
Audit report of the International School of Ghent

Type of school	Pre-primary and primary
School category	Private
Age range of pupils	Ages 2.5 to 12
Number of pupils	108
Governing body	Board of directors
Headteacher	Maija Lusher
School address	De Pintelaan 258, 9000 Ghent
Telephone number	+32 (0)9 221 23 00
Website	http://www.isg.ghent.org/
Email adress	info@isg-ghent.org
Audit dates	11th February, 25th, 26th and 27th February 2019
Auditors	Gerda De Backer Rudi Schollaert Herman Ros

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INTRODUCTION

The International School Ghent (ISG) was established in 2012 to provide pre-primary and primary education to pupils from different international backgrounds. It is privately owned and governed by a Board of Governors. Since its establishment it has undergone a number of moves in the city of Ghent until in 2016 when the school settled in a brandnew building in the De Pintelaan 258 Ghent.

Over the years the school population has grown to 108 pupils representing 40 different countries. As a consequence they enroll with different levels of knowledge of English. Because of the mobility of the parents the school population is transient. Pupils stay on average two years or start in the course of the school year and 30 % of them leave at the end of the school year.

The audit of the school was carried out by three auditors. It consisted of two parts: a preliminary visit of one day and a three-day visit. On the first day the audit team met with the headteacher and collected documentation for further scrutiny. During the three-day visit inspectors observed lessons (including a learning walk and a school assembly), conducted interviews with staff members, pupils, representatives of the parents, examined samples of pupils' work and analysed documentation regarding assessment and tracking of pupils' progress.

The audit team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- standards and achievement in the objectives of the curriculum;
- the use of assessment information to cater for pupils of all abilities;
- the way pupils' progress is tracked to identify individual needs and enhance achievement;
- the focus at all levels on improving the quality of teaching and raising standards and achievement.

1 VISION AND ETHOS

The vision of the school sounds as follows:

ISG aims to create an inclusive school environment where all pupils are supported to reach their full potential. We strive to raise international, global and cultural awareness amongst our pupils in order to inspire them to take an active role in our changing world.

At the heart of this vision is their mission statement:

ISG is a supportive and caring community where pupils of all nationalities, religious and cultural backgrounds are challenged to become active and open-minded learners and pursue academic and personal excellence.

The school ethos that is to support this vision is built on eight personal values: *respect, resilience, co-operation, morality, communication, thoughtfulness, adaptability, enquiry.*

The thread running through this audit report is that this vision is not a dead letter, gathering dust in one of the drawers in the head teacher's office. It is a living document that permeates everything that happens at ISG. It reflects on teacher and learner behaviour, on teaching and learning activities, on interactions among staff, learners and parents, on the decoration of halls and classrooms. It is ingrained in each and every aspect of the school culture.

That is because both the leadership team and the rest of the staff have taken genuine ownership of the school vision and values. As a matter of fact, vision and values are the brainchildren of the leadership team, who designed them virtually from scratch. It is the leadership team that drew up the blueprint of the vision and values. But they went further than this. In co-operation with the teachers they also translated each and every aspect of the vision and values to the level of the different age groups: *what does "enquiry" mean in pre-primary, and what does it mean in year 5-6 of primary? How can you encourage resilience in a 4-year-old, in a 10-year-old?*

Vision, values and curriculum are very well documented and clearly spelled out, e.g. *in the ISG Teacher guide. The rules are clear to everyone.* Yet, the school leadership manages to *steer clear of red tape.* The dreaded administrative burden so many school heads and teachers complain about is no issue at ISG.

2 LEADERSHIP AND CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Leadership

The headteacher acts as 'prima inter pares'. She has a natural authority and is very accessible. By the way she deals with staff, learners and parents alike she acts as a role model for others, demonstrating what the school values look like in practice. The head teacher herself calls this the hidden curriculum. This attitude reflects on the whole staff. There seems to be a lot of volunteerism in a caring community.

ISG is a flat organization. There is a **leadership** team consisting of the school head and two experienced teachers, one pre-primary and one primary, who set out the school policy. The two teachers act as go-betweens and coordinators for respectively pre-primary and primary. They make sure that what happens on the shop floor is in line with the mission and the values of the school.

2.2 Professional development

The leadership team also manages the **professional development** of the staff. There is not a great deal of input by external experts, mainly due to the fact that it is difficult to find appropriate expertise that can be delivered in English. Yet, the study days organized by the leadership team give evidence of a high degree of sophistication. Once again, they practise what they preach. **The concept of the study days is fully in line with the school's view on teaching and learning. They use a mixture of activities involving input and interaction, reflection and co-creation. This is a guarantee that the teachers will take ownership of the new ideas or practices that need to be implemented.**

There is a sophisticated appraisal system in place, as well as a peer observation and feedback scheme. The latter actively involves all teachers. The leadership team also plays an important role in coaching the teaching staff, in particular new teachers.

The activities mentioned above heavily contribute to the professional development of the staff as well as to the alignment of ideas and practices, in other words to school development.

There are occasional contacts with other international schools. In view of the lack of availability in-service training opportunities delivered in English, it might be helpful to apply for an Erasmus+ grant from the European Commission. This might be a KA1 grant that enables staff to attend CPD courses abroad or visit foreign schools. An application for a KA2 project would be more challenging. This would entail working on a joint transnational project with other schools, teacher training centres, universities etc.

Another element that contains major opportunities for professional development is the practice of co-teaching. Because of the availability of a substantial number of teaching assistants, co-teaching is already widely spread at ISG. Yet, it might be a very useful professional development activity to explore the opportunities for optimising this approach in view of the learning gains of the pupils.

2.3 Infrastructure and resources

The luxury of having small classes as well as a substantial number of teaching assistants provides the school with a great deal of pedagogical comfort. Although the new premises of the school were built before the present management team took over, the **infrastructure and resources** also contribute to the roll-out of the school's vision. The school is light and airy, open and compact. Classrooms are laid out in a way that is appropriate for the variety of learning formats that obtain in pre-primary and primary classes. There are ICT and multimedia facilities in all classrooms. There is a well-equipped multi-language library available. In summary it can be stated that the infrastructure and the resources are appropriate to support the

implementation of the school vision and the curriculum. The use and the setup of the outdoor space is a point of attention.

3 QUALITY OF TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

3.1 The curriculum

The International Primary Curriculum (IPC) and UK curriculum objectives for literacy and numeracy form the basis of the curriculum. The IPC provides an effective contribution to meeting the lofty goals that are embedded in the vision. Indeed, the curriculum is both comprehensive and integrated. It includes content, method, approach and assessment. The IPC is based on project learning through thematic units of work. Each unit focuses on a topic that is adapted to pupils' interests and lasts between 4 and 8 weeks. It encompasses knowledge, skills and understanding in each individual subject. The emphasis lies on language development and social interaction. Each unit of work is developed following the 'learning cycle', a process supporting the way pupils learn best from the ages of 5-12 years. At primary level, numeracy and literacy are largely taught and assessed as separate subject areas, though reading and writing are also integrated as part of the IPC units of work.

A weekly music, swimming and sports lesson is also provided. All pupils receive one Dutch lesson a week. Cross-curricular targets are covered by developing the eight personal values that are the core of the school ethos. Each month another personal value is highlighted. The school also provides a large number of extra-curricular activities that enrich the curriculum and broaden pupils' horizons.

Apart from the formal curriculum the pupils absorb a so-called hidden curriculum. It consists of implicit messages that transmit norms and values that are derived from the school's ethos. Metaphorically speaking, one could say those values exude from the walls of the school premises.

3.2 The standard of education

Teachers plan the lessons meticulously on a weekly and yearly basis, thus shaping a curriculum that is vertically coherent and horizontally aligned. Their flexible and dynamic planning leaves room for adjustments to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils. These are established by means of a wide range of assessment strategies (including portfolio, self-assessment). Teachers make accurate and productive use of assessment to monitor progress and to cater for pupils' differing abilities. The information is also used to reflect on the effectiveness of lessons and approaches to teaching.

Pupils get regular feedback, both orally and through accurate and motivating marking and are encouraged to respond to the feedback. They generally benefit from the detailed and useful comments that praise their good work and set targets for how they can improve. As a part of the feedback process pupils are guided to reflect on their progress by means of self-assessment. Midterm and end of the year reports give an accurate and detailed view of the progress pupils are making.

Teaching observed during the audit was consistently good with examples of outstanding practice. Teachers demonstrate excellent subject and curriculum knowledge. They use challenging teaching methods and offer a rich diet of interesting and exciting activities that make a significant contribution to the pupils' progress and joy in learning. Pupils are given many opportunities to think for themselves, to be involved in paired and group work and to act as a learning resource for each other. Thus, the teachers promote active learning and develop pupils' metacognitive skills. Their approach is completely in line with the school's view on teaching and learning.

All pupils benefit from the excellent quality of teaching. In spite of the significant differences in abilities and backgrounds all pupils are challenged at their full potential. The pupils learning English as an additional language also make remarkable progress.

Resources and facilities are used to good effect. Teachers also make good use of information and communication technology (ICT). In a small minority of lessons, however, there were missed opportunities to use multimedia for visualisation.

Lessons are made relevant by using authentic, real-world applications. In a few cases, though, materials could have been used that are more relevant to the multicultural background of the pupils. More explicit references to their mother tongues might also prove to be productive.

3.3 The school climate

All staff members establish a safe and stimulating environment for pupils. They provide good role models by establishing an ethos that builds pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Success is celebrated and mistakes are used sensitively as opportunities for learning. As a result, a harmonious atmosphere pervades the school with pupils from many different heritages working and playing together happily.

Pupils' attitudes to learning is exemplary. They are well-motivated and keen to do their best. Their thirst for learning was tangible during class visits. Their good behaviour impacts well on learning.

The school has clear rules for behaviour and strategies to maintain them effectively. Minor disruptions in lessons are rare and dealt with adequately.

In this favourable school climate there could be room for giving pupils a more formal role of responsibility, e.g. by establishing a school council.

ISG is a caring community for pupils, parents and teachers alike. As a consequence their well-being is paramount.

Staff morale is high because of the way all stakeholders' views are taken into account. As a result, they demonstrate a remarkable commitment to the school and they have developed an admirable sense of volunteerism.

3.4 Care, guidance and support

The school is very caring towards its pupils and families. Teachers have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils. Support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language is commendable. They make similar progress to their classmates because of the extra help they receive in lessons, in groups or individually. On class level teaching assistants are used effectively to support learning. On school level a learning support teacher focuses on the provision of supplementary teaching to pupils who require additional help. Extra support for Dutch is given to pupils who face the transition to a secondary school. To offer their pupils more opportunities to practice Dutch in an informal context the school takes initiatives to liaise with Dutch-speaking schools.

3.5 Parents' satisfaction

The parents who spoke to auditors were fulsome in their praise of the school. Parents are particularly pleased with their children's progress and their enjoyment in learning, the way the school keeps them informed and the range of extra-curricular opportunities.

The school creates numerous opportunities for parental involvement. Parents are encouraged to join in school activities. They are also offered the opportunity to take Dutch lessons after school hours.

4 SUMMARY OF KEY FEATURES

4.1 Strengths

- The effectiveness of leadership.
- The vision and ethos of the school and the way they are applied in standard practice.
- The school's capacity for sustained improvement.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- The appraisal cycle as a tool to monitor and coach staff members.
- The professional development scheme.
- The flexible and dynamic planning of the rich and relevant curriculum.
- The overall care, guidance and support of pupils.
- The safe and stimulating school climate.
- The well-being of pupils, parents and staff.

4.2 Challenges

Despite the many strengths of the school ISG faces a number of challenges that need to be tackled in the future:

- How to cope with the transient nature of the school population.
- How to prepare pupils who face the transition to a Dutch-speaking secondary school.
- How to make better use of the outdoor space.
- Explore opportunities for in-service training in English.
- Optimise the potential for co-teaching.

The audit team congratulates the school on the outstanding outcome of this audit and wishes to thank the whole school team for the congenial and professional cooperation.

On behalf of the audit team	On behalf of the Board of Governors
Gerda De Backer Rudi Schollaert Herman Ros	