



NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES, INC.  
COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

**VISITING TEAM REPORT**

# **Istanbul International Community School**

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**ACE Learning Principles Visit**

**March 6-9, 2017**

# **Roster of Team Members**

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## **Chair(s)**

**Co-Chair: Mrs. Diane Ullman** - New England Association of Schools and Colleges

**Co-Chair: Ms. Rebecca Dahl** - Dubai Modern Education School

# PREAMBLE

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## PREAMBLE

### Purpose

ACE Learning is an accreditation protocol designed to help learning communities chart a journey towards transformation. ACE Learning recognizes that, like all learning communities, schools are at different stages of development and maturation. Therefore, ACE accreditation does not depend on how many standards or Learning Principles a school 'meets' or 'fails to meet'; rather, Visiting Teams will seek to determine a learning community's

- - Conceptual Understanding of the Learning Principles;
- - Competency to plan for thoughtful and purposeful change;
- - Capacity for implementing systemic change;
- - Commitment to creating a culture of sustained, internal self-reflection.

This also means that the learning community's alignment with the Four C's of ACE Accreditation is far more important than where, on the Continuum of Transformation<sup>1</sup>, a school finds itself at the beginning of the process.

The Learning Principles Review Visit (LPRV) is the first phase in the ACE accreditation cycle once a school has been deemed eligible for NEASC/CIE accreditation. Two NEASC/CIE representatives will spend three days at the school, conducting as many observations of learning as possible and engaging in learning conversations with representatives from all constituencies. Their purpose is to allow the Visitors to gather enough evidence to arrive at an informed assessment of the learning community's progress on the Continuum of Transformation and its alignment with the Four C's. On the third day the Visitors present a ½-day workshop to the school's faculty and staff during which the next phase of the accreditation process – the Internal Reflection – is explained and the participants have an opportunity to discuss and work with several of the ACE Learning Principles.

The LPRV results in a recommendation by the Visitors as to whether the school should be given leave to proceed to the year-long Internal Reflection phase. If such authorization is granted, the school will be considered to have reached "Candidacy for (Continued) Accreditation" status.

It is understood that the LPRV – given its structure, mandate, and scope – does not lay claim to comprehensiveness or scientific accuracy. It is intended to 'take the pulse' of the learning community, to highlight practices that illustrate Learning Principle rubrics, and to identify potential gaps between aspiration and practice on which the learning community should focus during the Internal Reflection phase. The LPRV's avowed intention is to support the learning community's professional journey by offering constructive criticism, encouragement, advice, and support as appropriate.

A decision on a learning community's accreditation status is made following a full Team Visit at the end of the Internal Reflection phase.

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<sup>1</sup> The Continuum of Transformation consists of the following rubric descriptors: Not Yet Evident – Thinking About It – Working On It – Living It – What If....

# LEARNING PRINCIPLES REVIEW REPORT

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## LEARNING PRINCIPLES REVIEW REPORT

ACE Learning rests on three “pillars” which define the fundamental structure of the ten Learning Principles: Learning **A**rchitecture, Learning **C**ulture, and Learning **E**cology. Together, they create a coherent, inter-related and inter-dependent learning eco-system.

### Learning Architecture

defines what learners learn, why they learn it, how they learn it, how learning is assessed and communicated, to what extent learners are able to choose their own learning, and how the learning community knows that it has achieved the desired impact on the learner. In an environment characterized by a shared understanding and language of learning, learners demonstrate qualities of mind and heart that allow them to become responsible and successful citizens. An effective learning community fosters creative and critical thinking, performance, action, and entrepreneurship. In such a community, learning and creating, thinking, doing, and ‘making’ are valued equally.

Learning Principles 1, 2, 3, and 4 address a school’s Learning Architecture.

### Learning Culture

defines the learning community’s beliefs about the conditions that underpin effective learning, the norms and core values to which it adheres, and the impact leadership, governance, and staff have on the learning community’s sustainability and evolution. Learning culture represents the statutory as well as unspoken agreements woven into a fabric that creates community, sustains purpose and defines direction. Transformational learning communities have designed mechanisms that support intentional and systemic reflection, research, and future-oriented thinking.

Learning Principles 5, 6, 7, and 8 address the school’s Learning Culture.

### Learning Ecology

defines the physical and emotional/social ‘space’ in which learning occurs. It encompasses the nature of relationships, interactions, and communication within the learning community that sustain its values and norms. An effective learning ecology supports and is aligned with the architecture and culture of learning. Its principles are indispensable to the achievement of the purpose for which the learning community exists. Such communities also recognize that effective learning is not necessarily a function of fixed spaces, times, or forms.

Learning Principles 9 and 10 address the school’s Learning Ecology.

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This report, which aims to provide a holistic perspective on the school’s accreditation status following the Learning Principles Review visit, mirrors the ACE conceptual structure and offers the Visitors’ succinct observations for each of the three ACE pillars – Architecture, Culture, and Ecology. Its purpose is not to comment in detail on each of the Learning Principles, but to provide the school with an overall sense of the priorities that should, in the Visitors’ opinion, shape the school’s Internal Reflection, which now ensues.

# Foundation Standards Update (if required)

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## Foundation Standards Update (if required)

In February of 2013, the NEASC Commission on International Education (CIE) Director Peter Mott responded to the Istanbul International Community School (IICS) Special Report which focused on two specific issues: the Head of School/Board relationship, and concerns related to the Marmara campus and facilities. The school's Report, submitted in February of 2012, indicated that the school had made significant progress on each of these issues. The Commission considered and accepted the Report as evidence that the school had addressed the identified issues.

During the Learning Principles Review Visit, the Visitors found that indeed the school had taken the issues seriously, and had taken steps to address them. Regarding the Head of School/Board relationship, the Visitors observed that the Board and Head of School have a mutually supportive relationship and that each understands and acts in accordance with their respective roles and responsibilities. In fact, this renewed relationship has allowed the school to make considerable progress in the ensuing years. Currently, there is a high degree of trust between the Head of School and the Board, and a clear division of responsibilities which has enabled the school to move forward in terms of student learning, school culture, and cohesiveness of the faculty.

In terms of the facility issues, there has been progress, but current circumstances in Turkey have prevented the school from making a move to a new facility. In 2012, the Board formed a subcommittee to pursue a new campus, they engaged a design firm which developed preliminary designs for a purpose-built facility, and the Board has vigorously pursued options to buy or lease a new campus. Also, they have developed a maintenance plan for the Marmara campus should a move be delayed even further. Unfortunately, circumstances in Turkey have prevented the Board from purchasing or leasing a new campus.

The uncertainty surrounding the location of the Marmara campus has been of concern to all stakeholders in the community. Board members, teachers, Leadership, parents, and students all feel the effects of this uncertainty. It was expressed very well by parents who are concerned about not knowing if a move was imminent, or if they would remain in place at the Marmara campus. For many, moving the campus would result in a family move as well, and the uncertainty is affecting family life to some degree. Parents also raised the issue of maintenance of the Marmara campus, since it seems that the school might remain in its current location for some time. Teachers expressed similar concerns that the uncertainty of the location of the Marmara campus is unsettling and is causing some teacher turnover, as well as causing some candidates to look elsewhere for employment. At this point in time, the school is encouraged to communicate more thoroughly with parents and teachers and to explore additional ways to give some measure of predictability to teachers and parents as to where the school will be located. The Board and Leadership are also encouraged to engage all stakeholders in a conversation to share a short-, medium-, and long-term plan for upkeep of the Marmara facility that reflects the needs of all the school's stakeholders.

## **5-Year Visit Update (if required)**

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### **5-Year Visit Update (if required)**

N/A

# School Context

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## School Context

The Istanbul International Community School (IICS), founded in 1911, exists on two campuses. One is in the historic section of Istanbul near the Bosphorus and houses approximately 100 students in the Early Years through Grade 3, and the Marmara campus is located some distance west of the Hisar campus and houses more than 400 students from Early Years to Grade 12. While the separation of the school into two campuses that are a significant distance apart presents challenges to the community, there is no doubt that they are united by one Mission and approach to the education of children.

During the Learning Principles Review Visit, which took place from March 6-8, 2017, two NEASC Visitors spent three days in discussions with students, teachers, Board members, parents, and support staff and, most importantly, observing teaching and learning. The school's Mission to "inspire students to excel and to be inquisitive, creative, compassionate, balanced, and internationally-minded" was visible in every corner of the two campuses. In recent years, the school has pursued Personalized Learning as a means of providing a Mission-aligned educational experience for students and teachers. While the precise definition of Personalized Learning is still being debated among the faculty, they are unified in their desire to give students increased voice and choice in their learning, to give students the skills to reflect on their own learning, and to tap into the natural curiosity and invention that exists in all children by providing time for students to direct their own learning. It was also very apparent throughout the Visit that the school places a strong emphasis on relationships between student and teacher, among students, and among teachers, and that collaboration is woven into the fabric of the school.

It was notable to the Visitors that the work of adults at IICS is grounded in the same qualities of personalized learning that are in place for students. There are multiple means for teachers to inquire into their own teaching, and to collaborate with each other to find solutions to teaching challenges. The Visitors observed teachers at IICS who are reflective learners and continually seek ways to enhance student learning and deepen their understanding of personalized learning, and to improve the overall success of the school. This is due in no small part to the collaborative leadership style and overall ethic of growth and improvement that is modeled and promoted by the Head of School and the Leadership Team. As the Visit progressed, the Visitors were reminded of the iconic nested Russian dolls. The Mission-driven goals and values that characterized IICS classrooms were also observed in teacher interactions and Leadership interactions, creating a coherence in the school that is seldom seen.

Without a doubt, the Visitors were most impressed with the relationships among teachers and students. The school was abuzz with collaborative learning activity. Walking about the school, the Visitors found teachers and students collaborating in every corner of the building, with students working together in study groups or on projects. They also saw teachers who were engaged in the same kind of collaborative activity, working shoulder-to-shoulder to improve their teaching and find better ways to support student learning. In so many ways, IICS embodies the essence of a learning community in which teachers and students are partners in learning.

Throughout this stage of the accreditation process, whether in the school's Learning Principles Review Report or in the interactions the Visitors had with members of the community, it was abundantly clear that the school is honest and transparent about what it has accomplished and the work that lies ahead. The IICS community knows itself well. As a part of the ACE accreditation process, the school is required to rate itself on ten Learning Principles. IICS rated itself as either in the *Working on It* or *Living It* stage for all ten Principles. While there may be slight differences in regards to individual Principles, the Visitors are in full agreement with the school's self-assessment that in the midst of transforming itself into a vibrant, student-centered learning community, it is preparing its students to thrive in a complex and global society.

The Visitors hope that their comments will be helpful to the school as it embarks on the Internal Reflection stage of the accreditation process. IICS is a very good school striving to achieve excellence as described in the school's Mission and Vision. Given what the Visitors observed, IICS is a school that is well along the journey towards achieving its Mission.

# The Four C's

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## Conceptual Understanding

The ten ACE Learning Principles are a natural fit for IICS. Their journey toward personalized learning as a vehicle for delivering upon the school's Mission is well aligned with the CIE Learning Principles. While some variation in understanding of these Principles exists from one individual to the next, and from one section of the school to the next, the school is actively engaged in coming to a consensus on their meaning and testing out how it will "live" the Principles. The Visitors concur that the school has begun the journey and is in fact currently "living" several of the Principles. One example of the evidence of this can be found in IICS's hiring practices for teachers and leaders, which include questions that reveal a candidate's disposition toward personalized learning and the school's Mission. Another piece of evidence is the fact that meetings with teachers and leaders often evolved into lively discussions of the Learning Principles and how they might be further developed at IICS.

The Visitors observed that the Principles of Learner Engagement and Autonomy, Learning Goals, Learning Community, Research and Reflection on Learning, and Learning Space and Time appear to be well understood conceptually by most faculty. However, there are also ongoing, thoughtful conversations on developing a shared understanding of what it means to assess for and of learning within the framework of the school's Mission, and how to align Governance and Leadership to the school's direction. Fortunately, the pervasive culture of collaboration and reflection which is modeled and supported by the Head of School has created an environment in which the school can further develop its understanding of the Learning Principles.

The Visitors observed that IICS is already deepening its understanding of the Principles through two main vehicles: first, through whole-faculty study groups and smaller study groups, both of which help teachers make meaning of their work and systematically improve their practices. Secondly, the Visitors observed a natural cycle of action research that occurs in formal and informal ways. As an example, Professional Learning Communities were formed to help teachers who share students to improve teaching and learning. They were given time and resources to explore important questions about their practices and then given the opportunity to share their new knowledge with colleagues. Findings from this action research were shared in a publication called *Spark*.

The upcoming Internal Reflection period will provide an opportunity for the school to solidify its conceptual understandings of each Learning Principle and to map out its beliefs and practices that align with the Principles. Coincidentally, the school is about to embark on a strategic planning process which should be informed by, and incorporate the findings from, the Internal Reflection

## Commitment

The IICS approach to school transformation is embodied in their understanding of personalized learning. There is an eagerness to move from individual and small-team practices of personalized learning to a shared, school-wide understanding of what personalized learning means in the everyday work of teachers and students. Leaders and teachers alike are coming to grips with what it means to share the power in the classroom with students.

It was also evident to the Visitors that the community is making important connections between personalized learning and the ACE Learning Principles as they manifest themselves in all aspects of the school experience. There is a growing sense that living the Principles will require more than changes to classroom practice, but rather changes to the way the school acts as an organization. One piece of evidence of the school's commitment to the ACE accreditation process is the thoroughness and honesty evident in

the school's Learning Principles Review Report. It is quite clear that IICS is engaged in the process so that they can move to the next level of implementation of personalized learning. It was also encouraging to see the school use the IB program not as an inflexible set of learning goals and practices, but rather to encourage a deeper implementation of personalized learning. Another piece of evidence was the genuine high level of enthusiasm for exploring the Learning Principles exhibited by the attendees at the workshop conducted by the Visitors at the end of the Visit, when there was lively discussion and debate about the meaning of each Learning Principle. The Visitors feel confident in saying that the IICS community sees the synergy between their ongoing work on personalizing learning and the ten ACE Learning Principles.

## **Capacity**

Capacity to undertake the Internal Reflection stage of accreditation involves the school's ability to commit time and energy to the process and to sustain that focus over time. It also means the involvement of the entire community – students, teachers, parents, Leadership, and the Board – in assessing the school's alignment to the Learning Principles. Given the extensive work underway on personalized learning, the Visitors are confident that IICS is prepared to move on to the next phase of CIE accreditation. The Internal Reflection will provide the opportunity to engage all stakeholders in developing a shared understanding of the Learning Principles, assessing current practice in relation to the Principles, and developing plans so they can move toward the next level of implementation. During the Visit, many members of the faculty and Leadership Team commented on how aligned the Learning Principles are with the school's Mission and personalized learning work. The Internal Reflection will provide a means for the school to articulate the relationship among the Learning Principles, the school's Mission, and its personalized learning. From the Visitors' perspective, a Team Visit in April of 2018 is a reasonable expectation. However, should the move to a new campus become a reality, the school may want to push the Visit out to the fall of 2018.

## **Competency**

IICS is a community of learners accustomed to engaging in research and reflection as a natural part of the life of the school. The Visitors found the faculty, Leadership, and students to be oriented to a growth mindset characterized by an orientation to learning from experience and persisting when difficult challenges arise. This, in addition to the ongoing work for personalized learning, creates a supportive environment for the Internal Reflection process. Through Internal Reflection, the school will be able to develop a deeper understanding of its Mission and find areas of strength and areas ripe for growth. It can also use this Internal Reflection process to consolidate the many transformational initiatives, practices, and strategies that are underway into a cohesive whole. IICS is in a good position to conduct this Internal Reflection because of the deep engagement of Leadership and teachers regarding reflection and improvement.

# Suggested Principal Areas of Focus During Internal Reflection Phase

The Internal Reflection stage of the accreditation process will bring an opportunity for the school to assess its alignment to the Learning Principles, to validate what it is doing well, and also to identify areas of growth within those Principles. There are some areas of focus that the Visitors suggest the IICS community tackle during this process:

- Examine ways to strengthen the learning community by giving parents, students, and Board members a stronger voice in the development of the overall direction of the school, as well as the specific practices that impact teaching and learning.
- Identify the evidence that will be used to demonstrate impacts on student learning. A key piece of this work will be to explore more ways to assess the qualities and dispositions in the school's Mission and the desired outcomes of personalized learning.
- Continue to articulate the school's approach to integration of personalized learning into the IB curriculum, particularly at the DP level, and propose a plan to achieve what has been articulated.
- Develop a shared understanding among all stakeholders of the intersection of the school's Mission, personalized learning, inquiry, and the IB Approaches to Learning (ATL).

# Summary Assessment of Learning Principles

## Summary Assessment of Learning Principles

Learning Principles ↓	Continuum →	Not Evident	Thinking About It	Working On It	Living It	What If...?
1. Learning Goals						
2. Dimensions of Learning						
3. Assessment for, of, and as Learning						
4. Learning Perspectives						
5. Learner Engagement & Autonomy						
6. Research & Reflection on Learning						
7. Inclusiveness of Learning						
8. Governance & Leadership for Learning						
9. Learning Space & Time						

**10. Learning  
Community**



**Learning Architecture**



**Learning Culture**



**Learning Ecology**

# A - Learning Architecture

Learning Principles	School's Self-Assessment	Visitors' Assessment
<p><b>#1: Learning Goals</b> Learners demonstrate understandings, competencies, knowledge, dispositions, and values that will allow them to become responsible and successful citizens.</p>	Working On It	Working On It
<p><b>#2: Dimensions of Learning</b> Learning encompasses creative, moral, social, experiential, and entrepreneurial dimensions.</p>	Living It	Living It
<p><b>#3: Assessment for, of, and as Learning</b> Assessment measures the effect of learning on the learner. Assessment for, of, and as learning includes qualitative as well as quantitative criteria.</p>	Working On It	Working On It
<p><b>#4: Learning Perspectives</b> Meaningful learning is extended when learners explore the unfamiliar, consider a range of perspectives, and take informed risks. Mistakes are seen as opportunities for learning.</p>	Living It	Living It

## Observations

IICS is guided in everyday interactions by its Mission to develop students who "excel and are inquisitive, creative, compassionate, and internationally-minded." Most individuals the Visitors spoke to identified these learning goals as central to the IICS student experience and spoke of an approach to the IB curriculum that is increasingly focused on leveraging the Units of Inquiry, the Action component, the Exhibition in the IB Primary Years Program, the Personal Project in the Middle Years Program, and the CAS project at the Diploma level to engage students in critical and creative thinking, and to tackle pressing issues of global importance in a transdisciplinary manner. To further its student learning goals, IICS is also focused on the IB Approaches to Learning (ATL) dispositions as core learning outcomes.

Over the last several years, personalized learning has been a focus for IICS as a means of actualizing its learning goals, with a focus on giving students more voice and choice in their learning. The school has developed a definition of personalized learning which teachers are testing out in their daily work with students. The Visitors observed teachers discussing what personalized learning looks like in practice, and thinking about how personalized learning relates to the school's Mission. IICS is infusing its model of personalized learning into the IB Curriculum in order to provide increased choice and create a stronger student voice across the grades.

There are several learning structures emerging at IICS that encourage the development of the ATL, personalized learning, and achievement of the Mission. These structures include Maker Spaces, Genius Hour, Play-Based Learning in the Early Years, and Self Directed Learning Time (SDLT) in the MYP and DP years. These practices are all aimed at giving students voice and choice in their learning in order to deepen ownership of the learning process and critical thinking. There are numerous examples of student work that culminate in action to address real-world problems in a transdisciplinary manner. The Visitors were able to see a developmental progression of these experiences from the Early Years through the DP, indicating that the school values these student outcomes. While there is broad engagement in these concepts, there are varying degrees of understanding of what the Mission, ATL, and personalized learning look like in everyday school experiences. The school would be well served by working through these three critical underpinnings of learning at IICS (the Mission, the ATL, and personalized learning) in order to articulate the place that each one has in shaping curriculum, teaching and learning, and understanding the relationship between them.

Currently, the school has a system to track student progress, including IB assessment results and MAP testing. The community has come to understand that these traditional assessments are no longer sufficient to assess whether students are achieving the school's learning goals. Thus, teachers are experimenting with a wide range of authentic assessments such as projects, presentations, discussions, and inquiry writing. The Visitors suggest that the school continue to explore, review, and revise its assessment plan to ensure that it is aligned to the school's goals for learning. The school should also continue to monitor whether the assessment process is clear to students and parents and consistently documented. This includes an emphasis on measurement of growth rather than absolute attainment. The focus on assessment for learning, an ongoing topic of study, is to be commended. As new sources of data on student progress emerge, the Visitors encourage the school to develop a consistent data system so that the data is usable for improvement purposes.

The school has a clear focus on developing a growth mindset in students. This is evident as one enters the school, with the mindsets prominently displayed on the walls in the lobby. It is visible in classrooms and in conversations among teachers and students, and is an integral component of student self-reflection. Teachers are actively studying ways to increase student persistence and effort. One example of this is the positive connection that teachers are making among Self-Directed Learning Time, growth mindset, and IB Diploma Program results which are steadily improving.

Among the learning goals that the school values is the development of compassionate learners who respect other cultures. This aspect of the school's Mission is clearly encouraged and supported throughout the school. The Visitors found students to be polite and welcoming to guests, but also warm and respectful toward one another. The adults and learners at IICS enjoy a positive, collaborative relationship that is both taught and modeled in daily interactions between teachers and students. In the Primary, the Responsive Classroom Program systematically builds skills in self-management and respect. For Secondary students, the Dolphin Awards embody the school's ethic of respect and responsibility by recognizing character qualities such as kindness and respect, but also reinforce the school's emphasis on growth mindset by recognizing persistence and effort.

## Summary

IICS is very clear and forthright about its learning goals which are referenced in the school's Mission. The school is focused on providing learning experiences for students through the IB curriculum that promote critical and creative thinking and international-mindedness. There is an increasing focus on the Approaches to Learning (ATL) component of the IB program as central to the school's Mission. Finally, the school has made personalized learning a focal point for transforming teaching and learning, and for bringing increased voice and choice to students in the learning process. More than anything else, the IICS culture fosters reflection and experimentation, two keys to becoming a learning organization.

In addition to exploring increasingly effective ways to promote Mission-aligned learning experiences for students, the school is tackling the issue of Assessment For and of Learning as they move from a traditional assessment system to one that provides information on the impact of these broad goals on the students they serve.

# C - Learning Culture

Learning Principles	School's Self-Assessment	Visitors' Assessment
<p><b>#5: Learner Engagement &amp; Autonomy</b> Learners are engaged with and inspired by their learning. They have autonomy over their learning and make informed choices, supported by teachers acting as coaches and mentors.</p>	Working On It	Living It
<p><b>#6: Research and Reflection on Learning</b> Research, reflection, and future design-oriented thinking are valued and acted upon by the community of learners.</p>	Working On It	Working On It
<p><b>#7: Inclusiveness of Learning</b> The learning community embraces a culture of inclusiveness.</p>	Working On It	Working On It
<p><b>#8: Governance &amp; Leadership for Learning</b> Governance, leadership, and management support embody and promote the organization's intended learning impacts, norms and values.</p>	Living It	Working On It

## Observations

It was clear to the Visitors from the beginning of the Learning Principles Review Visit that IICS is a school that is actively working on developing a school/community culture and practices that support its Mission. The Visitors saw evidence of strong student/staff relationships, a caring environment, and the nurturing of each student to be an inquisitive learner who takes responsibility for his or her own learning. It is safe to say that these values are alive at IICS, and that the school is striving to create an educational experience that supports these values through an emphasis on developing a growth mindset for adults as well as students. While challenges remain, the school knows what it is working towards and is continually experimenting with structures and strategies that will move it closer to these values.

As it strives to create a sense of cohesion centered on the Mission and personalized learning that stretches across the entire community, IICS has created exemplary models of smaller learning communities that support each other in learning and contributing to the school's culture. For example, through their professional learning communities (PLC), teachers identified questions about their teaching that they pursued collaboratively. Topics such as Mindfulness in the Classroom, Modular Learning in Grade 10 Science and Mathematics, Exploring Movement and Play in the Lower Primary classrooms, and Teaching in Shared Spaces were explored by small teams and then shared amongst the entire faculty. This self-directed learning for teachers models the kind of experience they are working towards with their students.

A student example of a collaborative learning community can be seen in Self-Directed Learning Time (SDLT), which gives students approximately 20% of their school day to choose what they will work on and with whom they will work. During SDLT, students might seek out a teacher, or a teacher might seek out a

student. Or, as was often observed, students might work in study groups to help each other learn. It was also common to see teachers collaborating with each other during SDLT. This is one of many examples that demonstrate faculty willingness to release control of the learning process and to actively explore ways of doing this that are appropriate to various age groups.

While the inquiry-oriented nature of the PYP, MYP and DP naturally lend themselves to students exploring areas of interest, the faculty is continually looking for ways to increase student voice and choice in the delivery of these curricula, while at the same time addressing the need to develop caring, internationally-minded students. They are currently exploring ways to make the Approaches to Learning a more central part of their teaching and learning practices, and they are researching ways to authentically measure student growth in the ATL.

The focus on giving students a stronger voice and more choice permeates throughout the classrooms. The Visitors observed relaxed classrooms where “air time” was shared amongst teachers and students, with teachers more often facilitating learning than directing it. One example of this kind of relationship can be found in the MYP Grade 7 and 8 Literature class, in which students read independently from self-chosen books and teachers respond through e-journals that move with the students from grade to grade. A perusal of the journals revealed a rich dialogue between teacher and student about plot, character, literary devices, and other aspects of understanding literature. Teachers weave the skills of their grade-level curriculum into this dialogue.

While strengths in school culture abound at IICS, there are three areas in which the school is working to create a more inclusive sense of community. One of these areas is the Board's understanding of and involvement in the school in pursuit of its Mission, particularly its understanding of the concept of personalized learning. During interviews, it was apparent that the Board is very pleased with the experience of an IICS education, both in terms of academics and the nurturing of the whole child. However, they could not articulate specific ways in which this was being pursued, nor did they seem knowledgeable about personalized learning, which is a main thrust of the school. Given the very positive and mutually supportive relationship between the Board and Head of School, it would seem a logical next step to bring the Board into a deeper understanding of the direction the school is headed programmatically and to ensure that they are aligned with this direction. This will also enable the Board to contribute to the school's development in a more substantive way.

Parents are a second group with whom partnerships could be strengthened. Currently, parents describe a very close relationship and open communication with their child's teachers and with the Head of School, all of whom are described as caring, responsive, and genuinely interested in the students. However, they also expressed a desire to have a voice in school improvement matters beyond those pertaining to their own child. This is an avenue worth pursuing, since their unique perspective may lead to better solutions to the challenges the school has taken on.

Parents also articulated the challenge of having two campuses located quite a distance from one another. Despite a multitude of strategies that the school has employed to attempt to bridge the distance, there remains a separation between the two parent (and student) bodies. This is something that won't likely be settled until the school moves to a single campus; however, the school is encouraged to continue its efforts to bridge the gap, as it somewhat limits the school's forward momentum.

Finally, the role of student voice in defining the overall approach to teaching and learning at IICS could be stronger. While there is ample evidence that students have a strong and valued voice in shaping their own learning, and are regularly asked to reflect on their own progress toward their personal learning goals, the Visitors believe that the school could strengthen the inclusion of student voice in moving the school toward its Mission. There are some initial efforts underway, such as a fledgling Student Advisory that is separate from Student Council. These efforts could be expanded and formalized.

## Summary

IICS is a school that is highly reflective and focused on learning from its successes as well as its failures. Reflection is woven into the daily routines for teachers and students and is evident throughout the school, but especially in the classrooms and in all the ancillary learning spaces. There is a pervasive sense of community, especially among teachers, students, and Leadership, which supports collaboration and results in a rather "flat" organization in which power is shared. A growth mindset, characterized by a belief that effort and persistence will produce growth, is encouraged in many ways in the daily life of the community.

As IICS continues its journey toward personalized learning, the school is encouraged to look for additional ways to bring the Board and parents, as well as students, into the conversations about achieving its Mission.

# E - Learning Ecology

Learning Principles	School's Self-Assessment	Visitors' Assessment
<p><b>#9: Learning Space &amp; Time</b>            The design of learning spaces and the structuring of learning time are driven and shaped by the learning community's intended learning Impacts.</p>	Working On It	Working On It
<p><b>#10: Learning Community</b>            Respectful, healthy, ethical relationships and interactions create a true sense of community. Communication is honest and transparent. Community values are clearly stated, actively lived, and define a distinct, sustained identity.</p>	Living It	Living It

## Observations

Throughout IICS there are flexible learning spaces to supplement classroom space and to support student learning, creativity, and collaboration. The Visitors observed that the school is in the process of figuring out what combination of physical spaces will best support the school's Mission. Examples of spaces used to facilitate teamwork, collaboration, discussion, and student presentations abound. Natural lighting and visibility into classrooms is achieved through glass doors and large windows, creating an open environment and connection to the out-of-doors. In recent years, the school has created more space for laboratory work, media work, and Maker Spaces to spark creativity and experimentation. In conversations with Leadership and faculty, it became apparent that creating these kinds of spaces by moving and removing walls and repurposing existing space is an ongoing and purposeful area of exploration. One inspiring example of the creative use of space is the outdoor space at the Hisar campus which supports play-based learning. Using a relatively compact area of outdoor space, the school has created an exemplary environment for development of the whole child through play. The Visitors commend the school for its efforts to use learning space as an integral component of learning.

In addition to flexible learning spaces, the school is developing flexibility in the use of time. As described above, self-directed learning time is a prime example of how IICS is experimenting with use of time, as is the play-based learning time. In the PYP, teachers are beginning to carve out time in the daily schedule for students to work on self-directed projects, and the DP teachers are experimenting with learning modules that create more time for independent work. These efforts are a clear indication that the school understands that time is a key variable in developing self-directed and reflective learners, and that time and physical space play an important role in promoting its Mission.

The Visitors noted that, while a move to a new facility may be imminent, it has not dampened the efforts of faculty and leadership to experiment with learning space and time.

## Summary

The IICS learning community clearly recognizes that learning time and space are key variables that can either support or hinder its efforts to achieve its Mission. The innovative use of space and time related to learning is evident throughout the school. The Visitors saw numerous efforts to experiment with various uses of physical space and the flexible use of time as a means of achieving the school's Mission.

# Summary Recommendation

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## Summary Recommendation

Based on evidence gathered over the three-day Visit, the Visitors recommend that the Istanbul International Community School:

- Commence the Internal Reflection phase of the accreditation process by administering the parent, student, teacher, administrator, and Board member surveys.
- Submit its Internal Reflection to NEASC/CIE by February 27, 2018.
- Host a one-week External Review Visit comprised of three NEASC//CIE Visitors and one Team Secretary during the week of April 3, 2018.

# **Concluding Comments and Signatures**

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## **Concluding Comments and Signatures**

The Visitors would like to thank Head of School Jane Thompson, the IICS Leadership Team, and the Board for their warm welcome and for making the Visit so productive. In particular, the Visitors would like to thank Figen Engin who attended to every detail of the Visit and made our time in the school a joy. The entire community was welcoming throughout the Visit. The Visitors noted that the school's warm and inclusive environment fosters a sense of community that is truly exceptional. Teachers eagerly engaged in substantive conversations about teaching and learning, and the Visitors had the pleasure of talking with students, parents, Leadership, and the Board, all of whom were eager to engage with the Visitors regarding the school's Mission-driven agenda for improvement.

The Visitors wish the school well as it embarks on the Internal Reflection process.

Diane Ullman  
NEASC/CIE  
Accreditation Leader

Rebecca Dahl  
NEASC/CIE  
Visitor