



International Baccalaureate®
Baccalauréat International
Bachillerato Internacional

Amsterdam International Community School

WEAVING THE SOCIAL FABRIC: THE SCHOOL AT THE HEART OF A COMMUNITY

2006

IB World School since

2,000

Total number of students

Rynette De Villiers

Head of School



A sense of belonging

Amsterdam International Community School (AICS) is a Dutch international primary and secondary school offering the International Baccalaureate (IB) continuum of education and was the first to be authorized to do so in The Netherlands. By offering all four IB programmes for students aged 4 – 19, AICS is one of only 51 international schools worldwide to offer the full continuum. AICS offers high-quality, accessible, community-based international learning for students and aims to teach them to become compassionate and wise, handling differences and diversity, through knowledge and inquiry. School values include diversity, integrity, inquiry and community, aligning with the IB learner profile. It also requires all members of the learning community to be open to critically evaluate culture, history, values and traditions and to grow from the experience.

AICS is spread across two campuses in Amsterdam, but the distance is irrelevant to its staff and students, who travel by e-bike between the two for activities and events between classes throughout the academic year. It is this determination for collaboration that makes AICS very much one school, and with the school's approach in sharing the space with external community organizations, it "is now a place in the community where connections are made", says principal, Rynette De Villiers.

De Villiers describes the IB as the most "powerful vehicle connecting the campuses and driving the sense of continuity that threads its way through the school". Using the continuum as the central

model, teachers can collaborate cross-campus and across year groups. Staff and students alike also benefit from organic, meaningful connections with their community. It is these connections that connect students' learning experiences to real-world experiences, encouraging them to make a difference and build practical problem-solving skills.

The continuum brings focus to the school as a whole, it "offers continuity in thinking and helps to align the curriculum", explains Netty Foley, Deputy Principal. It also helps maintain the idea that the school's two campuses are one, which can be a challenge in the Netherlands. Legally, the primary and secondary schools are two separate entities, "so by having alignment of the programmes helps

to facilitate the whole school idea" continues Foley. The continuum allows teachers to reap benefits from both campuses and across all programmes, transitioning from the Primary Years Programme (PYP) to the Middle Years Programme (MYP) and beyond, and offering professional development and sharing best practices.

De Villiers describes the approaches to learning and teaching as a golden thread that students are exposed to throughout their IB education. This encompasses the IB learner profile "which provides further direction and focus" explains De Villiers. While the Dutch national curriculum connects knowledge, De Villiers explains that it is the "service learning element of each of the programmes that really makes the difference



with the IB continuum and connects our entire learning community. This style of learning helps to connect programmes." At AICS, year groups are often grouped together in integrated learning groups cross-campus, in line with the transdisciplinary idea of learning, as in the school's Global Citizenship Day, where every age group participates to develop their understanding of diversity and intercultural competence.

Service learning has been a huge success: students have taken agency and created their own sustainability and conservation initiatives that benefit their wider community. Being part of an IB World School gives learners "a strong sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves, and the IB philosophy of creating a better world

through understanding is central to creating this sense of belonging." Says Foley.

Inviting the local community for collaboration

Through the local and global context of the IB, students connect their learning experiences to their real-world experiences, taking action to make a difference in their community, building practical problem-solving skills, critical thinking and a lifelong sense of curiosity. These learnings are on clear display at AICS, where students work closely together cross-campus but are also very active in their local community.

In fact, external community-building is just as important to AICS as the internal community. Last year, the school appointed a full time community builder, whose job it is to bring the school into the local community and vice versa, to "bring the school out into the local community and the outer local community into the school" says De Villiers. A local community garden project, a choir and an orchestra which already had a collaborative connection with the school are using buildings at the school – students are now able to take part in their activities; partnerships which richly enhance their learning and reinforce the school's ties with the local community. "That is what we want," says De Villiers, for "the school to work together with the municipality to make things happen. These kinds of things we want to be part of".



A family affair

AICS cleverly integrates its parent community within the learning environments at both campuses, and the parents relish the opportunity to be so active and involved in their child's learning journey. Each class has been assigned a class parent, and all of the parents are connected regardless of their class's year group. It is this team of dedicated class parents, De Villiers says, that connect "like a tree that goes through the school", quickly and effectively communicating and helping us to get things done.

The group has organized a cross-campus 600-family ice skating event, and has helped displaced Ukrainian families come together – recent examples that help members of the school feel like they are part of a family. Many more activities are planned and AICS has complete faith in its parent leaders, giving them full access to campuses and the power to mobilize and accomplish their goals without direction but always with the best interests of the school community in mind.



Growing into the future

Next year AICS has plans to expand the Career-related Programme (CP), so they are investing in its growth. The first cohort of CP students just completed examinations with all students achieving their certificates. AICS staff are excited to see it develop as it allows so many opportunities for students post-secondary.

Training incoming teachers is an important aspect of the AICS community, and one that the principal takes seriously, "investing in training teachers is wholly supported, to make education better and make an impact on the world. The IB is renowned worldwide for excellence, and dedicated to ensuring the highest standards of every programme through the IB community

collaboration and a programme of continual improvement. This can be transformational for schools" says De Villiers.

For other schools looking to take the IB journey, there is some advice from the staff at AICS. Keep the end goal in mind; invest the time and resources into setting a solid foundation and understanding of what an IB education is so that you know how to define and reach your goals. Connect and collaborate with other schools which have already implemented the IB – don't reinvent the wheel. And finally, remain curious and open-minded, ask questions and get different perspectives, and be inquisitive learners just as much as your students.





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Find out more about the benefits of the IB:
www.ibo.org/benefits