

The International Primary Curriculum

Accreditation Visit to Nexus International School, Putrajaya, Malaysia

November 2013

Introduction

Each school using the International Primary Curriculum (IPC) is able to apply for IPC Accreditation. It does this by completing an IPC self-review and then submitting it for validation. To achieve IPC Accreditation, a school must meet nine key criteria at 'Developing' or 'Mastering' level.

Nexus International School has applied for accreditation. The validation of its self-review culminated in a visit to the school on Tuesday 19th to Thursday 21st November. The visit was conducted by John Holmes and Mary van der Heijden. Paul Moffett was also in attendance for training purposes. He did not contribute to the final judgements.

Context

Nexus International School opened in August 2008 for learners from Nursery age to Year 6. The school is situated in a purpose built campus in Putrajaya, a new city approximately 40 km from Kuala Lumpur. The school is owned by Taylor's Education Group.

The IPC Early Years Programme is used in the Early Years Class 1 and Early Years Class 2. The IPC Main Programme is used in Years 1 to 6. There are currently 322 children in the Early Years and Years 1 to 6.

The Accreditation Visit Activities

To check and confirm the school's judgements in the school's self-review, the accreditation team:

- Studied the school's judgements set out in its IPC self-review
- Toured the school
- Observed 58 lessons
- Observed the children in and around the school
- Studied a wide range of documents
- Talked to the headteacher at the start and end of each day
- Talked to the principal of the school
- Talked to the executive principal of Nexus International Schools
- Talked to the school's leaders for learning
- Talked to the classroom assistants (CAs) and personal learning assistants (PLAs).
- Talked to the new teachers
- Talked to the established teachers
- Talked to the specialist teachers
- Talked to a group of new to the school parents

- Talked to a group of established school parents
- Talked to three groups of children
- Met as the accreditation team to discuss and agree judgements against each rubric

In addition, the team leader was interrogated by two senior colleagues from Fieldwork Education to explain and justify the evidence base that led to each judgement.

Findings

Criterion 1: A clear focus on children's learning

The school judges its performance against this criterion as 'Mastering'.

All teachers in the school make explicit the learning intentions for subjects, personal development and international mindedness in their planning and to children and parents.

Discussions with children during lessons are focused primarily on what is being learned rather than the activities in which children are engaged.

All teachers talk to individuals and to groups of children throughout the lesson about their learning. They provide age-appropriate regular reviews that encourage children to reflect on their learning and to be aware of what they have learned.

All teachers keep records of learning which are well maintained and are up to date.

The school continually works with new stakeholders to introduce them to its view about the kinds of children it is helping to develop.

All classroom displays clearly show the learning that has taken place.

Descriptions of and discussions about the IPC with parents focus first on what children have learned or will learn and the school positively helps parents become engaged in their children's learning.

The following examples are from our observations and discussions:

- In every lesson observed by the accreditation team the teachers told the children the learning intention. The learning intention was also displayed for the class to see.
- Children were able to articulate what they were learning and were able to tell the accreditation team what they were doing.
- Teachers talked with children about how the learning intention of a particular lesson links to previous learning. In the Early Years the children referred back to learning in a previous unit.
- In classrooms and corridors there are displays about 'What we already know', 'What we would like to know', and 'What we have learned'.
- We saw a number of examples of well-maintained and up to date records of children's learning. This included records of home learning.
- Through discussions with new and established parents we were informed that conversations with teachers were learning-focused. The parents are kept well informed about their children's learning throughout their time at the school. This is achieved through communication books, electronic communication, home learning folders, newsletters, an 'open door' policy and regular, informative learning-focused consultation evenings. The parents of children in Early Years and Year 2 use blogs and Year 1 received Twitter feed information on their children's learning on a regular basis.
- Reports to parents are based on learning and set future learning targets.
- In many classrooms there are 'learning walls' where children are able to write about what they have learned. These were used as an additional tool to support their learning.

The accreditation team concurs with the school's judgement of 'Mastering' for Criterion 1.

Criterion 2: Shared outcomes about the kinds of children we are helping to develop.

The school judges its performance against this criterion as 'Mastering'.

The school is very clear about the characteristics of the children it is hoping to develop and can articulate these characteristics explicitly and with clarity. The school can justify these outcomes based on their appropriateness in terms of child development, their relevance to future stages of learning and their appropriateness for the world in which the children are likely to live.

The outcomes about the kinds of children the school is hoping to develop are clearly documented and shared by all stakeholders.

The children understand about the kinds of children which the school is helping to develop and can relate their own, and others' actions to them.

The vision articulated by the school's explicit and clear statement about the children it is helping to develop has significant impact on all aspects of school life.

The following examples are from our observations and discussions:

- Parents informed the accreditation team that they understand that their children all learn in different ways and that the school uses the IPC to cater for these differences.
- Parents new to the school talked about the information they had received on how the school is helping to develop the children.
- Extensive information on children's learning is available to parents. This information can be found on the school's website, information packs and home learning folders. The school's 'Nexus neuron' graphic is visible throughout the school and parents referred to it. The 'Nexus neuron' clearly identifies the characteristics that the school is helping to develop in the children. Information is documented and shared with new stakeholders in the school handbook and is visible on display boards around the school and newsletters. It is also continually included in assemblies, school board meetings and parents' information evenings.
- Members of the school board told the accreditation team that the school provided an alternative learning model to other schools in the area and was seen as the school of choice because of the learning based curriculum on offer.
- The teachers in the Early Years plan the children's learning with a clear focus on learning beyond the classroom and into the future. The philosophy was evident throughout the school.
- In lessons, teachers have discussions with children about the IPC personal goals. All the children could talk about the Nexus neuron.
- Children were heard to talk about personal goals referring to 'resilience', 'co-operation' and 'communication' where they were working in team situations. The children could talk about the kind of children that the school was trying to develop.
- Children are always referred to as 'learners' by all stakeholders, including the child's own parents. This was seen to have a positive effect by keeping a clear focus on learning.
- Parents new to the school told the accreditation team that they appreciated the amount of curriculum and personal development information that the school provided. This helped to strengthen the links between home and school.
- Class and specialist teachers always use the personal goals in their lesson planning in order to help the children develop.

The accreditation team concurs with the school's judgement of 'Mastering' for Criterion 2.

Criterion 3: Implementation of classroom practices that help children develop as we would like.

The school judges its performance against this criterion as 'Mastering'.

The school's awareness that different classroom practices affect children's development is evident in everything that happens in terms of learning and teaching in the school.

The school has clearly articulated a range of classroom practices that will contribute to children's appropriate development. There is evidence of these practices in action in each classroom.

Stakeholders can clearly articulate the links between classroom practices and the kinds of children the school is helping to develop and are able to justify them.

The following examples are from our observations and discussions:

- In our observations we saw evidence of a range of classroom practices including teacher-led whole class sessions, paired conversations, individual activities, paired activities, writing, reading, experimentation and research using books, PCs and iPads. The children recorded their learning using various tools, which included digital imagery, QR codes, Macs and voice recorders. Children in Year 2 used various research methods which involved the use of digiscopes, electronic microscopes, magnifying glasses, non-fiction books and picture sorting in the 'Flowers and Insects' unit.
- Children were often observed in role-play and investigative situations that were intended to stimulate their learning and deepened their understanding.
- The school organises regular development meetings which focus on classroom practices. Information from these meetings is regularly shared with the school board. Members of the school board can describe how the IPC contributes to the development of confident, internationally minded and willing learners.
- The school has produced a 'teaching and learning policy', which clearly states that all teachers should use a range of different classroom practices. We observed a wide range of practices in action throughout the school. The Year 1 children, for example, experienced a range of scientific activities that clearly supported their understanding of the properties of light.
- The school board members and parents talked about their understanding of the 'Nexus neuron' and how this influenced the way that children were being encouraged to develop. One parent informed the accreditation team how the methods used in the school had supported her child to develop both socially and academically.
- The new teachers, teaching assistants and PLAs all spoke positively about the support they received from the school in developing their own understanding of the importance of different classroom practices. The school has a well-established system of modelled collegial support and collaborative planning, which is supported by appropriate documentation.

The accreditation team concurs with the school's judgement of 'Mastering' for Criterion 3.

Criterion 4: International Mindedness.

The school judges its performance against this criterion as 'Mastering'.

The school demonstrates a deep commitment to the development of international mindedness as one of the main characteristics for its children. Stakeholders can articulate the school's definition of international mindedness.

The school is committed to the idea that international mindedness is not just limited to a commitment to learning within the classroom.

All classrooms provide practical opportunities, appropriate to the age and experience of the children, for them to develop and deepen their international mindedness.

This development of international mindedness is a central and consistent part of the school's planning for, and regular reviews of, teaching and learning.

The school has a clearly articulated process for identifying and resolving conflicts among diverse viewpoints.

The following examples are from our observations and discussions:

- The school has a clear international mindedness policy. One aspect of this is its commitment to reaching out to the community. This is clearly evident in the school's support for the refugee children from Myanmar who shared weekly lessons with children throughout the school. We observed both groups of children working closely together in a caring and sensitive manner.
- The school demonstrated its commitment to international mindedness through the children's participation in weekly world culture lessons.
- The parents informed the accreditation team that they felt the international mindedness policy was one of the school's many strengths. One parent gave the example of how international mindedness had had a positive impact on the development of their own child's empathy for other cultures.
- All classrooms displayed evidence that international mindedness was regularly discussed. A Milepost 1 child had written, 'I know I am the same and different to other people'. In many classes, practical opportunities were given to heighten the awareness of home and host countries. Malaysian children were allowed to 'adopt' another country because their home country was also the host country.
- The school's 'conflict resolution' and 'positive behaviour' policies are shared with all stakeholders. The accreditation team observed children constantly demonstrating positive relationships with each other. We also regularly witnessed high levels of empathy towards children with diverse needs.
- The school has a regular 'international challenge', a 'celebrations committee' on the Parent Teacher Association and holds regular demonstrations led by experts from the host country. Further classroom-based work supported any international learning that had taken place.
- The school has an extensive second language programme. A wide range of high quality resources in the school libraries supports these programmes.

The accreditation team concurs with the school's judgement of 'Mastering' for Criterion 4.

Criterion 5: An appropriate balance between knowledge, skills and reflection leading to understanding.

The school judges its performance against this criterion as 'Mastering'.

The IPC subject, international and personal goals form the basis of all the children's learning that takes place using the IPC.

Established teachers, children and other stakeholders can articulate the differences between knowledge, skills and understanding and are aware of the implications of those differences.

The school's and teachers' curriculum planning explicitly articulate the particular knowledge, skills and understanding which the children should develop in each unit.

There is evidence in all classrooms of practices that support the acquisition and development of knowledge, skills and understanding at levels appropriate to children's age and experience.

Children reflect on their learning and can articulate those reflections related to the themes they have been studying.

The following examples are from our observations and discussions:

- In most classrooms the IPC learning goals were on display. The teachers discussed the learning focus of the lesson with the children to help differentiate between knowledge, skills and understanding. In some cases children were able to provide a reasoned response and were able to talk about the differences between knowledge and skills. Many teachers explained the learning intention to the children in terms of 'children will know...' or 'children will be able to ...'.
- All teachers' planning identified whether the learning was knowledge based, a skill or reflection leading to understanding. Teachers' planning clearly shows that they know about the different kinds of learning which is happening and this understanding is shared with the children who talk about whether their learning is related to knowledge, skills or understanding.
- Children regularly stated that they found their learning appropriately challenging.
- The school's definition of learning states, 'We build on knowledge, skills and attitudes whilst deepening our understanding and applying these in a variety of contexts'. This definition is shared with all stakeholders and is displayed in all classrooms and around the school.
- In classrooms we observed a wide range of opportunities for children to acquire knowledge, improve their skills and deepen their understanding. In PE a teacher made regular reference to knowledge and skills. One child told him, 'I know I have to use soft hands to catch and now I have to turn that knowledge into a skill'.
- Children in the school are given regular opportunities to reflect on their learning. Children in Milepost 3 have personalised individual reflection time at the end of the week. The children can opt to electronically share this with their parents. The teachers use plenary sessions, learning journals, reflection-time and exit points to encourage the children to reflect on their learning.

The accreditation team concurs with the school's judgement of 'Mastering' for Criterion 5.

Criterion 6: Appropriately rigorous children's learning and teachers' high expectations of it.

The school judges its performance against this criterion as 'Mastering'.

Teachers and children in all age ranges are enthusiastically engaged in the learning activities.

Children's responses to their learning (research and recording) are rigorous. Children are supported by teachers using a range of appropriate strategies and interventions.

The children use a wide range of primary and secondary resources for their research.

Children and teachers are not only aware of the learning intentions of their activities but use these to guide their progress and development.

Children use a range of formal records of learning to support skill development in Language Arts which are appropriate to the children's multiple intelligences.

The children regularly demonstrate a high standard of presentation and care in all aspects of their learning.

The following examples are from our observations and discussions:

- In all classes the children were enthusiastic about their learning. In Year 6 we observed the children passionately explaining their learning to their 'shoulder partners'.
- The school makes very effective use of the TAs, PLAs, the extended language learning team and technology integrators to support the wide range of learner's needs found in each classroom. A TA in Milepost 1 demonstrated extensive understanding of the individual learner profiles of children in the class and was able to meet each individual's learning needs.
- Teachers supported the children by being rigorous in their approach and their expectations. Teachers' comments on children's work generally established new targets for the children to aim for.
- The children made regular use of both primary and secondary resources. Children were encouraged to bring in items from home which would support their research and recording.
- The children throughout the school use a comprehensive range of electronic and computer based equipment for research and recording tasks. Children as young as four years of age were able to independently record their friends' learning activity using a mini iPad. These solid foundations continue to develop throughout the school as a result of the high expectations of the teachers and the support of the ICT department.
- The children were expected to complete challenging learning tasks and were frequently offered 'top tips' to scaffold their progression through the learning.
- Language Arts was consistently and effectively linked to the IPC units. The leaders for learning ensured that the links were both meaningful and helpful in extending children's understanding.
- The Year 5 'Showcase' highlighted the pride that children had in their learning. It demonstrated a wide variety of learning the children had experience in the unit and the variety of resources they had used.

The accreditation team concurs with the school's judgement of 'Mastering' for Criterion 6.

Criterion 7: Implementation of the brain-friendly elements of the IPC.

The school judges its performance against this criterion as 'Mastering'.

All teachers in the school are able to talk at an appropriate level about those aspects of brain research which are well founded and those that are less so.

Teachers can clearly identify those aspects of the IPC that emerge out of brain research and can articulate how and why. They have deep insights into the nature of learning styles, intelligence and multiple intelligences and refer to these aspects in their planning and classroom practices.

Children are able to think about and adapt their own and other's learning based on their awareness of brain-friendly elements.

The key brain-friendly elements of the IPC are consistently and deeply implemented throughout each unit and classroom displays are used as points of reference for the entry point, knowledge harvest, explaining the theme, research and recording tasks and the exit point.

The following examples are from our observations and discussions:

- During meetings with the accreditation team, teachers talked about professional conversations they had with colleagues about brain research. Information on new research is distributed to staff on a weekly basis by the senior leadership team. Staff attend regular meetings where up-to-date information about brain friendly learning is discussed. All staff monitor and grade their own professional learning through the use of their 'professional learning' site.
- Teachers spoke about different learning styles and planned for the needs of different learners. We observed one child in Milepost 1 using a 'phonic phone' as a learning aid and another child using an electronic translator.
- Teachers spoke to the accreditation team about how the school's training programme had supported their understanding of the links between brain research and the IPC.
- The children were regularly seen to record their learning through different means. Children in Milepost 3 were offered the choice of making a poster, writing a report or singing a song to record their learning in the 'Fit for Life' unit.
- All teachers use the brain friendly elements of the IPC to structure the 'learning journey'. This was evident in every lesson that members of the accreditation team witnessed.
- A child in Milepost 3 spoke about how the entry point hooked him into learning and another child explained the purpose of the knowledge harvest and how it impacted on his own learning.

The accreditation team concurs with the school's judgement of 'Mastering' for Criterion 7.

Criterion 8: Implementation of themes through integrated yet separate subjects.

The school judges its performance against this criterion as 'Mastering'.

All class teachers know how a unit is taught through separate subjects and know that the children learn best when the subjects are linked and connections are made through the theme.

Teachers and other stakeholders are able to articulate the relationship of the IPC and the desired exit outcomes for the children.

Teachers comprehensively and coherently link subjects appropriately to the theme in each unit of work.

Children are able to articulate how their experiences of learning through the IPC units provides them with a multiple perspective and a big picture.

The following examples are from our observations and discussions:

- Teachers and other stakeholders talked to the accreditation team about how the curriculum structure supports the development of the qualities of the children outlined in the school's documentation.
- Stakeholders were able to articulate the relationship between the desired outcomes of children and the IPC when describing how children are developing skills that are transferable. Parents talked about having seen the positive impact this was having on their children.
- All specialist teachers plan the children's learning in collaboration with the class teachers, making coherent links between the theme and the subject, wherever possible. In a music lesson, children created a piece of music to be used in the 'Fit for Life' exit point.
- All classrooms display each of the subject areas linked to the unit. All classrooms clearly show the key brain friendly elements of the IPC and the children knew the purpose of the knowledge harvest and how the different subject areas within the theme deepened their learning. One child in Milepost 2 stated, 'the teachers make learning easier for us by separating the subjects'.
- All teachers made strong links between the IPC unit and literacy and numeracy.
- ICT is used to enrich children's learning throughout the school and is successfully used as a means of linking various separate subjects. Parents informed us that the information sent electronically to them helped their understanding of their own children's development through integrated subjects. Children could talk about learning through different lenses. In one class the children wore white coats when they were involved in a science lesson.

The accreditation team concurs with the school's judgement of 'Mastering' for Criterion 8.

Criterion 9: Assessment and evaluation that supports and informs learning rather than dictates it.

The school judges its performance against this criterion as ‘Mastering’.

All teachers and others who work in the classrooms demonstrate a strong commitment to discovering what the children have learned and how they can improve the children’s learning.

All stakeholders can articulate clearly why the school has chosen and how it uses the range of assessment procedures.

Class teachers and leaders for learning analyse the different assessment procedures and use these to devise children’s whole-school, class and individual targets throughout the school.

All teachers know about and use the IPC Assessment for Learning Programme. They give children clear next steps in learning which are derived from individual discussions. Teachers provide feedback to children and readjust planning for learning and teaching.

The following examples are from our observations and discussions:

- All teachers assess what the children are learning. We observed teachers using assessment evidence to adjust the planning of children’s learning. The TAs and PLAs effectively support the assessment of learning. Specialist teachers had individual programmes to meet children who had specific needs. In Music one child followed his own programme that was linked to the learning the other children were engaged in.
- The teachers informed the accreditation team about how they used the information gained in the knowledge harvest to inform future planning. A wide range of assessment tools are used to add to the understanding of children’s individual needs. The cognitive ability test (CAT) assessment tool also allows the school to monitor learning on a larger scale.
- The accreditation team observed whole classes being organised into ‘flexible groupings’ based on their knowledge of children’s academic strengths.
- Peer assessment was observed and challenging questions helped the children analyse their own and each other’s learning.
- Parents and the school board acknowledged the importance of the school’s assessment programme. They were knowledgeable about the different assessment techniques and talked positively about the use of beginning, developing and mastering. The parents also praised the use of learning targets contained in the school reports.
- Children and teachers have started to use the assessment rubrics both at the beginning and the end of the unit. Two Milepost 2 children clearly explained their progress from developing to mastering and how they had used the learning advice to achieve the progress. A child in Milepost 1 explained why he was ‘Mastering’ because he had used a range of different shades of colour in his picture.

The accreditation team concurs with the school’s judgement of ‘Mastering’ for Criterion 9.

Conclusion and Award

The accreditation team agrees with all of the school's judgements.

The school is therefore awarded accreditation at Mastering level.

John Holmes (Team leader)
Mary van der Heijden

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