underlines one of the problems with online applications – the need for good contact between the school and student to ensure a satisfactory placement. "Our goal in the admissions process is to make the best possible match between the student and the school," he says. "The only trouble with direct bookings is that it can be difficult to get to know the student well enough to determine whether he or she is a good match for Sedbergh."

This is where an education consultant's worth is noted, and many schools encourage applications from agents acting on behalf of their clients. Richmond School District in British Columbia doesn't accept online bookings because of the CAN\$200 (US\$142) application charge that must be paid at the same time, but it allows online enquiries. Mike Kliman at Richmond School District states, "Agents will submit applications and supporting documentation on behalf of students. We find that doing business in this manner keeps the agents involved with the students throughout the whole process."

Selection of high schools in Canada

	Location	Pay agency commission	No. of students	% int. students
Columbia International College	Hamilton, ON	✓	1,500	90
Fort Garry School Division	Winnipeg, MAN	✓	13,700	1
School District 69	Qualicum Beach, BC	✓	6,000	1
Lakefield College School	Lakefield, ON		365	17
Richmond School District	Richmond, BC	✓	11,500	<2
St Margaret's School	Victoria, BC		435	20
School District 42	Maple Ridge, BC	✓	15,000	1
Sedbergh School	Montebello, QB	✓	100	35
Surrey School District	Surrey, BC	✓	62,000	<1
Vancouver School Board	Vancouver, BC	✓	56,000	1.5



PHOTOGRAPH: SEDBERGH SCHOOL

Wetherill adds, "We are pleased to work with consultants because they can offer a variety of services, such as translation of documents etc, which we find very valuable. We look to develop relationships with each consultant so that they can get to know our school and the types of students that thrive here."

The proportion of business referred to schools in Canada by agents varies quite significantly from institution to institution, but what is clear is that schools do appreciate good agent relationships. At School District 42, Polan estimates that 55 per cent of international students are referred via agencies, while just two to three per cent apply themselves online. At VSB, Leung says five per cent of international students are referred via agencies, while 95 per cent apply directly – VSB has a facility for payment of the non-refundable CAN\$200 charge online. However, Leung points out one advantage of using agents. "Agents are familiar with local customs and understand student needs. They also enhance better understanding between the school board and the applicants," she says. ○

Language proficiency

Before a student can be accepted into a Canadian high school, they must prove not only their academic record but, in many cases, also their level of English language proficiency. Many schools report that they use a combination of Toefl scores, academic results and the Second Level English Proficiency (SLEP) test as indicators of a candidate's ability.

Students are able to enter the Canadian high school system with less than perfect English, but each school has its own standards and provisions for bringing a student up to the level required. At Sedbergh School, Doug Wetherill says, "There is no minimum score for the [Toefl or SLEP] test, but our standards for levels of English proficiency go up for students entering above grade eight."

At Richmond School District, students are not required to show evidence of Toefl test scores, although Mike Kliman says, "Sometimes, we are presented with certification or documentation showing [this from students]."

The school district uses students' own academic records as indicators of ability and each international student undergoes a thorough English language assessment on arrival. "It is this assessment that will determine the programming path for students in terms of the need for extra English language training," Kliman explains.