

An interview with Haruka Yamazaki – Gotanda School



Haruka Yamazaki's daughter Ryoka is currently four years old and attended the Kamikitazawa branch since she was 2 years and 10 months old. She has been attending the school in Gotanda since moving to the area last November.

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

Before attending the school, she had been watching English videos, such as songs on YouTube. Hearing that English would be required from elementary school age, I wanted her to grow used to it and enjoy learning it. I am not very adept when it comes to learning languages, so I wanted her to have a grasp on English before it became something she needed to study. This is why I sent her to the school.

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

We began by sending her to a four-hour program twice a week. Since her exposure to English was for only a short time, she was very interested in the language she was hearing that was clearly different from Japanese. However, she did not actively try to speak in the classroom. She only spoke Japanese at home and we didn't try to directly speak to her in English.

3. It has been nearly two years since your daughter started English. How is she now?

She currently attends the Gotanda school as a member of the K1 class. As her exposure to English has drastically been increased, she now actively searches out English language videos on her own at home. She also speaks to us in short English sentences which was a surprise. When I go to pick her up, she cheerfully talks to her teacher in English. When I ask her "What did you do today?" she tells me about the day's events in natural English.

4. Do you feel like there was a certain point where your child grew the most?

There was a certain point where I felt like my child grew significantly. During the first State of Emergency,

we were unable to send our daughter to school. However, she was able to take a total of 8 lesson hours (two days x four hours each) online, so we decided to have her take one lesson a day, Monday through Saturday. We were quite surprised that within two weeks, she was naming objects around the house in English. Being able to have even just a little exposure to English every day during the COVID-19 pandemic allowed her to continue to be interested and intrigued by the language.

Once able to return to in-person classes, she was able to play in groups with her friends. She began telling me about the friends she had made. She grew interested to know when was her turn for Show and Tell and began to think seriously about what she would show to her classmates next. She doesn't really have an opportunity to give presentations at home, so being able to do so in front of people, and in English none the less, is something I am truly grateful for.

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

She loves doing arts and crafts. She brings everything she made by herself home and tells me to, "Look at it in detail and display it well." She also enjoys dancing to popular dances, like BTS' Butter, at home as well.

Recently she really enjoyed the Summer Festival. She told me about how many rings she had gotten in the ring toss and kept her water yo-yo until it began to deflate. She enjoyed telling me all about the fun things she did at the festival. She was able to do activities she had seen done before joining the school and had fun wearing a yukata.

The principal is passionate about what she does, scheduling many events and excursions. There are events which allow the children to experience Japanese culture, such as rice planting. I am very grateful that my daughter is able to be included in these events. I believe that being able to do events that she would not normally be able to do in the city, like getting muddy, is a great experience for her.

6. Tell us your reason from changing from the PIP program to the PAP program.

Although the students do write in the PIP program, there is a limit to what can be done in shorter time frame. We felt that being exposed to English for a longer amount of time would help raise her speaking level as well.

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

We plan on sending her to a public elementary school. However, we don't worry about her English level since she will be able to continue to attend Jupiter program after graduation. We feel this the best way to not waste her English ability that she has and will continue to build on.

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

We want her to have a variety of experiences while she is still young. At PAP, the students are able to experience a comprehensive program which includes not only music and PE, but also cooking and other subjects as well. Everything can be done at PAP, so there is no need to send a child elsewhere for other activities. It's truly amazing that children can experience musical instruments like the piano and violin. The principal is passionate when it comes to education and the management of the school, which is why I think teachers perform so well. With a well-rounded curriculum and teachers you can trust, I am able to put my trust in the school and send my child to the school.