

## An interview with Sachi Sakata – Gotanda School



Sachi Sakata's daughter is currently in Grade 1 and has attended Gotanda school since she was K2. Her son, who is currently K2, has attended since he was 3 years old. Until enrolling at Gotanda, both students had been attending a licensed kindergarten.

1. Why did you choose to send your children to an English language kindergarten instead of a Japanese speaking kindergarten?

When I was thinking about how to broaden my children's future opportunities, I realized that it would probably be best for them if they were to obtain the ability to think and produce ideas in English. I then began to think about how building a base of English expression and customs before beginning elementary school would be necessary to truly create proper English ability. Having three children, it a little challenging financially, but I believe this is the most beneficial thing I can do for them at this stage, so I made the decision to enroll my children. Previously we lived in Yokohama. However, thinking about my children's education, I began searching for a kindergarten near my husband's workplace in the Shinagawa area. The small size of the Gotanda school allows for teachers to watch over all the children. With its strong Reading and Writing curriculum, I felt like this would be a great place for my children, so we decided to move to the area.

2. Tell us about your children at the start of the program.

When they entered the program, both my daughter and son had almost zero English experience. My daughter began attending school in September of 2019. My son began attending five days a week from April of 2020. In the beginning, my son's lessons began online due to COVID-19. He spent his days communicating with his friends and the teacher via the computer. When he started attending in person two months later, he did become emotional when he was dropped off. However, seeing familiar faces he had seen from his online classes, he adjusted quickly. After about three months, he was speaking in simple English sentences. One of the assistant teachers told me this, and I agree, that being able to be exposed to English via the online lessons was a good first step for my son.

3. Tell us about your child now.

Our son seems to enjoy writing the most, and always finishes his writing homework independently. I was extremely surprised to see that with the start of creative writing, he was able to develop his own sentence. He now works out the spelling of difficult words using the phonics knowledge he has gained. He can now read his weekly Reading Basket and decodable books smoothly.

When it comes to his Speaking, he mostly speaks in Japanese at home. However, on occasion I see him talking in English with his teacher or sister. From my observations, I can tell he has a good understanding of

what he is talking about. My daughter engaged in a lot of discussions in English when she was in kindergarten program. With the small class sizes, she was able to communicate closely with her teacher. This gave me the impression that she had many enjoyable discussions with the teachers and staff. She told me she was almost never bored.

4. What activities does your child most enjoy doing at our school?

My son enjoys Park Time on sunny days. However, he also loved the time it was rainy and they had a Lego party inside and created their own Lego town. He's always very excited from early in the morning on days when it is his turn to do Show and Tell. With the extended hours of childcare, field trips involve taking the school bus to places quite far. This really gives each student a feeling of something special. Students get to go blueberry picking and visit large parks to look for seasonal plants. Also, doing yearly events like Palooza (Sports Day) where students have to prepare by practicing a dance really displays the ability of the children by showing them what they can accomplish.

5. What are your plans for your child in the future?

We are planning on sending our children to a regular Japanese elementary school and then attending the Jupiter lessons in the afternoons. With three children, sending them all to international schools would be challenging. In addition, when it comes to creating a balance between their English and Japanese exposure, we thought it would be best to send our children to a Japanese elementary school to learn the intricacies of the Japanese language and experience Japanese culture. Then after elementary school, they can attend the Jupiter lessons to do the same in English. Our daughter currently attends Jupiter lessons where she uses textbooks that are used by students her same age overseas. She has continued to sustain her English level she built in kindergarten to this day, so we have no worries about our son doing the same.

6. How is your child doing in the Jupiter lessons?

Our daughter attends the lessons five days a week after school. At first, I thought that with the amount of homework given, it would be too much for her. Fortunately, she is enjoying herself. She creates her own schedule to finish her homework and when there is a large amount, she creates her own timeframe to finish it over the weekend. She independently reads books in English. Currently she is really enjoying the Kingdom of Fantasy series by Geronimo Stilton, and reads in English whenever she gets a chance. Since joining, she has taken Eiken from Grade 4 and took both the Grade Pre-2 and Grade 2 this year as a first grader. We don't consider taking Eiken to be a goal, but rather an indicator of her progress in English. However, it does appear to strongly relate to her motivation to study and the fulfillment she receives from passing.

7. Do you have any advice for parents thinking of enrolling their child in the PAP program?

English is a tool for communication. However, when it comes to a child's future, simply having fun in English is not enough. I feel that at PAP, the students take lessons at a level where they learn how to think about topics and express their opinions in writing. In addition, the teachers at PAP come from a variety of different countries. This allows the students to experience many diverse experiences and environments. The students truly love their teachers. I feel like the teachers must feel the same as they are always kind, teach fun lessons, and praise each student's efforts. They do what's necessary for each student at their current level. This is true when it comes to their English, toilet training, naptimes, and many other routines in life. The teachers are like a "friend" to us, watching over the students alongside the parents. This is what makes us entrust the children in their care.