



# TOSHIMAGAOKA TIMES

Special Edition

December 2015

## Caring students embody school spirit

First-time visitors to Toshimagaoka Joshi Gakuen Junior & Senior High School tend to think that it is an elitist, serious, diligent and quiet school that is oriented toward admission to prestigious universities. As you spend time here, however, you may be surprised to find many new things about its students and the environment.

Toshimagaoka, in Ikebukuro, Tokyo, is a school where the relationship between teachers and students is so close and friendly that the atmosphere on campus is warm and homey. Such an atmosphere apparently derives from the history of the school, which was opened by a private family and has developed without financial help from the government, businesses or religious organizations. And all of the Toshimagaoka students work very hard studying and in club activities.

“Be a pretty girl,” Tomokichi Futaki, the fifth principal of the school, often said. Many graduates from this girls’ school grew up hearing this phrase. Shino Takehana, the seventh and cur-



The front gate of Toshimagaoka Joshi Gakuen Junior & Senior High School in Higashi-Ikebukuro, Tokyo.

rent principal of the school since 2013, and some other teachers are among them.

“There have been a lot of changes to the school buildings since I was learning here, but I

loved and still love this school,” said Principal Takehana, adding “even if we have many changes, there are several things that mustn’t be changed, for example, the kind hearts. Every student of this school is considerate to their peers and teachers, and I hope they maintain such an attitude forever.”

Moreover, Takehana, the first female principal of the school, demands that the students be active in their everyday lives. “Being passive is easy, but we can learn nothing by only waiting for someone’s advice. You must act on your own will.”

Several other teachers sometimes tell their students the same thing and this phrase has become a new motto for the school.

At this school, which observed the 120th anniversary of its founding in 2012, there are about 50 clubs and all students have to belong to at least one. Some of these clubs, including the chorus club, the *go* (Japanese chess) club and the calligraphy club, are known outside of the school as they sometimes

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## Teachers at heart of Toshimagaoka’s community of learning

These days, Toshimagaoka has been showing successful results in terms of students going on to prestigious universities and the achievement is improving every year. This performance owes much to the efforts of the school’s teachers and their education philosophy.

For instance, Masayoshi Kamiya, a social studies teacher, said, “At junior high school, we want students to acquire not only knowledge but also the way of thinking. We always try to make classes a place where students can understand easily what is taught and where they keep asking themselves what they think by themselves.”



Principal Shino Takehana

Through his classes, students can develop the abilities to identify problems and to think seriously about how to solve them, and to distinguish knowledge from the way of thinking, said

Kamiya. “I make it a rule to keep posing questions to my students in my classes so that it will become a habit to think for themselves,” he said.

Japanese-language teacher Sachiko Tozaki said, “I want my students to think by themselves and express their opinions.” In order to achieve this, all the Japanese-language teachers use in their classes a textbook, called “Rongo-sho,” which the late fifth principal, Tomokichi Futaki, and the Japanese-language teachers at that time compiled from Rongo, or “Analects of Confucius,” a collection of sayings and ideas attributed to the Chinese philosopher.

Through this textbook, the students can learn how to read *kanbun* texts written in Chinese, which is one of the subjects. Moreover, they learn how to reconsider their daily life and understand how to live in society

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### NOTICE TO READERS

Toshimagaoka Times was created by a group of 26 selected students of Toshimagaoka Joshi Gakuen Junior & Senior High School in Tokyo. The first- and second-graders of the senior high school have endeavored to portray their school from various angles for non-Japanese readers at home and abroad – Editor

## Education Philosophy

### Caring students

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have great success at national competitions.

In addition, the school's junior high school students make it a rule to participate in a grand choral contest at the Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre in February every year. As each February approaches, beautiful singing from all of the classrooms fills the school campus.

Also hundreds of students join school events as staff. Touri-sai, the school's fall cultural festival, which is the most popular and exciting event for students, is setting new participation and attendance records, and its energy levels are rising every year.

While working hard at club activities and events, students here have a lot of things to do every day, especially studying. For example, they have tests in English, math and kanji almost every week. It is very important for them to study step by step

without missing a single day.

Although the Toshimagaoka students are very busy in their everyday lives, they devote all of their time and energy to events and club activities. They look so full of life, so it is easy for visitors to surmise that they lead fulfilling lives.

"We are very glad to be able to see your energetic school life and proud of having such a student. But be careful not to be too eager!" warn some teachers.

For students at Toshimagaoka, the words of the fifth principal Futaki, reflect the spirit of the school. That teaching reminds students the importance of being affectionate to others and the need to understand other people.

Through the practice of *Unshin* — repeatedly sewing a 1-meter-long white cloth with a red thread — for 5 minutes every morning, the students learn the importance of the accumulation of efforts, and they nurture



**Unshin – the five-minute practice of sewing a cloth every morning to help students learn how to concentrate.**

emotional strength and the ability to concentrate.

It is becoming the norm among current Toshimagaoka students that the goal of learning at this school is not only to enter a prestigious university but also to develop into a more compas-

sionate and benevolent human being, and become a woman who is active in society after graduation from school.

By Maika Kubo, Sawa Makita, Hinako Sato, Sonha Hyo, Konomi Kita and Mirei Hayashi

### Community of learning

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as they become capable of finding their solutions to problems. The teachers occasionally question what their students think about Rongo. Tozaki said, "They told me that they have learned other people's sense of values through reading Rongo."

Math teachers, Yasushi Negishi and Tomoko Goto, want to teach students how to make expectations in a logical manner. At Toshimagaoka, the students sometimes work in groups to solve problems by themselves. If the students can get this experience at school, they will be able to overcome problems in the future by applying their experiences, Negishi said.

Science teachers, Hiroshi Murayama and Mitsuharu Watanabe share this view. The science teachers said that the students have to have the ability to think and learn how to analyze a given situation to see someone else's problem as their own, which will make them acquire the ability to think logically. So they often do experiments in class to cultivate the ability to think and learn how to

analyze a situation, and this helps students to cultivate the required abilities.

"I want you to make an English database," said Motoko Sakai, a teacher of English. The English teachers at Toshimagaoka want their students to be able to express in English what they think. One of the features of Toshimagaoka's English classes is that there are a lot of tests. The students have many tests, at least once a week. In Japan, English grammar is classified as one topic. At Toshimagaoka, the students are given an English grammar test each time one topic is completed.

As they advance from junior high to senior high school grades, they have more tests. Tests cover what they have learned and if they fail the tests, they have to take the same ones again. They are called "try again" tests and are conducted at lunchtime. As the students are given the tests again and again, they eventually memorize a lot of English sentences and words. So, they learn by themselves how to write their thoughts in English.

Toshimagaoka Principal Shino Takehana said, "I want our students to try anything and be confident in themselves whether they succeed or fail."

"The Toshimagaoka brand has now been established and is recognized widely. You should be proud of Toshimagaoka, as you have entered this school by passing the difficult exams and are in good surroundings where you have smart and wonderful friends, and you can enhance each other. Thanks to Tomokichi Futaki, the former princi-

pal who taught at Toshimagaoka for about 50 years, this school is thriving. So, we should not only cherish the Toshimagaoka brand but enhance it," Takehana said.

She also said, "I want our students to work in a field they like. I don't say you must contribute to society because your work will be of some help to someone, whatever you do."

By Sayaka Takahashi, Kyoka Sakatani, Mika Muraki, Shiho Horiguchi and Ayano Tanaka



**Students work in groups to solve problems in a math class.**

## School Facilities

## Toshimagaoka builds for today and tomorrow

Toshimagaoka Joshi Gakuen Junior & Senior High School was founded in 1892, or 25 years after the Meiji Restoration, by Tsune Kawamura, the wife of a samurai officer of the Kaga Clan in the Edo Period, and her two daughters as a sewing training school for girls in 1892.

One of the school's mottos is "Not only high-quality education but also improvement of school facilities are needed in order to make school life better," according to school officials.

Why is Toshimagaoka so obsessed with facilities?

It was the wish of the school's former students and teachers, who had a hard time in the past at Toshimagaoka. Toward the end of World War II, the former school building was burned down and students had to use another school's facilities. At that time, they felt miserable.

After the war's end, Toshimagaoka was reborn at a new location in Ikebukuro in 1948 under the leadership of Kenzo Futaki, a famous medical scholar who served as the fourth school principal.

Tomokichi Futaki, the fifth school principal, once said, "When students came to take the entrance examination at Toshimagaoka, some of them went home (without taking the tests) when they saw the dirty school building."

The number of students was small, so Tomokichi Futaki thought, "We should enhance the quality of our facilities" and "students at Toshimagaoka must



use first-class facilities." Thanks to his efforts, there are many advanced facilities in the school today.

On the beautiful and sophisticated campus stand five main buildings, which house special facilities such as an auditorium, a language learning room, a tea room, an audiovisual classroom and a beautiful spiral staircase called the "Cinderella staircase."

The three-story auditorium, built in 2001, has 808 seats and features a stained-glass window in which the words of the school song are impressed. Students use the auditorium for events such as entrance and graduation ceremonies, school festivals and so on.

The size of the school premises is not so expansive, but the school uses its limited space effectively. For example, the school has seven places exclusive for P.E. (physical education) classes and club activities. These facilities include an aerobics studio and a training room, where the newest equipment is



The "Cinderella staircase" (left) and the language learning room (above) at one of the main school buildings in Higashi-Ikebukuro, Tokyo

installed, and a wide playground in Iruma, Saitama Prefecture, where the school's athletic meet is held.

The school authorities and teachers have worked hard to improve the overall teaching environment and facilities for stu-

dents. Shino Takehana, the current principal, said, "Toshimagaoka is a school that meets the needs of the times."

By Juri Azuma, Mayu Kato, Natsumi Miki, Ayame Taniguchi and Kaco Furukado

## Flip teaching integral part of ICT initiatives to keep students wired

The Japanese government is encouraging schools to utilize computers, the Internet and so on to improve the quality of education in a drive that is called the promotion of ICT (information and communication technology) use in education.

At Toshimagaoka, efforts have been made to enhance the quality of education with the aim of making its curriculum relevant to the times and suitable for students.

Toshimagaoka started classes with ICT several years ago and this year, the school introduced 55 tablets in the audiovisual classroom while teachers use projectors by themselves for presentations.

Flip teaching is a part of ICT, and inverts traditional teaching methods, delivering instruction online outside of class and moving "homework" into classrooms. Students watch videos uploaded by a teacher or read handouts from a teacher before class. When the class starts, students are divided into groups in which they discuss problems and answer questions posed by the videos or handouts. At Toshimagaoka, students in five out of six grades are taught by this method as part of math or science classes.

Takahiro Komino is one of the teachers who use flip teaching in Year 8 and 9 in math. The philosophy of his teaching is "Never give answers" in order to develop the problem-solving skills of students.

His teaching style is as follows. Before classes, he distributes handouts about the subjects to be covered in the next lessons, allowing students to preview, which is essential in mathematics. During the class, students answer questions posed by him by discussing the problems in groups, and he gives some hints (not the answer) to individual students, depending on their personality and their weak points in math. Also, he lets students explain how they answer questions, allowing them to give a presentation in front of the class for important questions.

The school prepares five computers in the library and each class has its own computer. Therefore, students who don't have computers and smartphones can watch videos at school. However, teachers have to spend a lot of time making videos. Yosuke Hishinuma, who is a math teacher, said, "It takes one hour to make a 10-15 minute video and I have to spend as much as three hours making them every day."

"The abilities students will need will change and the role of teachers will also change. It is therefore important for teachers to always think about teaching methods to keep up with the times. The teachers at Toshimagaoka are very enthusiastic and are always thinking about how to make classes better," said math teacher Komino.



A wide playground in Iruma, Saitama Prefecture, is used for the school's annual athletic meet.

TOSHIMAGAOKA JOSHI GAKUEN PHOTOS

## On Campus

# Japanese, South Korean girls in perfect harmony

A choral concert commemorating the 50th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and South Korea was held at Toshimagaoka Joshi Gakuen Junior & Senior High School in Ikebukuro, Tokyo, on Sept. 24, 2015.

Thirty-six members of the World Vision Korean Children's Choir joined 110 students of the Toshimagaoka chorus club on stage.

World Vision Korea is a partnership entity of World Vision International based in London, which is one of the world's largest Christian humanitarian organizations. A large audience of over 400 appreciated the one-hour performance by the Japanese and Korean students.

"The Japanese and Korean groups had their respective identities, but sang in harmony," said a student in the audience. At the end of the concert, all the chorus members stood on the stage, and sang together arm in arm, bringing some in the audience to tears.

At this club, all the members put their hearts into practicing in



**South Korean students join members of Toshimagaoka Joshi Gakuen Junior & Senior High School's chorus club for a choral concert at the school's auditorium on Sept. 24.**

a brief time. Because of the school's location, students have to end club activities by 5:00 p.m. in summer and 4:40 p.m. in winter.

In everyday practice, the members start with vocal training, divided into three parts: soprano, mezzo-soprano and alto, practicing some phrases each leader chooses. Then, all members sing together to check if there is anything that needs working on. If there is something, they ask advice from each other. Occasionally, some members stretch and exercise to strengthen abdominal muscles while they vocalize.

Yumi Shibata, adviser and conductor of the club, said:

"Members listen respectfully to my advice. Then they try on their own so that they could overcome what I pointed out and often achieve more than I expected. It is significant to make an effort individually, but I want them to feel the importance of the relationships between seniors and juniors, and, of course, among their colleagues as well."

This chorus club is famous at Toshimagaoka for its popularity and its achievements. Until now, the club has participated in many chorus contests, including the Nationwide Contest of Music for Students sponsored by the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK). The club won the

bronze medal in the division for high school student in October. It also won the silver prize at the JCA Choral Competition, hosted by the Japan Choral Association, in the same month.

"We had a hard experience when we couldn't produce the results of practice. But satisfaction after overcoming it is an irreplaceable treasure. I'm so happy to have worked up the same songs with the same members for six months," said Mizuki Teranishi, a senior high school second-year student, who is president of the chorus club.

*By Risa Tsutsuki, Ami Fukuma, Natsumi Hachiya, Rina Yoshimoto and Naoko Koyanagi*

## Graduate strives to strike happy career-children balance

Maya Toyama, a doctor, is one of many women in this country who are striking an appropriate balance between work and child care. She graduated from Toshimagaoka Joshi Gakuen Senior High School. She is the mother of a 3-year-old boy and a 5-year-old girl.

"People around me in the working environment have such a good understanding of my child care needs that I can work comfortably. Also, they help me as much as they can," she said.

She works for NTT Medical Center Tokyo in Shinagawa Ward. "I am satisfied with my working place due largely to the system of guaranteeing reduced hours for working mothers with children. Thanks to this, the time schedule is flexible at this hospital, which is operated by a private company," she said in an interview.

Toyama recalled that when she became a doctor, few female physicians had children. Now, there

are many women who are working part-time at university hospitals.

Looking back to the busy days of child-rearing, she said she couldn't have continued to work after giving birth to her second child unless she had established her professional career and social reputation, to some degree.

"Meanwhile, I wanted to do research activities more energetically, but I am too busy to attend medical conferences. My concern is that I am not sufficiently catching up with the latest knowledge and technology such as new medicines and new remedies."

Despite such apprehensions, she is serving as a doctor as well as a mother. "It is my utmost pleasure to be able to contribute to society and my patients encourage me with their warm words," she said with a smile.

When Toyama was at Toshimagaoka, less students hoped to go to medical school. At



**Maya Toyama, a doctor at a Tokyo hospital**

first, she could not get good grades. She studied hard and competed with her friends. "Teachers at Toshimagaoka helped me and I owe them what I

am today. They're talented and kind to all the students who study hard," she said.

In her message to the students at Toshimagaoka, she said, "Study as much as possible and to the degree you will never regret after graduation. Whether the consequences are good or bad, it will be your own asset no one can take from you."

*By Miyu Inoue, Saho Oguchi, Hana Sano, Hinako Nokami and Ayaka Uchida*

### TOSHIMAGAOKA TIMES

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Project Supervisor: Yasunori Sasaki & Yoshihiro Kobayashi, Toshimagaoka Joshi Gakuen

Project Coordinators: Junji Sakurai (GEIC) and Hiroshi Mishima (Japan Times)

Contributing Editors: Sayuri Daimon (Japan Times), Toshiyuki Takahashi (Japan Times ST), Keisuke Okada (GEIC) and Robert Hallam

Staff Writers: Maika Kubo, Sawa Makita, Hinako Sato, Sonha Hyo, Konomi Kita, Mirei Hayashi, Sayaka Takahashi, Kyoka Sakatani, Mika Muraki, Shiho Horiguchi, Ayano Tanaka, Juri Azuma, Mayu Kato, Natsumi Miki, Ayame Taniguchi, Kaco Furukado, Risa Tsutsuki, Ami Fukuma, Natsumi Hachiya, Rina Yoshimoto, Naoko Koyanagi, Miyu Inoue, Saho Oguchi, Hana Sano, Hinako Nokami and Ayaka Uchida

Contact: 1-25-22 Higashi-Ikebukuro, Toshima-ku, Tokyo 〒170-0013  
Toshimagaoka Joshi Gakuen