

**Climbing the rock face of success.
A non-denominational boarding school in Arusha challenges students
and achieves 100% pass**

The thrill of racing down rapids in a savage wilderness, is not what springs to mind when thinking about school, but for students at St Constantine's International School in Arusha, this is just one of the choices they have as Round Square - part of an internationally diverse network of 200 like-minded schools in 50 countries on six continents, and the only one of its kind in Tanzania.

Despite the online demands of the Coronavirus, and after rigorous assessment from the British Cambridge International Assessment and Examination board (who decided to use evidence-based decisions for each candidate in each subject), the entire Year 13 at St Constantine's -for the second year running – all passed their A-levels. So, the thrills and commitment surely worked.

“Whether they are walking in wild terrain, canoeing down a fast flowing river, or climbing a rock face, it tests their tenacity and resilience, as well as prompting them to be inventive and inquisitive,” says Headmaster, Tony Macfadyen, “which are important elements in preparing our young people for the challenges of life that lie ahead of them.”

The school, which caters for more than 500 students, over 80 of whom are boarders, is secular and non-denominational and gender-inclusive, welcoming both boys and girls from every religion and culture. While 35.1% of the population of Tanzania is Muslim, they are mainly concentrated in the coastal regions – so how do young people in the rest of the country identify with their faith?

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told his followers: "Acquisition of knowledge is binding on all Muslims, male and female" - this commandment including both male and female believers. The first wife of the Prophet Muhammad, Khadeeja, was a successful, highly educated businesswoman in her own right - and aspiring to follow the great woman's path is top A* student of St Constantine's for the 2019/20 year - Huseina Sulemanji, also winner of awards for Accounting, Computer Science and Business Studies. With three brothers (the elder attending St Constantine's before her and her two younger brothers attending now), it is Huseina who was voted by her classmates as the most likely to be a successful businesswoman. She is going on to further study at Sunway University in Malaysia to study computer science.

Fellow student, Zehrabanu Ladak, winner of the King Constantine Award and the Round Square Leadership Award, intends to continue her studies to become a medical specialist. Both are committed young Muslim women, who adhere to the principles of modest dress, keep covered and wear the hijab.

They take part in all activities. “It's easy here at St Constantine's and there's no reason why it should be difficult, as both teachers and students respect our faith.” Both girls agree that they are completely accepted by all other students and that their circle of friends includes those from other religions, without any need for any of them – whether Muslim (Shia, Sunni or Ahmadiyya) Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist or Christian - to debate or defend their beliefs.

However, a whole new “challenge” has arisen now for their school with the Coronavirus/Covid-19 pandemic.

“Parents are anxious that their children continue to receive the highest level of education, but in a safe and hygienic location,” Headmaster Mr Macfadyen says. “We have put a dedicated team in place specifically for our boarders. We are all ready to continue learning during this time.”

“The pandemic has shown how all of us from different races, religious beliefs and families can come together to fight a common cause, and the boarding house is a good place to start.”

The ability to have students in a secure, safe and hygienic boarding environment offers a much higher level of protection than those living in more open circumstances.

“St Constantine’s has always had a solid Infectious diseases policy,” says Mr Macfadyen, “but we have made even more adjustments for the health and safety of our students. “At all times we have used international best practice to guide us.”

Boarding school has always been a secure option of children with working and/or travelling parents and many find that they not only make lifelong friends in the boarding house, but secure higher academic and sports results with the distractions of the outside removed.

Assistant Head of Upper Primary, Frances Peacock, personally tutors students after school in their study time.

“The duty teachers and I are responsible for overseeing students completing their homework tasks in structured study by assisting them when they need help, answering questions on the spot, hearing students read individually and revising concepts with children who need additional help. Many parents are just too busy to be able to do this,” Miss Peacock says, “while my main role is to ensure their wellbeing while supporting both their pastoral and academic needs, promoting high standards of behaviour and ensuring they make progress in their year group.”

Miss Peacock pointed out the advantages for students from small families having the opportunity to socialise safely with children their own age and enjoy excellent facilities they might not have access to at home.

“Boarding boosts many skills that are required in life, such as being able to communicate and cooperate with a diverse group of fellow students and staff; being able to adapt to a new environment/routine/challenge that occurs in daily life and, in preparation for adult life, being responsible for their belongings, behaviour and their own learning.”

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Tanzanians generally identify as either Christian or Muslim, though many still practice folk beliefs as well. Additional minority groups include Traditional Africanist, Buddhist, and Hindu.

Islam is a major religious belief system in Tanzania, with 35.1% of the population as followers. In fact, 99% of residents of Zanzibar Island identify as Muslims.

Islam is mainly practiced in coastal areas and the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba. The Islam sects in the country include the suni (14.4%), shia (7%), sufi (1.4%), Ahmadiyya Islam (5.6%), and non-denominational Islam (7.0%)

Captions:

- 1) Year 13 graduating students at St Constantine’s celebrate their winning results
- 2) Top A* performing student, Huseina Sulemanji
- 3) Zehrabanu Ladak, winner of the King Constantine Award and the Round Square Leadership Award
- 4) White water rafting at Savage Wilderness