

# SPOTLIGHT ON:

## CHANGCHUN AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL (CAIS)

### *Leading with Purpose in the Heart of Northeast China.*

ECIS met with Dr. Ildiko Murray, Head of School at [Changchun American International School \(CAIS\)](#), to learn more about her leadership journey and the unique role her school plays in Northeast China. Her story, and also that of CAIS's, is one of resilience, creativity, and a commitment to building community in a region few would expect to find a thriving international hub.

Located in China's Jilin Province, CAIS may be far from the world's better-known education centres, but its impact is global. Serving more than 500 students from over 30 nationalities, the school's vision is clear: to inspire responsible global citizens who meet the challenges of the future through a holistic education.

**MOTTO** WITH PASSION, WE:  
*Challenge. Connect. Create.*  
READ THE FULL MISSION, VALUES, AND VISION

## LEADERSHIP AND ECIS PARTNERSHIP



**Dr. Ildiko Murray,**  
Head of School

Dr. Murray, now in her fifth year as Head of School, brings both academic depth and practical vision. Her PhD research has been instrumental in guiding CAIS through a developmental journey, helping the school refine its mission, strengthen its culture, and grow with intentionality. She also brought with her a longstanding relationship with ECIS, having been connected to the organisation during her time at the International School Dhaka.

When she arrived at CAIS, she prioritised [ECIS membership](#) so that her new community could benefit from the same professional network and training. This, Dr. Murray stresses, is one of the many advantages of belonging to the ECIS family: a professional home that combines expertise, training, and international connection for schools, no matter how geographically isolated they may be.



## A TRULY INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Founded in 2006 by Mr. Daniel Chou and Ms. Irene Chu, CAIS was the first IB World School in Northeast China and remains the only fully accredited international school in Changchun. Today, it offers the full IB continuum, from the Primary Years Programme to the Diploma Programme, alongside accreditation from CIS and WASC.

The community it serves is uniquely diverse: large numbers of German and Chinese students, alongside American, Mexican, Canadian, and many others. With a German section recognised by the Zentralstelle für das Auslandsschulwesen and an affiliated foreign language school for Chinese nationals, CAIS is proudly trilingual (English, German, and Mandarin), and purposefully inclusive.

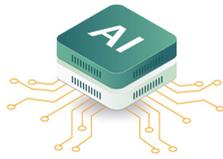
As Dr. Murray explains, "CAIS welcomes students at all stages of their journey, from those arriving with zero English to those pursuing bilingual diplomas, creating opportunities for every learner to thrive".

### DID YOU KNOW...?

Changchun is historically known as the "Detroit of China" for its role in the domestic auto industry.



# EMBRACING AI AND INNOVATION



CAIS also stands out as a laboratory for innovation in the age of AI. Dr. Murray recently took CAIS's story to the world stage, presenting at an international AI in Education summit in Montreal.

There, she showcased how CAIS is using AI as a tool for curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking—not as a replacement for human connection, but as a way to enhance it. Her message was clear: technology should serve learning, not define it.

The school has invested in a new technology centre, bringing together AR/VR, robotics, and design thinking spaces. Students use Flint AI, a safe, closed platform designed for schools, to develop critical prompting skills and understand both the potential and limitations of AI.



“  
*Technology should bring awe, joy, and belonging to learning.*  
”  
Dr. Ildiko Murray

And then there is Harry Botter (pictured), the school's first humanoid robot, who really can be found in between lessons resting in a cupboard under the stairs! Used in classes across primary and middle years, Harry helps students engage with coding, prompting, bilingual interaction, and, perhaps most importantly, critical thinking.

When Harry gives an incorrect answer, students are encouraged to spot the mistake and discuss it. As Dr. Murray explains: *"It's not about believing everything AI says. It's about learning how to question, analyse, and think critically."*

More humanoids are on their way, and CAIS is pioneering the use of AI tutors and assistants in classrooms, always with the clear principle that technology should enhance human connection, not replace it.



## BELONGING, HAPPINESS, & AWE

Beyond academics, Dr. Murray emphasises the importance of happiness and belonging. Drawing on research and her own leadership journey, she believes awe and joy are vital components of learning.

One student reflected on a school-wide dance and film project: *"I didn't have a lot of friends, but when we worked together, it felt like all our hearts were connected."* For Dr. Murray, these moments define CAIS's success: *"Fun and friends. That's what our students talk about most. Content will change, but the human connections and sense of belonging last."*



## CHILD PROTECTION MATTERS

Dr. Murray reflects that one of the most impactful outcomes resulting from the CAIS-ECIS partnership has been [Child Protection and Safeguarding training](#):

- Every single staff member at CAIS, from drivers to teachers to senior leaders, participates in ECIS certification programmes.
- Annual recertification ensures safeguarding is not just a policy, but a living culture.
- Trustees and board members have also completed ECIS Child Protection training, embedding a shared accountability for student safety

For more information about the ECIS Child Protection Certificate and how your school can benefit, visit [www.ecis.org/child-protection](http://www.ecis.org/child-protection).

## CONTACT US

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