

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER



August Issue

SCHOOL OF THE MONTH



THE NAIROBI ACADEMY

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MY VISIT TO THE NAIROBI ACADEMY

School hunting led me to Karen this time, for a visit to The Nairobi Academy on Langata Road. Walking around the campus, I understood quickly why this school has stood the test of time.

A Nearly 50-Year British Curriculum Pathway

The Nairobi Academy has been operating since 1976, which means it has close to five decades of experience delivering the British curriculum in Nairobi. Today, it admits learners from around age 2 up to 18–19, offering a continuous journey from Pre-Prep through Key Stages and into Year 13.

During my tour of the senior school, I was struck by the range of pathways available: students can pursue IGCSE and A Levels, the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme, or BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma qualifications. In practice, this means learners can choose between a more traditional British academic route, the broader and inquiry-driven IB, or a more applied, vocational BTEC track, offering valuable flexibility for families thinking carefully about fit, strengths and future plans.

One word kept coming up throughout my tour: Ubuntu. For those unfamiliar with it, Ubuntu is a Southern African philosophy often summed up as “I am because we are.” It’s the belief that our humanity is shaped through our relationships with others. That we become who we are through community and not in isolation. At Nairobi Academy, this philosophy is deeply woven into the school’s culture and moral framework. Not only can you see it plastered on every wall, but you can also see it in the way the community relates to each other across campus.

Something else that really stood out to me was their commitment to inclusion. The school welcomes learners with special educational needs across the entire spectrum, and that's significant because not every international school in Kenya offers that level of support. A big plus!

I also appreciated the way they approach co-curricular activities. Many programmes are designed around clear learning outcomes: leadership, resilience, empathy, rather than just filling schedules. One initiative that caught my attention was the school's community service work in places like Risa, Oloitokitok. Students there collaborate with local communities on tangible projects, such as building gazebos and renovating classroom floors. These activities are structured to help learners translate Ubuntu into practice: working in teams, listening to local priorities, and seeing how their effort improves someone else's daily reality.

And get this: every single term, the entire school goes on a hike. The whole school. From a wellness perspective, it encourages physical activity and gives learners a mental break from academic intensity. From a culture perspective, it reinforces the sense that "we do things together here," a living expression of Ubuntu in motion.

Who is The Nairobi Academy right for?

From my visit, The Nairobi Academy is right for families who want a values-driven, international school that still feels deeply rooted in community. It also suits parents who want rigorous academic choice; British IGCSE and A Levels, the IB Diploma or BTEC, all within one school that can carry them from early years through to Year 13.

The Nairobi Academy is also a strong match for families weighing day versus boarding for teenagers. With Bentley Hall boarding available from around 13 to 19 for boys and girls from multiple countries, it offers structure, independence and community under adults you can trust, while termly fees and boarding charges sit in the mid-to-upper range of Nairobi's international schools, with limited scholarships available on merit.

If you are the kind of parent who wants your child to be stretched academically, given room to grow through service, co-curriculars and whole-school experiences, and anchored in a community where Ubuntu is lived, then Nairobi Academy is the sort of school that belongs on your shortlist.

WHAT KENYAN PARENTS ACTUALLY LOOK FOR WHEN CHOOSING A INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL



Every year, I speak to more Kenyan families who are quietly stepping off the “traditional” path and into the world of international schooling. According to ISC Research's Global Market Overview 2025, Kenya is now home to 117 international schools, with the firm naming it one of five emerging markets driving global growth in the sector, alongside Romania, Kazakhstan, and Colombia. Globally, the international schools’ market has passed 15,000 schools and \$69 billion in annual fee income. Kenya is a genuine and growing part of that story.

But growth in the number of schools doesn't automatically make the decision easier for the parents choosing between them. If anything, it makes it harder. So what are Kenyan parents actually weighing when they choose a school, not what the schools say they offer, but what genuinely drives the decision?

Cost

It would be dishonest to write about school choice in Kenya right now without naming the elephant in the room: money is tight, and it's expected to get tighter. A December 2025 Infotrak survey found that 61% of Kenyans expect school fees to increase in 2026, with cost-of-living pressure the single biggest concern shaping how people think about the year ahead. That anxiety sits underneath almost every school-choice conversation happening in Kenyan households right now. It isn't new, either. Academic research on school choice in Nairobi has consistently found that cost is one of the most commonly cited reasons parents give for choosing one type of school over another.

Curriculum

A recent structural study of parent decision-making (2025/2026 academic year) found something worth thinking about: curriculum had a statistically significant effect on school choice, while facilities and location did not. The researchers' interpretation was blunt; good facilities and a convenient location are treated by parents as baseline expectations, not differentiators. Nobody chooses a school because it has a swimming pool. They choose it, increasingly, because of what and how it teaches.

This tracks with what we see directly in our own advisory work with families. Curriculum questions have become the first, not the last, question parents ask especially now, with Kenya mid-transition on two fronts at once: CBC's rollout into Senior School (1.2 million Grade 9 learners moved into Grade 10 pathways in January 2026 alone), and a steady stream of returning and relocating families trying to match a child's curriculum history; Cambridge, IB, American, CBC to whatever is actually available and well-established locally. We've worked through this exact problem repeatedly this year: families moving from Rwanda, USA, France, and elsewhere, all needing a school that doesn't just claim a curriculum on its website, but has a proven track record in it.

Brand Names Aren't Enough Anymore

One of the more interesting shifts we've noticed is that parents are increasingly warned against starting with a school's name. The advice is consistent: start with your child, not the brand. What's your child's temperament? Do they need a highly structured environment, or more flexibility? Are they the kind of child who gets lost in a large cohort, or one who thrives in a bigger, more energetic community?

This matches something we've seen play out concretely in our own advisory work. Two schools can be equally well-regarded, equally within budget, and equally strong academically and still be the wrong and right choice respectively for two different children, purely on fit. A multicultural, larger international environment might be exactly right for one family and genuinely the wrong call for another that would do better with a smaller, values-driven community. The prestige of the name rarely settles that question. The child does.

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Proof Over Prestige

Something else that is showing up consistently in real conversations with parents is a growing skepticism toward schools that can't or won't share actual, verifiable results such as exam pass rates. Parents are asking sharper and more specific questions than they used to, and they're increasingly unsatisfied with polished brochures that don't answer them.

The Real Question Underneath It All

The final thread running through all of this is that whether it's curriculum fit or cost, Kenyan parents in 2026 aren't just asking "is this a good school." They're asking, "how do I actually know that, and is it good for my child specifically?" That second question is harder to answer, and that's precisely where thoughtful, evidence-based advisory work has become essential.



Sources: ISC Research, Global Market Overview 2025 and TES (September 2025); Infotrak Research & Consulting, December 2025; Journal of Educational Management Research, 2025/2026; EduPoa, "Senior School in Kenya Starts January 2026"; academic research on school choice in Nairobi's low-cost private school sector; and GoShule's own advisory casework with Kenyan and relocating families throughout 2025–2026.



ACCREDITATION AND INTERNATIONAL CURRICULA IN KENYA:WHAT PARENTS SHOULD ACTUALLY BE LOOKING AT

When parents start researching international schools, the curriculum is usually one of the first things they look at. Cambridge, IB, American, British, French, German, Canadian. Fair enough. Curriculum matters. It shapes what a child learns and much more. However, if you stop at the curriculum, you are missing half the story. The other half is the question: “Who, exactly, stands behind this curriculum, and which external body has looked at how this school delivers it?”

If you spend enough time looking at international schools in Kenya, you will notice the same names appearing across school websites: CIS, KAIS, AISA, Cambridge Assessment International Education, Pearson Edexcel, IB and BSO, among others. What you should note is that these organisations don't all do the same thing. Some accredit the school, some provide qualifications, some authorise schools to offer particular programmes, while others are professional associations. For parents, understanding that difference can help separate meaningful credentials from a collection of impressive-looking logos.

KAIS, AISA and CIS

The Kenya Association of International Schools (KAIS) is the local professional association for international schools in Kenya, while the Association of International Schools in Africa (AISA) operates across the continent. Both connect schools to a wider professional community through advocacy, professional development, collaboration and shared best practice. CIS (Council of International Schools) is different: it is an international accreditation body that evaluates the school as a whole, including areas such as teaching and learning, student wellbeing, safeguarding, leadership and continuous improvement. For parents, the key distinction is simple: KAIS and AISA are professional associations; CIS accreditation is an external evaluation of the school.

International Baccalaureate

If you are considering an IB school, look for IB World School status but don't confuse this with accreditation. A school can be both an IB World School and separately accredited by an organisation such as CIS. The International Baccalaureate authorises schools to offer specific IB programmes: the Primary Years Programme, Middle Years Programme, Diploma Programme or Career-related Programme. To become an IB World School, a school must go through the IB's formal authorisation process, which includes an application, consultation and a verification visit before the IB makes the final decision. Once authorised, schools are also evaluated regularly, with programme evaluations taking place at least once every five years.

For parents, there is a very simple way to verify this. The IB maintains a public "Find an IB World School" directory on its website, where you can search for a school by country and see which IB programmes it is authorised to offer.

Cambridge Assessment International Education

For British-curriculum schools, Cambridge Assessment International Education (CIE) is one of the most common names parents will encounter. Cambridge provides international qualifications including IGCSE and Cambridge International AS & A Level. It is therefore primarily about the qualification pathway, rather than accreditation of the school itself. If a school says it offers Cambridge, parents should ask if it is registered and which Cambridge programmes are offered, at what stage and whether the pathway continues through the child's senior years.

Pearson Edexcel

Pearson Edexcel operates in much the same space as Cambridge, providing international qualifications including International GCSEs and International A Levels through approved centres. Again, this tells you about the examination and qualification pathway, not necessarily the quality of the school as a whole. A school can offer Pearson qualifications while also holding a separate whole-school accreditation such as CIS.

British Schools Overseas

For British-curriculum schools, British Schools Overseas (BSO) is yet another credential worth knowing. BSO is a voluntary inspection scheme operated by the UK's Department for Education for British schools outside the UK. Schools are inspected against standards designed for British schools overseas, and parents can access the resulting inspection reports. If a school has BSO accreditation, you can actually read the inspection report. It can give you a much clearer picture of how the school performs against an external set of standards.

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MSA-CESS and ACSI

Parents looking at American or North American-style international schools may encounter MSA-CESS, the Middle States Association – Commission on Elementary and Secondary Schools. It is a whole-school accreditation body that looks at areas such as student learning, leadership, governance, and institutional effectiveness. ACSI (Association of Christian Schools International) also provides accreditation and quality assurance, specifically within Christian education. For parents, both are useful because they provide external evaluation of the school rather than simply validating a particular curriculum or examination.

French and German Curricula

Some international curricula have their own national systems of recognition. French schools, for example, may have homologation from the French Ministry of Education and, where applicable, links to the AEF network, while German Schools Abroad operate within a quality-assurance framework involving German authorities.



Ultimately, you don't need to memorise every acronym. Parents should just look beyond the question of "What curriculum do you offer?" and ask "Who recognises it, who awards the qualification, and who independently checks the school?" Those answers won't choose a school for you, but they will serve as helpful tools when you start comparing your options. International schools operating in Kenya are also required to have the appropriate registration and regulatory documentation, and many schools display their registration certificates openly in their administrative offices. When you visit a school, don't be afraid to ask to see them.

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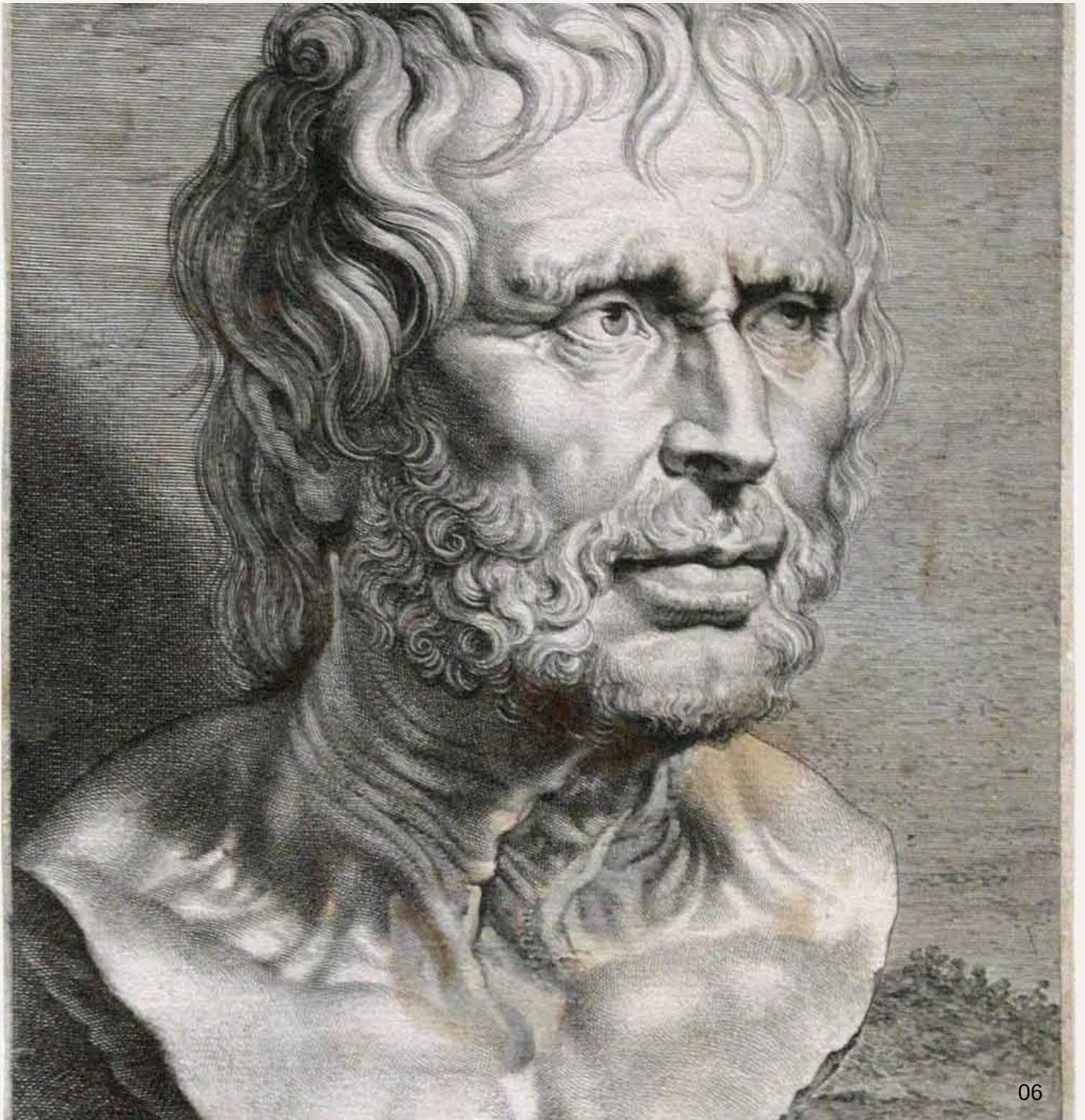
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how to live.”*

Seneca



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