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Matthew Broughton, technology coach and leader of the Yokohama International School’s Underwater Explorers

Into the Deep

One Japan school’s dive into learning and service

IN OCTOBER 2018, nine high schoolers—scuba gear in tow—headed to Anilao, Philippines. Their mission? To plumb the waters just south of Manila, collect environmental data, and clean up plastic trash. Meet the Yokohama International School’s Underwater Explorers, who are taking learning to new depths.

Started in 2017, the club gives students the opportunity to hone their diving skills on four to five diving trips throughout the school year. The 680-student Yokohama, Japan, school—one of the oldest international schools in the world—has offered diving opportunities for students for a decade. Its mission? “Live, learn, lead.”

“We try to really embody that with our group,” says Matthew Broughton, technology coach at Yokohama and a certified dive coach who leads the club. “We’re out there creating these experiences, giving these students leadership opportunities but also learning in a really unique, hands-on, applied way.”

On the trips, students collect data for Project Baseline, a nonprofit citizen science organization. They snap photos, measure water temperature and visibility, and make observations about plastic trash in the water and on the beach—a significant issue in Southeast Asia.

“I’ve always enjoyed being underwater,” says student Silvia, a junior who began diving at age 11 and one of the group’s leaders. “[On the Philippines trip] I saw the impact that we have on the ocean and where our trash actually ends up.”

It may take years for the data the Underwater Explorers send

back via spreadsheets to Project Baseline to have an impact—but collecting the information and opening students’ eyes to environmental issues is part of the experience, says Broughton.

“Fun is a huge part of our group—but we do it through the lens of service,” he says.

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THE YOKOHAMA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL’S UNDERWATER EXPLORERS not only hone their diving skills, but they also collect data for Project Baseline, a nonprofit citizen science organization.