

Western School

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Summary: At Dzongkar Choede, education is understood as the formation of the whole person. Alongside prayer, memorisation, philosophy and debate, young monks receive a modern education: Tibetan reading, writing, grammar and spelling, English, Chinese, history, religious history, mathematics and computer classes. What began as an open-air calligraphy class grew into a school with classrooms, trained teachers, regular examinations, a student magazine, the Zongchoe Library, and a new classroom building opened in November 2024.

Tags:

COMMUNITY

EDUCATION

MONASTIC SCHOOLING

Read the original page at: <https://dzongxpan.xpandinghorizon.com/en/community/western-school>

Overview

At Dzongkar Choede Monastery, education is understood as the formation of the whole person. Young monks are not only trained in prayer, memorization, Buddhist philosophy, ritual, and debate; they also receive a modern education that gives them the knowledge and skills needed to serve their community in the contemporary world.

The monastery's school grew from very humble beginnings into a structured educational institution serving young monks from Tibetan and Himalayan communities. What began as an open-air calligraphy class gradually developed into a school with classrooms, trained teachers, regular examinations, student writing activities, library support, and a modern curriculum.

This Western-style education is not separate from monastic life. It is carefully woven into the daily rhythm of the monastery.

A School Rooted in Monastic Life

Dzongkar Choede's school is part of a living monastery. The students live within the monastery, follow the monastic daily rhythm, and receive both religious and modern education. This creates an educational environment in which modern knowledge and traditional wisdom support each other.

From Open-Air Calligraphy to Modern Classrooms

By 1984, the school had a building and classrooms, led by Ven. Geshe Jampa Norbu la with the support of the monastery's governing body. In 1997 the basic modern curriculum was formally

developed through the efforts of Ven. Jampa Gyaltsen la, then principal, and Ven. Thupten Lodoe la, then vice principal. The school began with 45 students, from kindergarten to class four.

Purpose of the School

The school was created to fulfill His Holiness the Dalai Lama's concern for the education of young monks and adolescent students. At Dzongkar Choede, modern education is seen as a way to strengthen monastic life, not to replace it.

Subjects and Curriculum

Subjects taught include Tibetan reading, writing, grammar and spelling; English; Chinese; history; religious history; mathematics; and computer classes. Language and literacy are central, history explains where the students come from, mathematics develops clear thinking, and computer education introduces the digital skills needed in the modern world.

A Day in the Life of the Students

Students gather early in the prayer hall with the monastic assembly. Until 8:45 a.m. they memorize chants and scriptures. From 9:00 to 9:45 a.m. they attend self-study; senior students take part in dialectic sessions. Regular classroom instruction runs from 10:15 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. After school, students return to memorization, dialectics, and debate.

Residential Care and Guardian Teachers

Students live in monastic residential houses and are cared for within the monastery community. Guardian teachers look after the students' well-being, monastic studies, and homework, giving students stability, structure, and a sense of belonging.

Teachers and School Administration

The school is administered by a two-member committee consisting of the principal and vice principal, overseeing academic, educational, financial, and development administration under the monastery's general governing body.

Examinations and Student Achievement

Each year the school conducts four terminal tests, one half-yearly examination, and one annual examination. On September 30, 2024, the half-yearly examination ceremony was held in the new prayer hall, presided over by His Eminence Khenpo Jampa Sopa Rinpoche.

Reading, Writing, and Student Voice

Essay-writing competitions are held frequently. The school has also produced a student magazine titled GANG TRUG GI LANG TSO, translated as Growth of Snowland Children, which accepts articles in Tibetan, English, Chinese, and other languages.

Library and Learning Resources

The Zongchoe Library was initiated by Sangha members following advice from His Holiness the Dalai Lama during his 2004 visit. It supports both religious and modern education, encouraging reading and preserving Tibetan history and culture.

New Classrooms and Future Development

On November 10, 2024, a new classroom building for Zongchoe Secondary School was opened, with prayer flags, ribbon cutting, classroom visits, and guests including representatives from the Italian Buddhist Union.

Supporting the School

Support helps sustain student sponsorship, teacher salaries, textbooks, school maintenance, library development, and educational resources.