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GESM: Educating socially aware citizens of the world

By: **Tarra Quismundo - Reporter** / @TarraINQ Philippine Daily Inquirer / 06:24 PM October 16, 2011

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As Metro Manila assessed the damage caused by Tropical Storm “Ondoy” the day after the typhoon struck, students of the German European School Manila (GESM), with their parents and teachers, drove to Marikina City on Sept. 27, 2009, bearing food packs and other supplies.

“We were the first to help, [we were there] even before the Red Cross came,” recalls Christoph Grandt, one of the longest-serving teachers at the international school.

School officials say such sense of service and concern for others come naturally to students, faculty and staff of GESM, where a socially responsible, “truly international” education has been raising citizens of the world for 30 years now.

Located in Parañaque City, the school now has 250 students divided between the German section, which offers classes in German, and the European section, with an international curriculum in English.

Students consist of Europeans, Americans and Filipinos. The faculty and staff are also multinational.

Both GESM sections offer a three-year preschool program and a 12-year basic education course: primary and secondary schooling for 10 years and the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma program, designed to qualify graduates for the world’s best universities.

Classes have seven to 15 students for more focused instruction and learning, teachers say. (The biggest class at GESM has 18 students, just a little over a third of the standard class size in Philippine schools, which is 45 students.)

To ensure a holistic learning experience, GESM provides students with an environment where giving and sharing are daily fare.

The school’s social projects even thrived during last year, as it was declared

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Pucklitzsch, GESM administrator.

“It’s part of their (students) daily being. They start so young. It doesn’t seem like it’s such a big thing to go out to the community. It’s part of their education, both inside and outside school,” says Karen Carcomo, IB coordinator.

“We’re teaching our kids to be good citizens of the communities where they live. We’re teaching them how to be balanced individuals, that it’s more than just academics. It’s academics and social life,” Carcomo adds.

Although they are more fortunate than most people their age, GESM students are also well aware of what life is like in the community around them, teachers say.

Students in primary school, for instance, have play dates at day care centers in Tondo, Manila. They also throw spaghetti parties at Gawad Kalinga housing sites in Metro Manila.

“We do have outreach programs starting from elementary school. We go to GK sites, for example, throw spaghetti parties for them (residents), so that they (students) can interact with other children,” says Grandt.

“Our Grade 10 students have a project in Tondo. They go there to help in a day care center. Our students get a lot of exposure and interaction with Philippine culture and reality. This is very important for us,” he adds.

Nicholas Lea, head of the European section, says students from primary school visit every year children in El Dorado Village, an urban poor community near their school.

“Our children in the primary school have a spaghetti party there every year, organized by the teachers and students. So it’s something that starts early with the kids. They get a sense of community. By the time they get to middle school, it’s part of their life,” Lea says.

GESM’s brand of education has continued to attract new enrollees that the school population has grown by 50 percent in the last two years, says Pucklitzsch.

With the current location getting more congested because of this growth, there is a plan to move GESM to a bigger campus farther south in Metro Manila.

Pucklitzsch says there is a very high interest in the school among parents.



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