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Life Beyond PSLE and AEIS

The British boarding school one hour from home

A guide to Weekday Boarding at Epsom College Malaysia, for Singapore families exploring their next educational pathway



For many families living in Singapore - Singaporean, permanent resident, or expatriate getting a child into the right school, and keeping them happy once they're there, has become one of the most stressful parts of raising a family in the city-state. Between the high-stakes PSLE, the competitive AEIS route into local schools, and a shrinking pool of places at Singapore's best international schools, even well-resourced families can find themselves without a comfortable option.

This guide walks through why the Singapore system feels so pressured right now, and introduces an alternative that a growing number of Singapore-based families are exploring: Weekday Boarding at Epsom College Malaysia, just over an hour's flight from Singapore and only 15 minutes from Kuala Lumpur International Airport.



THE SINGAPORE EDUCATION REALITY

Navigating the PSLE Journey

At the end of Primary 6 around age 12 nearly every child in a Singapore school sits the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE), a national exam in English, Mathematics, Science and Mandarin that determines secondary school placement. Since 2021, PSLE has used an Achievement Level (AL) scoring system intended to ease direct ranking between students, and in 2024 the old Express/Normal streaming was replaced by Full Subject-Based Banding. Despite these reforms, PSLE remains the defining, high-stakes moment of a Singapore childhood and the pressure starts years before the exam itself.

“S\$1.8 billion spent by Singapore families on private tuition in 2023, up from S\$1.1 billion a decade earlier 8 in 10 primary school children currently in private tuition; some as early as preschool 16.9% / 9.3% primary-aged clients showing clinically elevated depression / anxiety symptoms, per a 2025 clinician survey”

Sources: SingStat News commentary on household tuition spending; EveryChild.SG, “Academic Stress Among Primary Schoolers in Singapore” (2025).

Navigating the AEIS Pathway

For expatriate families without an existing place in a Singapore government school, entry runs through AEIS (the Admissions Exercise for International Students) or its supplementary round, S-AEIS centralised English and Mathematics tests run by Singapore's Examinations and Assessment Board. Crucially, AEIS is not a fixed pass mark: placement is capped by however many vacancies happen to exist that year, and the Ministry of Education does not publish official pass-rate statistics. Estimates of the placement rate vary widely by source anywhere from roughly 10% to 40%, depending on level and year but every estimate agrees on the core point: most children who sit AEIS in a given intake do not secure a place, with no guaranteed fallback route into the local system.

Even where a place is secured, non-citizen families pay real fees for local schooling up to roughly S\$26,000 a year for a non-ASEAN secondary student in 2026, rising each year on top of the logistics of Singapore's Student's Pass, which requires a Singapore Citizen or PR aged 21 or older to act as a local sponsor. For expatriate families without that connection, it's a real hurdle before school is even in the picture.

The International School Landscape

Singapore is home to a large and expensive international school market estimates of the exact number range from roughly 50 to over 70 schools, depending on how 'international school' is counted and the well-regarded ones fill up fast, sometimes a year or more ahead of intake. Fees at the top tier now regularly reach S\$36,000–58,000 a year in tuition alone, before one-time enrolment fees (S\$3,700–5,000) and capital or development levies that can add several thousand dollars a year on top.

Most schools raised fees again for 2025 and 2026. For a family relocating mid-year, or one that didn't secure a place early enough, the remaining options can be thin and expensive.

Sources: Ministry of Education (fee schedules, AEIS/S-AEIS eligibility); Doris School and IschoolAdvisor, Singapore international school fee guides, 2025–26; ICA, Student's Pass requirements. AEIS/S-AEIS placement-rate figures are third-party estimates, as MOE does not publish official statistics.



Jamaica

- Third largest Caribbean Island
- Historical history
- Since 1987-92, rapid growth in tourism
- Tropical climate

A DIFFERENT PATH: WEEKDAY BOARDING AT EPSOM

For a growing number of Singapore-based families, the answer is to look beyond the traditional options and consider what is available just a short flight away. Epsom College Malaysia is the only sister school of Epsom College in the UK, an independent school with nearly 200 years of British boarding heritage. Set on a 50-acre campus just 15 minutes from Kuala Lumpur International Airport, Epsom follows the British curriculum through to IGCSE and A-Level. Its Weekday Boarding Programme built specifically for families based in Singapore and the surrounding region lets a child board Monday to Friday and be home most weekends, with a Full Boarding option for families who'd rather that be the default.

For Singapore families, this means a child can be settled into a stable, well-resourced school with a clearly published admissions process not a lottery of vacancies and waitlists without parents needing to give up their jobs, home, or life in Singapore. A flight between Singapore and Kuala Lumpur takes about an hour, with roughly 70 flights a week in each direction, so visits, weekends, and holidays at home stay easy and realistic.

Some Schools Fill the Hours. A Boarding House Builds the Person.

Singapore families understand the importance of academic achievement. But beyond examinations, another equally important part of education is developing a young person who can take responsibility, manage their time, and grow in confidence. That is what a British boarding house is designed to nurture.

Research into child development points in the same direction. Longitudinal research from the University of Minnesota found that children given meaningful responsibilities from an early age grew into more independent and capable adults. The Harvard Study of Adult Development, one of the world's longest-running studies of adult life, similarly found that warm, dependable relationships are among the strongest predictors of a healthy and fulfilling life.

Responsibility and relationships - these are at the heart of boarding life at Epsom. Students take an active role in their House community, look out for younger students, learn to manage their own time and prep, and choose from more than 100+ Co-Curricular/Super-Curricular activities each term.

At the same time, independence does not mean being left to manage alone. Houseparents live alongside the students, tutors know each child individually, and the pastoral team is there day and night. Supervised prep, subject-specialist support and clear routines provide structure alongside that growing independence, all within a 50-acre campus that gives students the space to grow.

“Away enough to grow. Close enough for Sunday lunch.”

None of this comes at the expense of results: Epsom's 2026 A-level students achieved 72% A*-B (53% A*-A), and graduates hold offers from Russell Group and G5 universities, and from NUS — so the door back to a Singapore university stays open. This is wellbeing with rigour, not instead of it.

Independently certified - the COBIS Double Beacon

Epsom College Malaysia is one of only six schools worldwide to hold the COBIS Double Beacon: a top rating for both Student Welfare and Leadership in the School. COBIS is the Council of British International Schools. In plain terms: an outside body has inspected the school and confirmed that the care your child receives, and the way the school grows young leaders, are among the best anywhere.



HOW EPSOM COMPARES

	Staying in the Singapore System	Weekday Boarding at Epsom College Malaysia
Getting a place	AEIS/S-AEIS entrance tests for a capped, shrinking pool of local-school vacancies; popular international schools waitlisted a year or more ahead	A published, year-round admissions process (entrance test and interview) with defined entry points from Year 4 to Year 12
Annual cost (approx.)*	International schools: ~S\$36,000–59,000+/yr tuition. International school with residential boarding can exceed S\$100,000/yr at senior-school level.	Weekday Boarding all-in (tuition + Mon–Fri boarding, all meals, CCAs) ~S\$42,900–48,400/yr
Academic pressure	High-stakes PSLE at age 12 shapes secondary placement; roughly 8 in 10 primary children are in private tuition	British IGCSE/A-Level curriculum with a whole-school 'Positive Wellbeing' approach built into pastoral life
Pastoral support	Varies school to school	COBIS Double Beacon Status - held by only 6 schools worldwide: for Student Welfare and Leadership
Family logistics	Student's Pass requires a Singapore Citizen/PR aged 21+ as local sponsor	One-off application (S\$320), enrolment (S\$6,400) and refundable deposit (S\$8,000); Student Visa to be provided by the School
Distance from family	—	About an hour's flight from Singapore (~70 flights a week each way), with the child home most weekends
A-Level Results	Results reported using H1/H2 grades and University Admission Score (UAS)	IGCSE Results - 85% (A*-B) 64% (A*/A) A-Level Results - 72% (A*-B) 53% (A*/A)
University Placement	Varies school to school	Oxford, Cambridge, UCL, LSE, Ivy League Institutions and the Russel Group Universities

*Epsom figures are from Epsom's own AY26/27 Weekday Boarding Programme fee sheet for Singapore residents, quoted directly in SGD; a one-off application fee (S\$320), enrolment fee (S\$6,400) and refundable deposit (S\$8,000) apply on top, and Malaysia's 6% service tax may apply to some items. A 5% early-payment discount, 2% two-term discount, and sibling discounts of 5–10% are available. Singapore figures are drawn from official school fee pages and third-party fee guides current as of mid-2026.



QUESTIONS SINGAPORE PARENTS OFTEN ASK

Will my child fall behind, moving from Singapore's curriculum to a British one?

Epsom is experienced in welcoming students from different education systems, and our academic team supports each student through the transition. In Years 7–9, students have time to settle into the British curriculum before choosing their IGCSE subjects at the end of Year 9. Teachers monitor progress closely, with additional academic support available where needed to help students adjust confidently and stay on track.

Is boarding right for a child who's never been away from home?

Epsom's Boarding Taster allows prospective boarders in Year 6 and above to experience a full week of Epsom life, including real lessons, CCAs, time with a student buddy, evening activities and boarding routines, before making a longer-term commitment. Full and Weekday Boarders then join a Boarding House from day one, supported by their Housemaster or Housemistress, Matron and tutor team.

How are British A-Levels different from Singapore A-Levels?

Both pathways are academically rigorous and internationally recognised, but the British A-Level offers a more specialised approach. Students typically focus on three or four subjects, allowing them to study their chosen areas in greater depth rather than managing a broader combination of subjects and requirements.

This more focused structure allows students to build their programme around their strengths, interests and intended university pathway, while working towards a qualification recognised by leading universities in Singapore, the UK and around the world.

Does this close off Singapore or regional university options?

No — Epsom's Sixth Form and Higher Education team supports applications to the UK, US and global universities, and recent leavers have been admitted to institutions including the National University of Singapore alongside Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial College London and others. A British qualification keeps regional pathways open, not just UK ones.



TAKING THE FIRST STEP

The best way to know if Epsom is right for your family is to see it for yourselves and this campaign window has three ways in.

- Singapore Parent Evening - an evening talk with Head of School, Mrs Avis Parker and the Director of Admissions, with one-to-one consultations available on the night
- Discovery Weekend on campus - a Friday–Saturday visit with a boarding house stay, academy taster sessions, and a parent session with the Head and houseparents
- Boarding Taster - a live week alongside current Epsom students (real lessons, real CCAs, a buddy), with the entrance test sat during the week and a personalised offer within 48 hours of departure; the application fee is waived for taster families

Applications for January 2027 (Term 2) entry close in mid-December; for families not ready to move that quickly, Epsom's main entry point remains August 2027. Ask about current Parent Evening, Discovery Weekend and Boarding Taster dates when you get in touch.





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