

# Introducing Andrew Cross!

TMS New Head of School



This year, TMS welcomes Andrew Cross as our new Head of School. Joining us from the International School of Hamburg in Germany, Andrew brings a wealth of experience in education from around the world. Exploring this ‘new beginning’ for TMS, we got to know Andrew a bit better as we sat down for this Q&A interview.

## Q Tell us about your journey to becoming Head of School at TMS?

Like many high school graduates, I had no clear idea of what I wanted to do with my life after finishing my studies, but a career in education was at least on my short list of possibilities. Enrolling in the concurrent teacher education program at Trent University, I quickly found myself back in the classroom as a student teacher, while also taking a full undergraduate course load. I was fortunate to have patient and supportive mentors guiding me in my teaching placements. Amazingly enough, one of those mentors was the TMS DP Coordinator, Ms. Hurley! It is quite incredible to realize that some 35 years later, as the incoming Head of School, “**I Am Known**” by someone at TMS whose influence and example inspired me along my career path as a young student teacher.

While completing the final year of my teacher education program at Queen’s University in the early 1990s, I attended their annual overseas teachers’ recruitment fair, and that is how my career in education began. An independent school in Turkey took a chance and hired me to teach English and Drama. From there, my wife and I moved on to international schools in Venezuela, Belgium, Japan and Germany while raising three daughters along the way. My first senior leadership position was at a boys’ school in Tokyo, where I served for four years as the Middle School principal. In 2012, we moved to Germany where I have been the Head of School at the International School of Hamburg for the past five years, following four years in the role of Secondary Principal. I completed a Master’s degree in English literature at Queen’s and an MA in Education at Bath University in England, where I was introduced to the game of skittles (a British variation on nine-pin bowling).

One of my favourite memories of our overseas life is the year I coached a co-ed softball team. Despite almost none of the players ever having seen a softball before our first practice, we somehow won the tournament against all the odds. Our winners' trophy still sits in a glass case in the PE department among all the other relics of long-ago seasons.

**Q What was it about TMS that made you want to pursue the role of Head of School here?**

While my wife Lida and I were exploring a return to Canada with our youngest daughter, we noticed the Head of School advertisement on the CAIS website. As parents of a school-aged child, we were immediately attracted by the phrase **I Am Known**. We found these words, and the values resting beneath them, deeply compelling as a vision for the kind of experience we wanted for our daughter. Another aspect that I found impressive was the number of projects and initiatives in progress across the school, all of them designed in different ways to further improve the quality of school life for students. It quickly became clear to me that TMS is a learning community with a commitment to being on the leading edge of independent schooling in Canada.



From my first interview with the TMS Board of Trustees last November, to all my online meetings and conversations with David Young and the leadership team over the past few months, I've had a very personal experience of just what a "TMS welcome" entails. The school is justifiably proud of its achievements over the past 60 years but is also eager to build a vibrant and secure future.

The single most important factor in my decision to go forward with the application to TMS was the people I encountered during the hiring process. Even though all of these interactions were conducted online, the pride and affection for the school and its community were evident in every conversation. Mr. Young has given more than generously of his time, knowledge and experience to make this transition as smooth and collaborative as possible. He leaves big shoes to fill.

**Q What are you excited about in regards to TMS? What do you see at opportunities for our School?**

Where do I start? I'm excited to be a Titan again! My school in Tokyo was home to the Titans and had the same yellow and blue colours. When I see these colours and the team name again, it all feels very familiar. I am also excited about the strategic planning work the school is preparing to engage in. There are tremendous opportunities for reflection and thoughtful decision-making embedded in these processes. I'm excited to be working with a Board, leadership team, faculty and staff who are so committed to building on the achievements of recent years.

There are many opportunities for TMS, including the building projects, growing demand for the school's programs and services, record high retention rates for the coming school year, adjacent land development, continuing to build on our strong academic programs, and developing

our advancement initiatives. There will be challenges along the way, which is a natural part of the process of growth and development. At this point in time, none of us can be sure of what the coming school year will bring in terms of the pandemic, but we have all gained valuable experience over the past year. That experience, and the many learnings that have come with it, will probably be called upon again and I am confident that we will manage, and even thrive, whatever the circumstances.

**Q The theme of this issue is 'New Beginnings'. What are you excited for in terms of this new beginning at TMS?**

New Beginnings is such a great theme! After nine years in my current school, I'm excited about the fresh impressions and experiences that always come with being completely new to a place. The start of a school year is also a special kind of new beginning and I'm hoping to be able to greet new and returning families in person, as Covid-19 conditions allow, when school starts in September. The arrival of a new Head of School is another form of new beginning for a school community. At the same time, I am well aware that there is a tremendous amount of institutional knowledge and experience in a school like TMS. I will rely on those who have been part of the school for much longer than me to guide me in understanding its culture and building on its strong values and traditions as we move forward.

**Q What is your process to get to know a new School and Community?**

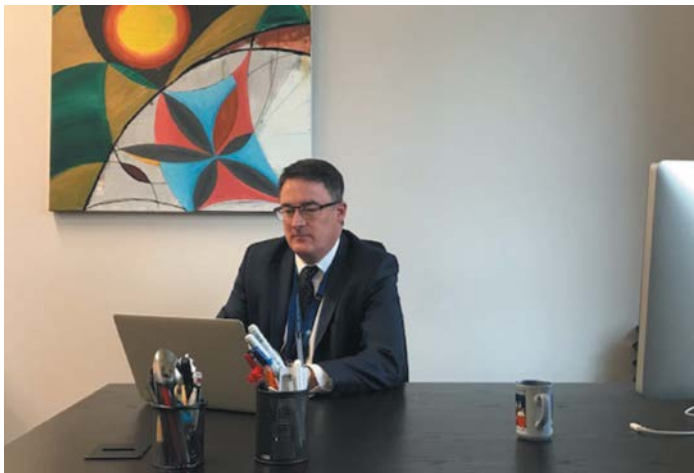
For me, the most valuable way to get to know a new school community is to start to build individual relationships as early as possible. There is so much to be learned simply by listening to people sharing their stories and experiences of work, studies, and life.

I've been grateful for the opportunities to meet David Young and the leadership team via online conversations, and I am really looking forward to doing the same with other members of the faculty and staff and, of course, with the students and parents at the appropriate time. Other useful resources have included last year's TMS Yearbook which was included in a wonderful welcome package I received a few months ago. A yearbook provides some unique insights into a particular moment in time. I enjoyed going through the pages and seeing how the school remained a vibrant community despite the onset of the pandemic in the final quarter. Reading documents like the Annual Report, past issues of Going Beyond, and reading the testimonials of students and parents on the website all helped me to form a picture of the TMS Community. The more I read and heard, the more excited I felt to be making this move with my family.

**Q You and your family are moving back to Canada after being overseas for many years. What things are you excited to do/see/experience (for yourself and your family) being back in Canada? What things did you miss about Canada and why?**

We are looking forward to re-discovering some of the natural beauty of Canada, such as the changing autumn colours and experiencing a real Canadian winter after so many years away. My family and I have been missing some of the things that are uniquely Canadian, and near the top of the list would certainly be a 20-pack of Timbits! My daughter has played basketball on school teams, and we are hoping to be able to attend a few Raptors games once fans are allowed back into sporting venues. We were thrilled when they won the NBA championship in 2019 and will never forget Kawhi's buzzer-beater. I will be very happy when North American professional sports games are no longer taking place in the middle of the night where we live!

I spent part of my childhood in a small town with a pond behind our home. My brother and I would spend endless hours shoveling snow off the surface of the pond and then arguing about whose turn it was to cut a hole in the ice so that we could flood the surface. It would be hard to think of a more stereotypical Canadian upbringing, but I have really missed the chance to put on a pair of skates and head out onto a frozen lake on a winter day.



We are also looking forward to getting out in nature for long walks and it is good to know that there are so many opportunities to do so in southern Ontario. My father was a devoted hiker and, over a period of years, he walked the entire Bruce Trail which extends from the Niagara Region all the way to Tobermory on Georgian Bay. We often walked a section of the trail together, and I'm looking forward to exploring it again with my family so many years later.

Throughout our time living in other parts of the world, countless people we met commented on the warmth and friendliness of Canadians. I am personally looking forward to returning to a country where I am not the only one speaking to strangers about the weather.

**Q We are coming to the close of another Academic Year within the pandemic and facing the 2021/2022 Academic Year not really knowing what to expect. How do you stay positive and maintain your resilience in a situation like this?**

There is no doubt that the pandemic has given us countless opportunities to become discouraged and anxious about our safety and that of our loved ones. Many families have been personally affected on a deep level, and for children and young people the feeling of isolation from teachers and peers has been heart-breaking to observe. So many special and cherished school events have had to be cancelled or moved online. Everyone has found different ways to maintain their well-being and resilience amidst the many challenges of life in a pandemic. One of the things that keeps me positive in my work environment is that I see teachers, counselors, support staff, principals and others doing incredible things every day to support their students. Many of these same individuals are themselves facing multiple stresses and challenges in their professional and family lives. Despite this, they are going beyond in so many ways, and it is truly inspiring to observe their heroic efforts.

On a personal level, trying to stay as fit as possible by going on long walks has been a very good outlet in difficult times. I recently re-discovered my Fitbit in a drawer, and now I have a motivation to reach at least 10,000 steps per day (I am not always successful, but it is a great target!).

**Q What advice do you have for students and families?**

Students and families are going through really difficult times as online learning and working from home have created some challenging new realities for family life. If I could offer any advice from my own experience over the past year or more, it would be to take care

of your own well-being so that you can more effectively support your family and loved ones. During long periods of online learning and working from home, diet, sleep and exercise can all suffer. As much as possible, try to maintain the routines you followed before the pandemic. This is really important for our children and can involve small things like being fully dressed for the day at the start of the first online lesson, or having a proper sit-down lunch rather than grazing by the laptop. Spending time together doing family activities is essential. This could be a nature walk after school two or three days a week, pulling out the board games that have been hiding in a cupboard, or anything else that preferably does not involve yet more screen time. The point is to stay connected, whatever that might look like in your family. Finally, be patient with yourselves and each other! Everyone is struggling in different ways, and perhaps we can remember the wise advice to “seek first to understand, then to be understood.” For the first time in history, we are experiencing a health crisis that has affected almost every corner of the world. We need more than ever to think in terms of “we” rather than “I” if we are going to emerge at the other end of this unprecedented period with our human connections intact and even strengthened.

**Q What are some things about you that the TMS community should know?**

When we were living in Japan, I participated in a 100 km Oxfam fundraising walk through forests, hills and terraced tea plantations in a beautiful region called Hakone. My team of four completed the distance in 29 hours and 2 minutes, wearing headlamps during the night to avoid rocks and tree roots. A month before the race, I twisted my knee, and during the night one of our team members suffered an ankle injury, but somehow we all made it across the finish line in the early afternoon of our second day. It was a great experience but I can think of slightly less strenuous team-

building exercises, particularly since our team leader understood that we were on a 100 km run!

I enjoy reading historical fiction and am working my way slowly through Ken Follett’s second trilogy at the moment. Books by political figures also interest me as I find that they offer a very ground-level view of some of the major events of our time as seen through the eyes of those who helped to shape those events.

Baking is one of the ways I relax and re-charge whenever I have a bit of time. My favourite recipe is oatmeal cookies with shredded coconut and cranberries. I also play the tenor horn at a fairly basic level, but it is another way for me to unwind after a long day or week. I do realize that what is a relaxing pastime for me may have the opposite effect for the rest of the family, but our basement is fairly well soundproofed so I do not feel too badly. During my high school years I was a member of the school band, playing the euphonium, and that is where my interest in brass instruments began.



**Q** What words of advice would you give to our Class of 2021 as they embark on their own “new beginnings”?

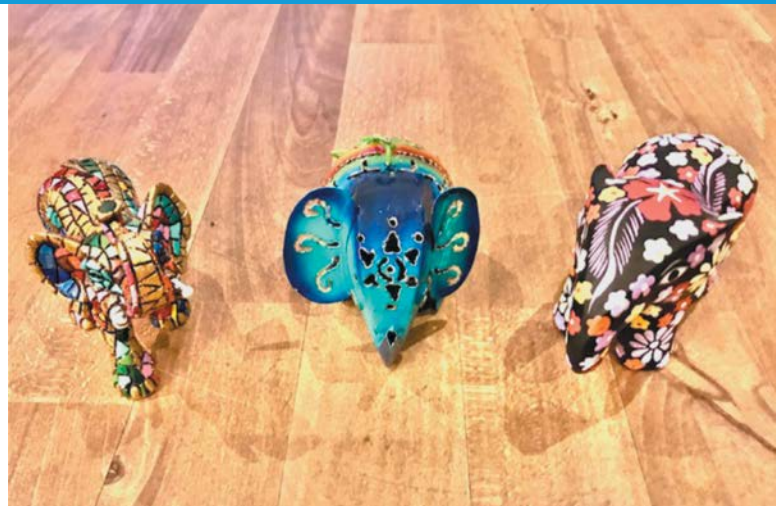
These are unprecedented times to be a high school graduate heading out into the world. However, I am certain that this year’s graduates have developed the skills and attitudes needed to achieve success in the coming years. Equally important, the mission and values of TMS will ensure that the Class of 2021 has the capacity to make a difference in the lives of others. There is an old axiom which reads, “From whom much has been given, much is expected.” An independent school education is a rare privilege in our world, and I am in no doubt that each of you will find ways in the years ahead to make someone else’s life just a little bit happier and more secure through your acts of kindness. I hope that you will not be too discouraged by the times you are living through. Even in periods of crisis and adversity, we can find many reasons for hope. The resilience you have had to develop over the past year or more will be a great asset as you prepare for the next stage of your life. My only words of advice would be to try to look beyond the next week or month and take a longer view of time. You have your whole lives ahead of you and, one day, the current period will be a distant memory, as hard as that is to imagine today.

**Q** What are 5 words you would use to describe yourself?

Adaptable, energetic, open-minded, patient, talkative.

**Q** What 5 words would others use to describe you?

Approachable, cheerful, even-tempered, optimistic, outgoing.



# Andrew’s — 10 — Favourites

**Favourite Colour:**  
Purple

**Favourite Food:**  
Mushroom pizza

**Favourite Song:**  
“Black Velvet” by  
Alannah Myles

**Favourite Book:**  
“Pillars of the Earth”  
by Ken Follett

**Favourite Animal:**  
Elephant

**Favourite Season:**  
Autumn

**Favourite Subject  
in School:**  
English

**Favourite  
Hobby or Sport:**  
Football

**Favourite Smell:**  
Freshly baked bread

**Favourite thing  
about being a head  
of School:**  
Celebrating our  
students’ successes