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**Bond Academy**

The Our Kids Review



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# Bond Academy

## The Our Kids Review

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Written by Glen Herbert

Since 1998, families have trusted Our Kids to help navigate the private school landscape. Drawing on years working with education experts, parents, and school insiders, Our Kids provides families with insights into the top schools—and into choosing the right school for a child.

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## Preface

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*“Knowledge we can get. It’s not important to memorize the knowledge—it’s more important to know what to do with it.”*  
—John Healey, principal, elementary/Montessori

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Every private school is unique, with its own character, facilities, programming, culture, and reason for being. No private school is right for every learner, but for every learner there is a right school. Your task—and it isn’t an easy one—is to find the right school for your child; the one that offers the right challenges and the necessary supports; the one where she feels comfortable and included; the one that allows him to grow into a sense of himself and his place in the world; the one where people laugh at their jokes, and ache in the same places. The one where they know, without question: those are my goals, these are my friends, this is my school.

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We know how hard it can be for you, as a parent, to research private schools. For more than two decades we’ve published Canada’s most trusted annual private school guide, building on insights gained over years of work. The *Our Kids Private School Reviews* series of book-length reviews is aimed at information-seeking families,

providing a detailed look at the offerings, the traditions, and the culture of each school. Titles published in this series to date include:

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## Details: Bond Academy

**Location:** Toronto, Ontario

**Founded:** 1978

**Enrolment:** 550

**Grades:** Preschool to 12

**Gender:** Coed

**Living Arrangements:** Day and Boarding

**Language of Instruction:** English

**School Focus:** Academic

**Developmental Priorities:** Balanced, Intellectual

**Curriculum:** Liberal Arts

**Curriculum Pace:** Standard-Enriched

**Academic Culture:** Rigorous



## Introduction

Begun primarily as an international school, Bond has grown over the decades to include a wealth of programs, including those beyond the prospectus of the academy itself. Boarding supports international students, and includes a language centre offering ESL classes and tutorials in addition to the core curriculum, as well as provisions for foreign credit equivalency. The fairly recent addition of Kindergarten and Montessori programs, as well as an elite athletic program, filled out the school's profile to where it sits today.

There's a lot to the offering, to be sure, though the feel of the school itself, in the day-to-day, is personal, intimate. Staff and faculty regularly comment that the impression is that of a family (parents, too, regularly refer to the Bond family). Not all schools see themselves in that way—they will refer to the quality of the programs, the success of alumni, or awards won. Bond, as it has from the start, prides itself most on those personal connections between the staff, students, and parents. Any visit to the school brings that to the fore. As students enter for the day, they pause on their way in, stopping to say hi to a teacher or an administrator who happens by. One boy regularly plays piano in the foyer, just for a bit. He's clearly very skilled, though he is also absolutely unselfconscious; he's not putting on a recital, but rather just adding his voice, in a sense, to the space. He's saying, "I'm here," and it's clear that all the students, by and large, feel the same way. They clearly see this as their place, they feel comfortable and known

here, and they feel that they belong. For the parents we spoke with, that was a primary draw for enrolment—despite the breadth of the academic offering.

In a way, that's saying a lot, given the size of the school. This isn't a neighbourhood preschool, after all. Bond includes Kindergarten through Grade 12, with a sizable student population, as well as a notably diverse student body. But the force of the program isn't focused on where students come from or where they are going. Rather, from the youngest to those approaching graduation, the focus is on what they bring into the classroom and the experience they have while they're here. Throughout, Bond has taken the goal of a liberal arts education—to educate responsible citizens, ones with the tools and the postures required for empathetic, productive civic behaviour—and applied it in the service of educating citizens of the world. If the school was once a place for international students to prepare for post-secondary study, today Bond is that and much more, having developed programs and approaches to deliver a robust academic and social experience.

# 1

## Basics & background

Bond Academy is a coeducational independent school offering preschool through Grade 12. Bond was established in 1978 as a secondary school, though it has grown in every way since, and today includes a full Montessori program that runs in parallel to the traditional Kindergarten program. The addition of an elite basketball program in 2018 also adds depth and dimension to the student body and the life of the school.

All the various brands—Bond Academy, Bond International College, Bond Schools International, and the Bond Centre for Leadership and Management Development—continue to have lives online, and you'd be forgiven, if googling the school, in wondering whether there are multiple locations in Canada. In practice, the offering is more cohesive and intentional than the online footprint might suggest. Bond Academy is the most visible, as well as being the core of the school; it's the location all of the various programs are run out of, including the summer camps, and it's home to the administrative offices of the parent organization, Bond Education Group. Bond International College is one of the brands that sits beneath that umbrella, appealing specifically to the needs of international students.

Bond was founded as Bond International College and, for a time at least, had a fairly narrow mandate. It intended to be an academically oriented school, one designed to meet a well-defined constellation of needs. It would be principally an international





school in the way that term was understood at the time: it would provide a means for students from around the world to enter the Canadian educational space in order to be better positioned—more fluent in English, acclimated to life in North America—to gain acceptance to Canadian or US universities and thrive once there. Supports, such as ESL instruction and levelling, were available to those who needed it, as well as counselling around visa, travel, and university application requirements.

Through the first decades of its life, Bond succeeded in precisely those terms. Time, however, moves on, and so has Bond. The current name signals that; today the various elements of the offering sit beneath the Bond Academy banner. The program does as well. It still offers an international school, though there is a broader conception of what that means, both for students arriving from overseas and for those enrolling from local communities. There are still the supports necessary for students who come from away, if not more so, but the program intends much more than just giving them the tools they will need to be successful at university and beyond. Instruction makes the most of not only the international learning experience but also the students' experience, addressing a greater social, cultural, and academic diversity.

The development of the full offering brought the school into a new era, and recent developments have continued the theme. The partnership with the elite basketball program, most obviously, underscores the vision Bond has for the future. If they once addressed a specific portion of the student population, that is no longer the case, with programs and support for a wide range of learners, in terms of age, level, and instructional requirements. "There is really something for everyone," teacher and parent Lisa Balm tells us, "and my kids have really thrived here. They love coming here every day, they love the personal attention they get. ... It's safe, familiar, and comfortable."

Along the way, Bond also established satellite programs in China, of which there are now four. They don't occupy their

own buildings, but rather teach out of dedicated spaces in existing schools. Accredited Ontario instructors teach the Ontario curriculum and offer classes conducted in English. Students graduate with both the Ontario Secondary School Graduation Diploma and the Chinese High School Diploma. Having a North American degree can help them gain admission to post-secondary education in Canada and beyond, though students are also attracted to the content and the instructional delivery, both of which differ somewhat from the Chinese curriculum. For many, perhaps especially those who prefer to stay in the country, it's understandably a very attractive option.

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*"Knowledge we can get. It's not important to memorize the knowledge—it's more important to know what to do with it."*

*—John Healey, principal, elementary/Montessori*

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Families looking for the stereotypical private school with ivy-covered walls won't find it here. The current location—the fourth in the life of the school—is on a busy thoroughfare in the heart of perhaps the busiest suburban area in the country. The spot has clear and obvious benefits, including a wealth of indoor and outdoor space, as well as access to a vast network of public transportation servicing Toronto and its environs. The grounds include green space, and while the school shares the building with other businesses—there is a wholesaler on one side and a bus company in behind—it dominates the property. The building was once occupied by a chocolate manufacturer, though all signs, perhaps sadly for some, are gone.

While Bond certainly isn't tiny, it's also true that many schools are larger. Size, as ever, can mean many different things and create different demands. Larger settings require more infrastructure,

particularly around counselling and communication. Where students can be lost in the crowd, there needs to be more vigilance placed on making sure they don't. Bond, though, is not one of those places. There are 550 students, which would be smallish for a secondary school, though here that population is spread across the entire grade spectrum, from preschool to Grade 12. As a result, class sizes are small, and students are known to teachers as they advance across the grades. When a student arrives in Grade 11 English, say, the instructor will already not just know their name but also have an intimate awareness of their talents, personality, and challenges. It goes without saying that there is great benefit in all of that.

Parents who enrol their children here choose the school for those reasons—size, academic focus, and fee. Olga Bakonyi is a current Bond parent, and her son George has been attending since Grade 9. When choosing a school, her first criteria was academics. “Do they have a strong academic background, and will they provide high-quality education?” she says, admitting that, in many ways, that's the baseline—all private and independent schools have quality academic offerings. The second, then, is what tipped the balance for her: “Do they develop a well-rounded person—a person that is open-minded, kind, understands diversity—and really prepare the child for the real world, not just the academic world, not just the school life.” She adds, “Like any parent, you want to give your child the best education, the best life, and everything you can give them to be successful in life. In that regard, now having three years of experience within the school, I know George is creating a strong foundation.” Bakonyi believes “a school is a partner to a parent to deliver results for your child,” adding the caveat that “as a parent, you need to be engaging and reaching out.” She's found the school invites that kind of engagement, something she and other parents we spoke with rightly appreciate.

When we visited, our tour began outside, at the play space out front. The Terry Fox Run was underway, with the head of physical education leading the charge. Younger kids were playing

on the climbers, with teachers in the mix, taking in the sunny, warm weather. It was all very charming and inviting. The school promotes itself as family-oriented, and the feel on an average day, as this one was, confirms the description. Entering through the foyer, you'll see administration to the left with entry to the instructional spaces to the right. There's a nice bustle, with kids coming and going, and parents and teachers, too, stopping in the hall to connect and make plans. It's obvious the students clearly see this as their space and feel free to be social, casual within it. It's all very nice to see.

The school has made the building its own, and its interior spaces are open and bright. There is some division within the school between the various programs, though it's more programmatic than architectural. The Kindergarten and Montessori programs occupy a hallway, for example, and the high school classrooms are in a separate area on the main floor. Nevertheless, there is a fluidity to the space, and staff and students of all levels travel through all areas of the school during the course of a normal day. The gym, music room, performance space, library, and cafeteria are on the main floor.



# 2

## Leadership

Since 2010, all administrative and academic divisions (elementary, secondary, and international) have been at the current location on Birchmount Road. With the move, the school conceptually became a complete whole, both in practice and in name. While leadership is still distinct—there is a principal of the lower school and one of the upper—administration works closely together. The intentions, too, became consistent across the levels: young students benefit from a diverse student population. The upper grades benefit from feeling part of a larger whole and having an even broader student experience.

Phil Davies arrived at Bond in 2010 as a teacher and served as curriculum leader and vice-principal before becoming principal in 2018. One of the things that attracted him to the school was his predecessor, Jeffrey Farber, whom he was aware of through his strong reputation with the local public school board, as well as at Bond. The approach Farber took in his leadership was one that intended to balance all areas of student life, both academically and socially. Says Davies, “There was a very intensive program, in terms of arts and sports, which I really liked. And I could see that every day [at Bond], people living that life.”

Farber is still involved in the life of the school, working with the international schools. When we visited the campus, Farber was there, as he is many days, overseeing the Advanced Placement (AP) courses—Bond offers AP courses and is a testing centre—and

consulting on the administration of the school. While he’s no longer principal, his presence adds a welcome continuity to the way the school is run.

John Healey has been head of the elementary program since he helped create it in 2002. He brought a lot of experience, including that of working closely with populations of at-risk students. Before arriving at Bond, he was a principal within the Toronto District School Board, marking a career that spans decades since his first position as a teacher in 1968. “I came here for five years, just to open the school,” he says of his arrival at Bond, “but I really enjoyed what we’re doing here, so I stayed around.”

Healey is old-school in all the best ways. “He’s got a lot of perspective,” says a current parent. “He knows what works and what doesn’t. He’s been very good for the school. ... John is no-nonsense with the kids. He has high expectations of them, and the big thing with John is that he really wants kids to excel.” She adds that “he’s pretty straight and narrow, and he expects the kids to rise to the occasion.”

Indeed, when Healey talks about education, you get the sense that he’s seen it all and has a long experience with forming best practices. Which, actually, he has. When discussing the school’s security measures—all students enter using an electronic key fob—he’s matter-of-fact, having deliberated intently on the operations of the school. His approach to the academic experience, and the life of the school, follows in kind. “I’ll be honest,” he says of the preschool, “we don’t truly follow every nuance of the Montessori programs.” Indeed, parents appreciate that kind of honesty, as well as the approach. Montessori isn’t perfect, developed at a different time within a different cultural and social context. Being flexible in its application, as Healey is, is a strength, allowing important adaptations for the students who are here now rather than blindly expressing an abstract curricular ideal.



# 3

## Academics

“The centre of our approach is very holistic,” says Healey. “I don’t see education as simply what happens in the classroom.” As in physical fitness, he says, “you can’t be working out only one arm. You’ve got to work on the whole body. We look at things that allow children to build up their self-confidence and self-esteem, which I think are critical to learning.”

“Basically, I look at our school as meeting our community needs,” says Healey. Supervised before- and after-school programs are an element of that, giving families the flexibility to pick up and drop off knowing there is not only supervision but also active engagement with peers and teachers. Parents are welcome into the school after 4:30 p.m., free to visit with teachers, sit and watch children in the gym, and chat with other parents. “It’s got to be inclusive,” says Healey. “To me, that’s the energy you can feel when you walk into the school. It’s a friendly place.”

The Montessori program begins at age three—children need to be four years old to enter Kindergarten—and continues for three years until the transition into Grade 1. Most typically, students remain within the program they first register in: the Montessori students stay in the Montessori program, just as the Kindergarten students stay in Kindergarten. “The programs are extremely different,” says teacher Lisa Balm. Kindergarten is more play-based, whereas Montessori is more structured. “It’s a very different learning environment, and a parent would have to decide

which environment would be better for their child,” she says.

There is a student focus, seen in the teachers’ ability to adapt their work to the specific children in their classroom. That includes all of the things the students bring into the classroom, from interests and experience to skills, talents, and aspirations. “Two of my kids came out of Montessori, so they were coming from a very enriched program where they were used to being challenged, and they needed that constant challenge,” Balm says of her own children’s transition to Grade 1. “The teachers were able to modify the program to suit the needs of everyone.”

The elementary and secondary programs naturally lead on from the preschool and elementary programs. Transitions are served by a close working relationship between the principals. When elementary students move into the secondary program, there’s keen attention paid to making that transition smooth and efficient, with students carrying on from where they left off. In service of that, there is a Grade 7 to 10 team-building group that hosts events, ranging from concerts to social activities, in order to bring the populations together around a shared experience. “We want a whole-school bonding,” says Davies. That includes encouraging mentoring relationships during the instructional day, with senior students guiding the younger ones. “We try to really build up the full school and community.”

The academic program and its delivery have been developed to build skills in creative, engaging ways. Teaching is dynamic, and the classroom furniture has been chosen to facilitate student engagement as well as intensive interaction with the course content. “You need to have interpersonal skills; you need to have problem-solving skills,” says Healey, though these are delivered with an eye to what the students will need as they move on in their education and, ultimately, into their professional lives. “They need to have transferable skills, because the reality is that there is a possibility that a lot of the jobs our students will work in in the future are not even identified yet.”

There is a close attention to cross-curricular instruction, in which skills are brought from one curricular area to bear on another. While some schools may emphasize the core curriculum, there is a belief at Bond that students are best served by various approaches and that, ultimately, all contribute to the whole. “‘Why are you doing drama?’ I’ve had that question asked of me,” says Healey, to which he answers, “I think it’s one of our more critical skills. Where else can you learn to think on your feet, improvise, and project your image the way you want someone else to believe in you? Are those not the skills, for instance, you would need for a job interview?”

Were you to visit a classroom during an average instructional day, you’d see teachers working closely with students, sitting within groups, and engaged in, more often than not, project-based inquiry. This isn’t an environment of chalk and talk—with the teacher lecturing from the front of the room—but rather of teachers leading through prompts and questions. “It’s very engaging and hands-on,” says teacher Anita Chhabra of the academic delivery, “with a lot of working together.”

The approach to the curriculum is student-centred, meeting each student where they are in order to help them achieve their potential. Says Chhabra, “We want them to see success in their own way.” Chhabra leads the character education program, something she brought to Bond more than a decade ago to promote a set of core values: citizenship, trust, perseverance, integrity, resilience, and respect. She sets the curriculum, which in the elementary grades is delivered by homeroom teachers. In the upper grades, Chhabra delivers the program herself. Character education was initially limited to 40 minutes per week, though the program has grown considerably, in turn informing instruction across the curricular areas. Says Chhabra, “Because I also teach them social studies, history, and geography, I integrate a lot of the character learning into those subjects as well.” Learning about war, for example, is used as an entree into a broader discussion of conflict

resolution. She also brings in speakers from the community to speak on topics relevant to character and how it’s expressed in their lives. Students are shown by example how they should behave.

The secondary academic days are somewhat brisk to keep students engaged. Classes begin at 8:45 a.m., and there are four periods. After school, from 3:40 to 4:15 p.m., there is time for one-on-one and small group meetings between students and teachers to review progress, answer questions, and build ongoing strategies and approaches. From 4:15 to 5:15 p.m., there are study halls, one for English and social science, and one for math and science. In each, there is a dedicated teacher from Monday through Thursday.

The secondary school operates on a semester system, with two semesters each year. Secondary students begin their credit courses at the beginning of the fall semester in September and at the winter semester beginning at the end of January. Students are able to retake courses or augment their credit accumulation through the Summer School Credit Program every July. Bond offers ESL credits continuously throughout the year, and students are able to enter it any time, including before they begin taking academic credit courses.

The school clearly sees community as a driver of learning, and teachers mean that in a fairly comprehensive way. The community, in their formulation, includes the needs of the families that turn to Bond, including a desire for smaller classes, more one-on-one instruction, and a focus on academics. The before- and after-school programs are a draw, as is the attention to skill development.

Advanced Placement (AP) courses are available for students preparing to enter university. All are offered at the discretion of the principal, which is typical and not unique to Bond. These courses are administered by a third party, the College Board, and allow students to work ahead, in order to either enhance their university application or simply stretch themselves, and to get an even better sense of what will be required of them at post-secondary institutions. Classes may be separate or integrated with



the regular curriculum, although AP students' assignments are much more in-depth. Each AP course culminates in an exam, for which Bond is an approved examination centre—students from Bond and other area schools sit their AP exams here. In addition to the core AP curriculum, Bond offers AP exam prep courses for calculus AB, chemistry, and physics, beginning in December. Courses are offered based on interest and enrolment. Fees for AP exams are in addition to tuition.

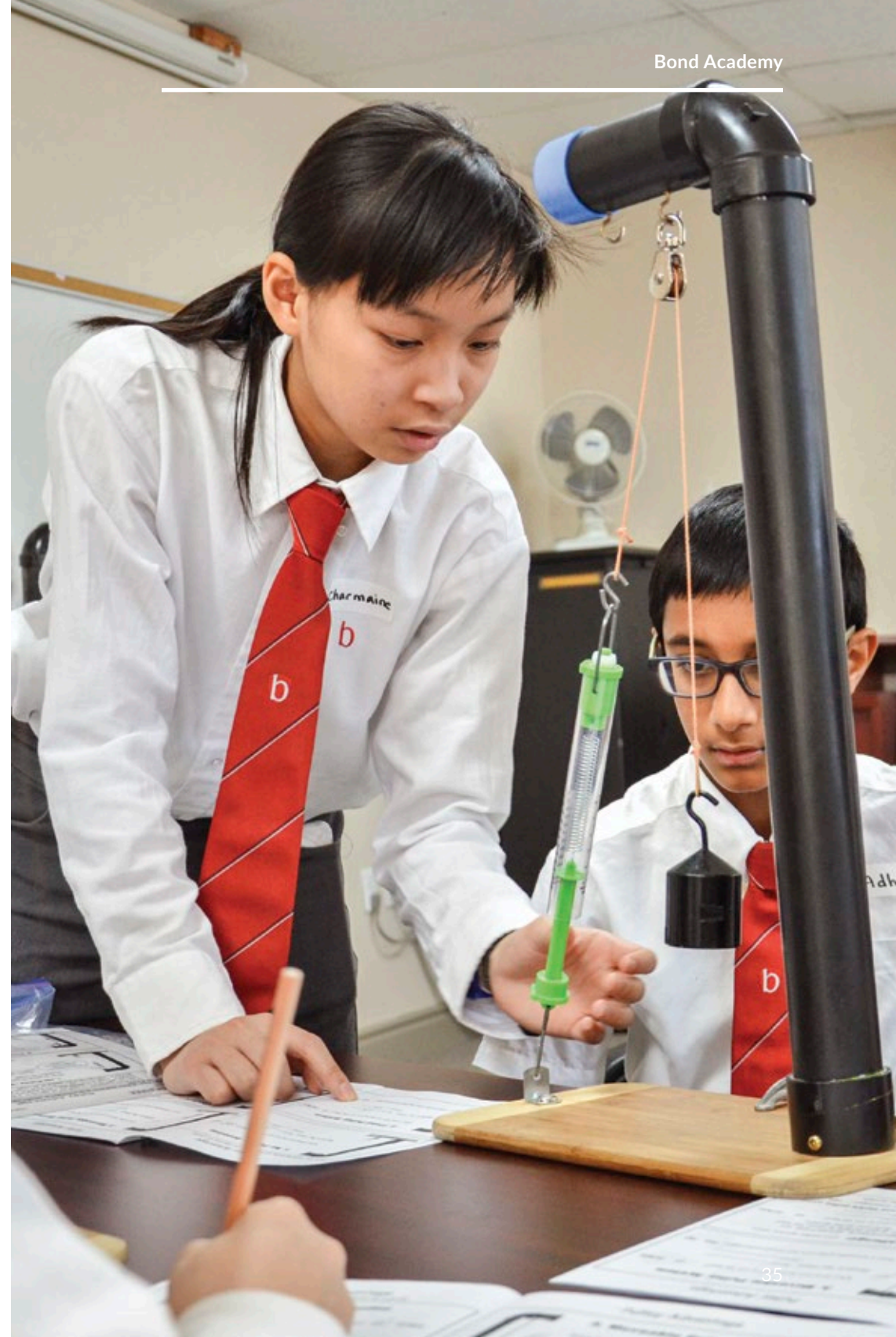
## 4 Student population

The school attracts local students from a broad catchment area in Ontario, from downtown Toronto to as far away as Ajax and Pickering to the east and Markham to the north. The boarding program supports international students. The residence program in Canada has grown from a homestay model to include a dedicated staffed residence solely for Bond students. There was perhaps a time when the weekend outings were bus trips to see the leaves in the fall, Niagara Falls, the shopping centres of Toronto, or the zoo. There's nothing wrong with that, of course, though there is more to life, something that is reflected in the current co-curricular programs. International students will see the Falls, but they'll also take part, alongside local students, in athletics, the annual trip to Camp Wanakita, and community outreach initiatives. There are programs supporting families in need, offsetting food insecurity, and volunteering within a local women's shelter. ("Community involvement—that's what we're about," a parent told us. "And, honestly, it's been the best thing for my kids.")

The trip to Wanakita came up frequently in our conversations and clearly is a highlight of the school year—one student called it "the best event!" Over the course of four days each fall, the entire senior student body engages with the mentor community in a unique environment: a traditional summer camp on a lake in Haliburton, about three hours north of Toronto. There they rely on one another and forge relationships around mutual understanding

and support. “They come home tired but happy,” says a parent, “and bonded. It’s such an amazing thing for these kids.”

Between all of the co-curricular programs, the result is, without question, good for all, allowing international students in particular to gain a more genuine experience of life in Canada. More pointedly, there’s a true English immersion, with less opportunity to fall back on their home languages and more opportunity to grow fluency through interaction with peers, both inside and outside the school. Of course, there are benefits for domestic students as well, allowing occasions to learn each day with peers from around the world, to interact with them both academically and socially, building all those communication and personal skills that will serve them well in post-secondary studies and beyond. For all, the learning experience is heightened. A discussion of world events, for example, is more meaningful when people who have personal experience with them are in the room.





# 5 Athletics

Some athletic facilities, including sports fields and a full-size gym, are available on-site. Beyond that, and to provide the full breadth of activity, the school looks to local resources, including the pool at its old location on Midland Avenue, now home to Midland Avenue Collegiate Institute. All grades attend swimming lessons there, making use of an Olympic-sized pool that includes an Olympic-grade diving platform. Parents and students love it, and indeed there may not be a school in the GTA with such a dedication to aquatics. The focus is on recreation and safety, though some students have gone on to have success in national and international competitions. For others, it's a means of gaining work experience. "I have three lifeguards," says a parent and enthusiastic fan of the swimming program. "It's a life skill," she says, adding that it's also "been their bread and butter for getting them through university. ... They've been able to pay for their accommodations and so forth."

Royal Carney has been the athletic director since 2007, and when asked what he's worked to bring to the program, he speaks first of the values that athletics instill: determination, mental strength, and a positive attitude. "I want to create a holistic physical education program," he says, "one that builds a student's confidence and self-esteem—working from the inside out, rather than the outside in."

The elementary physical education program seeks to build participation first, rather than competition. Carney says it's

primarily about encouraging students to try their best and have fun. That focus sets the tone for what the students experience in the later grades.

In building out the elementary program, administration seized upon the opportunity to provide a better balance between physical fitness and academics, given that the provincial curriculum has consistently chipped away at physical education programs. “If you feel good physically, you feel good mentally. So the approach is ‘healthy body, healthy mind,’” says Healey. There is some form of compulsory physical education every day, five days a week, for all learners in the elementary school.

All students are encouraged to participate regularly and to try out for sports teams. “It is our objective to make every student feel physically comfortable and confident with themselves,” says Healey. “Through better fitness and body control, students can improve their athletic abilities and their overall health.”

The goal, says Carney, is to create better people through physical movement, health, and teamwork. “If a student can begin to see that co-operation, sharing, selflessness, kindness, and compassion can be learned through physical movement and team sports, then they will be on the path to success.”

The recent creation of an elite basketball program continues the theme. It was formed in partnership with PHASE 1, a long-standing local athletics organization. In addition to expertise and experience, the partnerships also provide another interface between the work of the school and the community it sits within. Wayne Dawkins, a former NCAA basketball player and coach, leads the program. “It’s important that we create these opportunities for our young people,” says Dawkins, “to know if that passion and that fire ... is something that can be real. And I think, for kids, that’s it. We’ve just got to try and help make it real for them.” The words he uses—passion, fire, making it real—are telling. This is a program rightly centred on not wins and medals but aspiration and personal development,

alongside like-minded peers and quality coaching. Which is just as it should be.

“I think it opens up a whole other dimension,” says Jane Phillips, head of guidance. “It opens the eyes of some of the students who didn’t know programs like that were available, and indeed, they then try out for themselves. It’s not just players that coaches have chosen—anyone can try out. And the whole school is always interested in how they’re doing. It just widens the scope of our program.” If the team is having a home game, the entire school goes. “It’s another arm of who we are,” says Phillips. It also nicely opened the school to even more interfaces with the local community, benefiting students and the community as well.



## 6 Pastoral care

Students are polite and outgoing, keen to meet visitors and present their school. They are real kids, too, and while Davies had to take some time to recall a serious behavioural event, he was open in saying that, as anywhere, issues arise from time to time. (He did remember one from two years ago, which he presented in detail.) The point being that, as with any school, there are times when students need correction, and the administration is open and honest, keen to give real answers and demonstrate the proper approach.

The parents we spoke with seconded that, and mentioned their appreciation of the school's ability to deal effectively and empathetically whenever issues around behaviour or interpersonal relationships arise. "As children grow, they develop personalities—even mine!" said one. "As a parent, you expect that." She added that "you're dealing with human beings who are developing their personalities, their characters." Hiccups are seen as opportunities to learn and grow. Another parent commented that, being involved in the school for a number of years now, "I felt supported in having open, trusting discussions that involved the teachers and principals, so we can all figure out how to support the child to further grow and learn." All absolutely good to hear.

Katherine Kszan has enrolled four children at Bond, and over the course of the past decade, she has developed a close relationship with the school. The initial push factor for her family to approach Bond was bullying at a previous school, combined with

some issues the child had with authority. They came to Bond looking for a place that was perhaps more empathetic, more positive, more open to addressing the challenges her son faced. Katherine admits she found that helpful, including the approach to corrections. "You know if a child did something or was out of line or so forth, they weren't sent home. They were sent to the office, and they would do their homework there. ... They weren't sent home to play games or be on the computer. So I was very impressed with the way they dealt with issues and the way they dealt with children." Again, that's a sentiment shared by all the parents we spoke with.

The program of care is proactive, beginning for many with the character education program designed and delivered by Anita Chhabra. As such, students have opportunities to form long-term, more ad hoc relationships with staff and administration. Likewise, faculty are able to note any differences in behaviour and approach the students casually with any concerns. That kind of relationship extends to the parent community. Parents, both local and overseas, clearly feel comfortable approaching members of the staff and feel confident that, when they do, they won't need to explain who they are and why they are calling.

Phillips brings a long experience, both in the public and private school systems. "We go to them. We don't wait for them to come and seek us out," she says of the students, both in terms of social and academic counselling. She and the other counsellors have an open-door policy, as well as a chair just inside her door that students are free to use at any time. "It doesn't matter what I'm doing—if they just need a place to come, they can. Sometimes they chat to me about something that's bothering them, or they have questions about something. Other times, they just sit there for a while. It's kind of a safe spot." Phillips sees students frequently throughout the school year, not only at transitional times or, say, when course selections or university applications are coming due. "They'll just come in and ask questions. We don't do

appointments or anything like that—they don't have to sign up and, you know, if their heart is broken over something, they don't have to sign up and the only spot available is a week from now. ... That wouldn't happen."

"A lot of the students I've known since they were three years of age," she says, of those who joined the school within the Montessori program. Students and parents report close communication with the school and with Phillips herself, something she works to encourage with both local families and those farther afield. "We've instituted a lot more online meetings with the international parents," she says, a practice that expanded in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, as more people became increasingly comfortable with online-conferencing platforms. Sessions include regular parent conferences to discuss student progress, and interpreters are provided should the parents wish. "They get to hear in real time what their particular student is doing, how they're making out, both academically and socially, and how they're fitting into the program." Those meetings include opportunities for parents to speak directly with Phillips, as well as the teachers. They occur once every semester or more frequently, should parents wish. "If a parent is worried about their child, we can have them at any time," says Phillips, adding that it's a policy many parents make good use of.

University counselling begins in earnest in Grade 10, though students are encouraged to start considering their plans earlier. "We do a lot of work with them so they understand the implications of their choices," particularly around course selection, she says. "I find you really need to help the students understand diversification now, in Ontario, including the option to go to college for two years prior to entering university." It's an option that's attractive to students in some fields. Phillips feels it's important to make students aware that their paths can vary depending on their interests, skills, and talents. "There's all sorts of opportunities for them. Some of them don't know you can get a degree in art if you

like and then go to law school. They don't know that. They think they go to a lawyer school or something," she says with a chuckle. "We try and give them a broad sense of what their options are and to look at different avenues they have."





# 7

## Parents & alumni

“Everything we do is community-based,” says a parent. That “we” is telling, and it was said in an unself-conscious way. It needs to be said that, at many schools, that’s not the case—typically, parents will talk about the school and what “they” do on any given occasion. With Bond, the parents we spoke with very much see it as a partnership that involves them, not just their learners. That inclusive “we” was consistent.

There is a full roster of annual events that support that sense of community and allow ample opportunity for involvement. Theatre productions get high marks, particularly for their quality. There is a teacher appreciation event every year and an annual chili competition. “They are fun things, but it’s family,” says a parent. “We support one another.”

Parents report a high level of satisfaction with before and after care, including a flexibility on the part of the school around drop-off and pickup. For their part, the school intends to remain attentive to the stresses parents face.

# 8

## Getting in

“We believe in talking,” says Phillips, “and making sure that what we can offer a child is what you want for your child.” The process begins with an application, though the conversation begins there as well, finding out if the school is the right fit for all involved. There is a modest application fee, but parents report that there aren’t any surprises along the way, and that an entry to the school is personal, handled as the beginning of a relationship between the school, the student, and the family.

“I accept students that perhaps other schools wouldn’t,” Phillips says, something she partially attributes to having a child who required academic support. “Having to work with her and not getting the supports we really needed. ... We’ve had a lot of children with autism, and I also have a grandson with autism who doesn’t speak. I couldn’t turn down an autistic child here if I feel we could give them a step up and help them. And we’ve had many, many successes with kids with that profile. So I believe our own experiences help us in our jobs here. And we’re willing to put ourselves out there.” Phil Davies agrees, noting that his own experience, particularly in high school—both the successes, as well as the challenges and anxieties—colours how he approaches the leadership of the school and the students. Says Phillips, “It’s opening yourself up that allows the students to see we all have things we need to deal with. And I think that’s one of the important things at Bond, is that we’re willing to go out there, we’re

willing to take a chance and help them turn themselves around and become who they really want to be. ... We really try and lower any barriers for these kids.”

Tuition levels are what you’d expect for a school of this stature and breadth in this market. Before- and after-school programs for the Montessori, junior, and elementary programs are included with tuition, which is atypical and certainly very appreciated by the families that make use of them. There is a cafeteria with hot meal options and, there again, pricing and fees are set with the needs of families in mind—meal plans are available, though à la carte is as well. There are some incidental costs, such as those associated with uniforms and supplies, but the school intends to keep those to a minimum.

## 9 The takeaway

Like any good school, Bond has proven it’s able to offer quality programs while remaining agile, adapting to meet the needs of the current student population at the same time as broadening the offering to address new learners. Bond continues to appeal to students from overseas who are looking to gain a Canadian academic experience with an eye to entering post-secondary programs in North America. The addition of preschool and elementary programs filled a need in the local area— allowing the choice between the Kindergarten and Montessori streams —and also added depth to the student body. Leadership has been consistent throughout, particularly in John Healey, who created the preschool and elementary programs, and remains at the helm today. He consistently gets high marks from parents who appreciate his equitable approach to learning and student life. Davies, relatively new to the role of principal of the secondary school, nevertheless brought a full CV of relevant experience, as well as a demeanour that serves the school well.

Today, Bond is a school that reflects a new conception of what international education can be and where it sits within the educational mosaic. With a larger local population, served by the creation of a full preschool to Grade 12 program, international students are afforded a more authentic student experience, one that interfaces well with the surrounding community. For local students the experience is equally broad, with a range of

perspectives offered in class and a chance to meet students who will, in both subtle and substantive ways, open their eyes to the diversity of the wider world.

Academics are strong, with challenging programs and student support, able to address a wide range of learners. There is much focus on thinking skills, learning attitudes, and encouraging students to take risks, academically and athletically. The character education program, offered at all levels within the school, is substantive. Advanced Placement courses are offered, and the fact that Bond is an accredited testing centre for the AP exams contributes to that. By the same token, the academic program is well-served by a full course offering, with distinct emphasis placed on cross-curricular connections. It's nice to see that while literacy and numeracy may be core skills, the arts are promoted in tandem with them. The arts offerings are strong, delivered by faculty who have experience in the arts world as it exists in the city and beyond. Joey Herbison, in particular, demonstrates that strength, delivering a vocal music program that is a highlight of the school, both in terms of student development and the quality of the performances mounted. The visual arts are equally served, nicely demonstrated by an online gallery created during the pandemic—the pivot to a digital format was great to see, and the art displayed is a testament to the talent, instruction, and mentorship within the school.

There is a welcome emphasis on physical education, including a swimming program the entire school participates in. The development of the elite basketball program brought physical activity even more to the fore, for the students who participate within it, as well as the students who have rallied around it. It provides a nice focus for the entire student body, while also adding another substantive point of interaction with the community.

In all of that, perhaps including the move to the Birchmount Road property, the administration has added more momentum to Bond Academy. It feels like a school that, while it's had many

successes over the decades of its life, is truly coming into its own. The planned addition of an on-site dormitory will continue the theme, bringing Bond into a new era.





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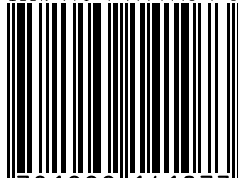
“This isn’t an environment of chalk and talk—with the teacher lecturing from the front of the room—but rather of teachers leading through prompts and questions.

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