



COBIS | Council of British
International Schools

Accreditation and Compliance Report



School:

British International School of Brussels

Lead Improvement Partner:

Christine Williams - Retired Headteacher

The findings and next steps of this report reflect the work of the Lead Improvement Partner.

The Compliance visit took place onsite between
4 - 6 December 2023.

Site visited:

British International School of Brussels

Acorn Building: 163 Avenue Emile Max

Oak Building: 59 Avenue de L'Emeraude

Student Numbers: 140

Compliance is valid for 5 years.

The next Compliance check is due in December 2028.

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COMPLIANCE REPORT

The British International School Brussels has successfully met standards one to five of the COBIS Compliance system.

1.0 SAFEGUARDING AND SAFER RECRUITMENT

The school places a high priority on the safeguarding of students and staff, including child protection, and the safe recruitment of appropriately qualified and experienced staff.

1A

STANDARD

The school recruitment process is fair, thorough and transparent and applies to all appointments consistently

COMMENTARY

The school has a population of approximately 140 students and a dedicated, often long serving, and stable staff. The fact that they stay for a long time says a good deal about the atmosphere in the school. Recent recruitment for a new Head was outsourced and the successful candidate is now in her second year. The school's recruitment process is undergoing a careful review to ensure the thought and care applied previously to acquiring new staff is now supported by documentation and actions that sustain a fair, thorough and transparent process overall.

There is a more robust recruitment policy. It is laudable that a birth certificate is now asked for to reinforce the identity checks and that the school has developed a rigorous application form to replace the previously universal CVs. A question around name change has further strengthened this new document, along with more stringent reference checks for shortlisted candidates. It is also reassuring to see that efforts have been taken to address the absence of references for long serving staff, by carrying out interim risk assessments on them. Safer recruitment procedures are also in place for ancillary and contracted staff, such as volunteers and bus drivers for the day and residential trips. Whilst there are no peripatetic staff such as music teachers or ECA providers, it will be important for the school to apply its safer recruitment procedures consistently, for these types of employees too, should there be a future need. The Single Central Register and staff files are in good order. Seven files were discussed and examined across a range of roles, which included teachers, teaching assistants, governors, administrative and maintenance staff amounting to 24% of the staff roll.

Recruitment is drawn largely from within Belgium and advertisements are posted on the school website and in local, influential newspapers. Where relevant, staff are supported with relocation and settling into a new life in Brussels. Police checks are sought on entry to the school and there is a rolling programme of renewal every two years. The school is now committed to requesting police checks for any new staff who have lived or worked in countries other than Belgium during their previous 5 years and has included this in their updated safer recruitment policy.

Copies of key documents, for example, birth certificates, qualifications and passports/identity cards, are kept in staff files. They are now colour copies of the originals, and are signed and dated when seen, either at interview or by requesting a quick, virtual meeting to 'see' them virtually.

Prolonged and frequent absences of the Head's HR support have meant that she has become chiefly responsible for all aspects of recruitment and the maintenance of the Single Central Register (SCR) in her brief time at the school. Given the weight of responsibility for any Head, this is a situation which should be addressed as a matter of priority because, while it is the overall responsibility of the Head to oversee the process of quality and safe recruitment, the maintenance of the SCR and the attendant obtaining and filing of recruitment documents should not be her job. More eyes on, and scrutiny of, the process, the logging of details and the filing of recruitment documentation from administrative and safeguarding colleagues would help with the consistency and diligence of safer recruitment and would free up the Head, to perform her other duties.

There is a clear and welcoming induction process for new staff which includes safeguarding training and lasts for a period of roughly one month. The school has investigated local employment laws regarding staff probationary periods as an additional safety net in its recruitment and found they do not apply. It is aiming to introduce a lesson observation into the school's Induction process in lieu of this.

Early February update. At the time of the visit there were several enhancements that the school needed to put in place to ensure that this standard was met fully. It is to the school's great credit that leadership understood this and responded immediately and rigorously to ensure compliance.

COMMENDATION

The energy and diligence applied by the new Head towards the meticulous work around the Single Central Register in preparation for the visit is commendable.

NEXT STEPS

Having taken on much of the administrative side of HR and safer recruitment herself since joining the school, the Head now needs effective short- and long-

term administrative support for the future. The appointment of such a person is imperative for the continual growth and smooth running of the school.

Continue to ensure all documents copied and filed are colour copies of the originals and dated and signed when originals are seen.

Continue to apply appropriate checks for any future ancillary staff such as volunteers, peripatetic teachers and those on external contracts, such as security staff.

Continue to ensure any new staff who have worked abroad provide police checks retrospectively, from those countries worked in, for a period of five years from their date of appointment.

Aim to improve the staff induction process further by including a lesson observation and checking local laws regarding probation periods for employees.

1B

STANDARD

All staff within the school including volunteers and supply staff meet high standards of child protection and the safeguarding of students

COMMENTARY

The school takes the welfare of its students and staff very seriously and always aims to ensure their well-being and safety. This is an inherent part of its philosophy and practice, which now needs to be shored up through the continuing creation of current safeguarding actions and procedures, which are then embedded firmly within the day-to-day organisation of the school.

The school has appointed a Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and a Deputy Safeguarding Lead (DDSL), who act as the safeguarding team for the whole school and have Level 3 safeguarding training, which is renewable every two years. They are both eligible for time, funding, training and resources from the school to support them in their roles and it is recommended that they create a calendar of half termly meetings across the school year to do this. These regular meetings should have a formal agenda and be minuted. There is a Designated Governor for Safeguarding (DGS), who also has Level 3 training. The DGS keeps the Board informed of safeguarding matters within the school, through a termly meeting with the DSL. Again, these meetings should be recorded and have a formal agenda. At least one of these meetings must involve a check together of the SCR.

Safeguarding signage around the school is currently limited and easily 'lost' amongst the abundance of display already on all the walls of the two buildings. It is recommended to review the display policy to ensure important safeguarding signage is clearly visible, and students' work remains current and pertinent. The school is also strongly advised to introduce visitors' badges and add succinct information about safeguarding, (including what to do in the event of an evacuation or lockdown), to them, as part of their entrance and exit procedures.

The school has made a good start in raising parental awareness of safeguarding, by holding a recent E-safety parent workshop, which was well attended. Continuing to offer parent workshops on safeguarding and providing summaries of them on a parent communications APP, would be further good practice.

There is clear methodology in place for reporting concerns and handling potential disclosures, which is well understood by all salaried staff at the school. Extending this to the wider school community, including parents, volunteers and visitors, is now an important next step. There is a Concern Form available, complete with a body map, to record staff notes and pass them on to the safeguarding team. All files are securely stored in a lockable filing cabinet kept in the Head's room, which is also locked when she is not there. The school is keen to acquire a suitable digital safeguarding platform on which to store this information.

Safeguarding training for all staff occurs annually and includes the yearly updates from key UK documentation. It is best delivered by the school's safeguarding team, so that effective discussion can take place. Staff safeguarding awareness is fostered throughout the year at the regular staff meetings.

New staff undergo an induction process on joining the school, which includes safeguarding training, usually during the three-day staff inset at the beginning of the school year. At whatever point new staff enter, it is recommended that safeguarding training be delivered face to face by the DSL or DDSL as well as taking the school's online course.

There is a recent Safeguarding and Child Protection policy which includes Belgian regulations and external support. These strengthen the safeguarding team's hand when dealing with more serious cases which cannot be resolved in school, and which require a legal process. It is important that the school safeguarding team and the Head are in control of any communication between the school and the external agencies, in such cases.

It is strongly recommended that the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection policy is reviewed immediately, before being ratified by the Board, to ensure updates and recommendations from this report are included.

NEXT STEPS

Review the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy immediately and replace the current copy on the school's website. Make sure it is ratified at the February Board meeting.

One of the termly meetings between the DSL and the DGS must be used to scrutinise the school's SCR, checking that it is both up to date and accurate.

Explore ways to ensure the methodology for reporting concerns and handling disclosures is understood by the whole school community. For example, visitors to the school receive a safeguarding and health and safety briefing as part of the sign-in process.

Ensure the programme of induction for all new staff, including governors and volunteers, includes face to face safeguarding training delivered by the DSL or DDSL.

Aim to source a suitable parent communications APP to improve the school's control over, and the efficiency of, all information communicated by the school.

2.0 STUDENT WELFARE

The school provides a safe and supportive environment for all young people.

2A

STANDARD

The school provides a pastoral structure that meets the needs of all students and promotes their personal development

COMMENTARY

The pastoral care provided by class teachers and teaching assistants is noteworthy and certainly meets the needs of all the students. This has developed over time, through the care and understanding of the school's long-standing staff, who recognise the potential of their students and work with such passion to ensure they are provided with every opportunity to develop as individuals.

Opportunities exist throughout the taught curriculum to reinforce the pastoral values of the school. Weekly assemblies pick up on current pastoral themes in the school, there is a well-developed House system to aid that sense of belonging, and a thriving and dynamic School Council to provide a sense of purpose for the students, especially regarding their current work on sustainability.

Students settle quickly into the school at whatever time of the year they join; the warmth and compassion of the staff and the family feel of the school, are the main reasons for this. The distance from their home country and the complete change in climate and culture for them, is well understood by all the staff and every effort is made to help the students, and their families, feel welcome and develop a sense of belonging at the school.

The compassion the school demonstrates towards all members of its community was mentioned by staff as a significant and positive factor that supported the mental health and well-being of everyone who worked at the school. As a school, it certainly does live its values daily!

COMMENDATION

The strength of the pastoral care within the school is commendable. It is an important and distinctive characteristic of the school that ensures all its students can thrive within the truly nurturing environment it provides.

NEXT STEPS

None noted.

2B

STANDARD

The school has provision for the physical and mental health, and safe supervision, of all students to allow them to flourish in the school environment

COMMENTARY

The level of supervision within the school is commensurate with the age of the students and the school's aims to develop responsibility and independence in its young learners. Younger students at the Acorn site walk confidently into school and those in Year 2 walk independently up the central flight of stairs and accomplish their change of shoes and storage of school bags efficiently, whilst greeting their teachers and settling into their classroom to start on their early morning tasks. At playtimes teachers on supervision duty interact positively with the students. The beginning and end of day procedures are carefully organised to ensure students are safely collected and handed over to their parents in a warm and friendly manner. After school supervision is provided in the form of 'Garderie', by a member of staff from 15.30 until 17.45, when students can read and complete homework tasks. It is paid for and booked into, by the parents.

There is a First Aid policy which is practical and sets out the procedures for staff to follow in the absence of an infirmary at either site. All staff have received recent paediatric first aid training in English, from the Belgian Red Cross; this is a particularly practical and thorough training and is certified. It is renewed every two years. As a result, staff feel confident to address the day-to-day scrapes and knocks that students experience at school and know how to make use of the selective, but well-stocked first aid kits at each of the school sites. More serious injuries, such as head bumps are reported to parents via an accident form, which may recommend they take further advice from their doctor. There is an insurance policy to cover any school related accidents. Should an ambulance be needed then there is the understanding that a member of staff will accompany the student. If a student feels unwell at school, parents are contacted to collect them; the school has an emergency contact list for all its students. Any personal health appliances, such as inhalers or EpiPens are stored securely in the respective school offices.

There is a member of staff responsible for health and safety, who coordinates any health and safety concerns communicated to her by other staff and ensures swift action is taken to resolve them. Part of her role will also include termly liaison with

the governor responsible for health and safety, so that the Board remains up to date regarding health and safety matters in the school. The school adheres strictly to local health and safety regulations regarding its employees and is visited once a year by a member of Mensura, the local health and safety organisation, to ensure they do!

Attendance registers are taken twice a day, and prolonged or unexpected absences are followed up.

NEXT STEPS

Organise a calendar of termly meetings between the soon to be appointed Health & Safety governor and the Health & Safety representative in the school; ensure meetings have a formal agenda and are minuted. Topics for discussion would probably include recent maintenance work undertaken by the school, an understanding of the current health and safety concerns regarding the students and feedback from the visit by Mensura to report on the health and safety conditions for the staff.

2C

STANDARD

The school ensures that through positive behaviour management students are supported in their learning and safety

COMMENTARY

Staff believe in having high expectations for all their students and nurture appropriate behaviour through positive reinforcement and mutual respect.

There is a draft Behaviour policy based on valuing and respecting the individual, supported by a robust Anti-Bullying policy, both of which need ratification by the Board. Bullying in all its forms is explained in the policy and consideration is given to the need to support the perpetrator as well as the victim. Discussion at forthcoming staff meetings will be instrumental in ensuring consistency in the delivery of both policies. Procedures for rewards and sanctions could be a good entry point for this discussion.

The school's PSHE programme is 'home grown' and works particularly well, because the teachers know their students and their needs. There has been recent development within the programme to include more relationships and sex education. Parents spoken to commented on the way their children were being taught to understand the meaning of consent in their Nursery class and about puberty in Year 6. Regular assemblies promote and celebrate positive behaviour at all levels within the school.

NEXT STEPS

Enhance the existing PSHE curriculum further by researching and possibly investing in, a valid Junior School, Relationships and Sex Education programme to support all staff in its delivery.

2D

STANDARD

The school ensures that off-site activities are appropriate and safe

COMMENTARY

The school offers extensive off-site visits and residential trips, at no extra cost to parents, which provide a wonderful opportunity for life skills learning for the students.

A thorough and comprehensive set of guidelines and procedures have been put in place, to ensure a high level of safety for the students during these off-site activities. Parental approval is sought for all categories of trips and a well-defined risk assessment is carried out before any students are taken off-site. It would be useful to evaluate these afterwards to continue improving the safety and relevance of the visit for the students...as well as noting the highlights too! All students wear a distinctive school uniform, which makes them easily recognisable as a group.

Whilst the variety of experiences afforded to the students by these off-site visits is truly commendable, it is important to realise that the procedures and guidelines also need to be written into a rigorous Offsite Visits and Activities Policy. In addition, without a Critical Incident Policy in place too, the school is left in a vulnerable position regarding the financial, legal and reputational impact on the school itself should any serious incidents happen. It is therefore important that the school creates and works with these two policies to ensure the excellent personal development being offered to all its students continues within an awareness of and understanding about, how to respond should anything untoward occur.

COMMENDATION

The firm belief by the school in providing such a wide selection of off-site experiences for the students is commendable. The impact they have on the students' personal development is outstanding. The passionate commitment of the staff to these ventures is noteworthy.

NEXT STEPS

Create an Off-site Visits and Activities Policy along with a Critical Incident Policy to ensure staff and students know what to do and how to act, in case of

emergencies, accidents or any other critical incident.

Evaluate all risk assessments carried out by adding a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats (SWOT) table at the bottom of the risk assessment form.

3.0 FACILITIES

The school provides all students with access to an environment conducive to learning and that keeps them safe.

3A

STANDARD

Accommodation supports the learning needs of all students

COMMENTARY

The school is located on two sites, in adjacent roads in central Brussels; both sites were originally town houses. The Acorn site occupies a well-endowed early 19th century town house which retains some of its former splendour in the gracious iron work and stained-glass windows and ceilings, and its beautiful 'white lady' wall sculpture. It has been thoughtfully restructured to contain sufficiently spacious classrooms for the Nursery, Reception and Key Stage 1 years, each with its own non-functioning fireplace! There are sinks within each classroom area, as well as sufficient toilet facilities for the age of the students.

The Oak site for Key Stage 2 students dates from the 1970s and feels a little more constrained in the space available for the size of its classes. However, all its classrooms are complete with modern interactive whiteboards and Wi-Fi, have large windows to allow the free flow of air plus the provision of sufficient light and contain an adequate number of large radiators to provide warmth during the colder months, all of which creates a comfortable and pleasant environment for learning at this site as well.

Again, there is a sufficiency of wash basins and toilet facilities for each classroom. Students are expected to bring their own water bottles for drinking purposes, which can be refilled at school. Both sites have a small, but well stocked and attractive library, which is thoughtfully run by a member of the school staff. Students spoken to said how much they enjoyed reading.

At the time of the visit, the classrooms on the Oak site were experiencing a considerable amount of noise pollution from the redesign of the adjacent building. It is a credit to both the staff and the children that they were able to maintain a calm and cheerful aspect nonetheless and continue their daily school routines. The staff's resilience and commitment to their teaching is noteworthy and representative of staff dedication per se to the students.

There is sufficient space at both sites to provide adequate and inviting areas for most specialist teaching, for example for EAL learners and music lessons. However, there is

a full complement of students in certain year groups at the Oak site and rooms designated for French language classes have become cramped for space in lessons for these year groups. It is suggested that some thought be given to the timetabling for French to support and improve the learning experience of students in these larger year groups. It is also vital to remember specialist rooms, and indeed all classrooms, require visual access from outside when the door is closed, for safeguarding purposes.

The school responded extremely positively to this requirement for visibility into all spaces used for learning and teaching. Photographic evidence of modifications completed to doors over December and January have now been provided for both sites enabling the school to be compliant in this key area for student safety.

Corridors and staircases are narrow, particularly at the Oak site, but all are serviced with handrails at child height. The stairs at the Oak site could be made even safer by the addition of coloured slip strips, as there is no stair carpet on this site. Well contained outside areas with soft-fall covering are provided for student recreation at both sites. There is a desire and necessity to create a more natural feel to these areas by revealing greater amounts of soil and planting bulbs and vegetables to develop the existing gardens. Gradually replacing the old plastic equipment with a greater number of wooden structures would also improve the natural appearance of both play areas, making them more aesthetically pleasing for students and staff alike.

COMMENDATION

The teaching staff at the Oak site are to be commended on their resilience and fortitude in maintaining a professional approach in the face of considerable noise pollution at their site, this term. They have ensured their students' learning has remained a priority.

NEXT STEPS

Consider devising a rolling programme of replacement for outside equipment to create a more natural and enticing area for students' recreation.

Add slip strips to all concrete stairs in the Oak department.

Consider more careful timetabling to improve the learning spaces available for the largest classes at the Oak site; for example, the Year 3 French class.

3B

STANDARD

The site provides a secure environment for students, staff and visitors

COMMENTARY

Both Acorn and Oak sites have street entrances, which always have a staff presence during the entries and exits of students at the beginning and end of the school day. There is a second member of staff just inside the building to convey messages and assist the students. Handheld phones are carried by these 'on duty' staff. Whilst this provides an excellent opportunity for the school to engage regularly and positively with the parent body, the fact that this occurs on a public street does leave the school wide open in terms of security. It is recommended that the leadership team investigate various possibilities to overcome this potential breach of security, such as hiring personnel from security firms during this period or employing a full-time security person at both sites.

The procedures for entrances and exits during the school day should also be scrutinised using expert eyes and experience, to ensure students are always kept safe. Visitors to the school should obviously be included in these procedures and at the very least be asked to sign into the school with an identity document and wear a lanyard with a sign saying that they are visitors.

At both sites the school has internal staircases and a sturdy and well-secured external fire escape staircase to aid quick evacuation from the buildings in case of fire. Emergency evacuation procedures are practised at least once a term using these staircases. There is a sufficiency of well serviced fire extinguishers that are checked on an annual basis, at both sites. They are identified by signage and can be found in both classrooms and corridors. There is a central fire alarm system which provides immediate access to the local fire brigade and triggers sound alarms for those inside all areas of the building. Fire doors protect electrical servers at both sites. Clear signage for fire exit routes is made evident in all classrooms and corridors. Termly practices of emergency evacuations are timed for efficiency and notes taken to improve their effectiveness. When spoken to, the students knew what to do and where to go. Blocking an exit during one of these practices every year would be valuable for both staff and students to experience and would enhance their awareness of real-life possibilities.

It is recommended that once outside, the students should line up facing away from the building and that a register should be called to identify who is and is not present, rather than taking a simple count of heads. At the Acorn site, it would be prudent to create a second set of steps onto the upper play area, where students are expected to congregate, so that their arrival at this safe area can be achieved more speedily and efficiently.

At present the regular procedures in place for a lockdown are not applied, because of staff concern regarding the detrimental impact on the students. It is strongly recommended that consideration is given to this safety measure as well, following careful and child-focussed explanation as to why it is necessary.

The school does not have a dedicated infirmary or qualified nurse on site; however, all staff receive thorough and regular paediatric first aid training and follow an effective First Aid Policy, both of which reassure and assist them in dealing responsibly with any first aid matters during the school day. Students who fall ill at school are accompanied to the school's quiet areas and wait there, supervised by a member of staff, until they are collected by their parent.

NEXT STEPS

Reassess the security at both school sites in terms of entrances and exits during the school day. Seek expert advice once again, perhaps from one of the local embassies or security organisations, to understand the most effective and efficient procedures for the school to use to always ensure a high level of security for staff and students at both sites during the school day.

At one of the organised emergency evacuation practices, at both sites, block an exit route to gain an understanding of possible real-life occurrences and how to act in them.

The school should consider and devise a secure set of procedures for a lockdown and practise this on a regular termly basis too, especially considering the concern mentioned in this report regarding entrance and exit security measures.

Build a second, small flight of steps for access to the upper play area at the Acorn site, to relieve the pressure on the existing stairway. This would also benefit everyday use of the play areas as well as being crucial to the efficiency of the emergency evacuation procedure.

3C

STANDARD

The fabric of the school provides an effective and safe working environment

COMMENTARY

The school does not have facilities for the cooking or preparation of lunches and snacks, which are brought from home by each student. Lunch time for the younger pupils occurs at their tables in their classrooms and is a highly sociable experience

for them. Older pupils eat at designated dining tables set out in a large room, which also acts as an assembly hall. The students are all expected to clear up after they have eaten, which for the younger ones consists of packing away their lunch boxes, whilst the older students are encouraged to take responsibility and clean the table surfaces and floors with the equipment provided. All mealtimes are supervised, and staff will encourage students to eat, where necessary.

Thorough cleaning of the school occurs daily and during set periods of the school holidays for additional deep cleaning. A small, family run, loyal team of cleaners with a long-standing affiliation to the school, arrive once students and staff have left. They work effectively and unobtrusively to maintain a high standard of cleanliness around the school at both sites. The storage of their cleaning equipment, when not in use, is kept well away from student access.

The outside garden areas of the school, whilst providing a sufficiency of space for the students' recreation, would benefit from having additional protection from the rain and sun, especially for the younger students. This would provide further opportunity for these young children to take their learning outside and enjoy a more 'free flow' activity-based, school day.

NEXT STEPS

Look into possibilities for considerably increasing the covered areas in the gardens at both sites, to create more opportunities for taking learning outside, especially for the younger students at the Acorn site.

3D

STANDARD

Overall facilities meet the needs of all students, including those with additional educational needs and/or a physical disability

COMMENTARY

Access to suitable toilet and washing facilities for students and staff is adequate and meets the gender, safety and privacy needs of both groups. Currently there is no disabled toilet in either of the buildings. Any recent temporary student disabilities have been met by the exchange of classrooms, so that access remains possible to facilities on the ground floor. The inclusivity of the school is nonetheless compromised by the constraints of the present buildings.

Where the school facilities do not provide all the resources and equipment to support access to the curriculum, the school has developed a wide range of external resources and opportunities for the students to experience. For example, there is a

strong, eight-week swimming programme organised across the school year for all students in Years 1 to 6. Swimming instruction is in English and delivered by professional instructors. Students not only learn how to swim by the end of the course, but they also acquire important lifesaving skills. All lessons are provided by the school at no additional cost to the parents.

NEXT STEPS

Continue to explore ways in which the school buildings can facilitate the inclusivity aspired to by the school in their policies.

4.0 GOVERNANCE

The school's governors work to support students and to provide strategic direction for the school.

4A

STANDARD

All governors / proprietors meet all the requirements for adults with access to young people reinforcing the importance of safeguarding within the school

COMMENTARY

Since its establishment in 2000, the responsibility for the school's strategic direction has been under the guidance of the school proprietors in their role as Board of Directors. With the growth of the school has come the recognition for the formation of a governance structure with a broader base and a wider selection of competencies. This is very much a 'work in progress' that is providing additional support for the new Head and the opportunity for the school to develop further.

At present there are five members on the Board, with the Head teacher playing an active part at Board meetings as well. Governor details are recorded appropriately on the Single Central Register and police and ID checks have been carried out for each governor. All governors have received certified safeguarding training and those governors who will sit on interview panels have safer recruitment training certificates too. Safeguarding training for governors should be renewed on an annual basis. A Designated Governor for Safeguarding, (DGS) has been appointed recently and has acquired Level 3 safeguarding training, which requires renewal every two years. Termly meetings between the DGS and the school's DSL and DDSL have already commenced and are followed up at the successive Board meeting, so that safeguarding is now a standing item on each full Board agenda.

The responsibility for Health and Safety at governance level is currently under discussion and an appointment is expected at the next Board meeting in February. Similar formal liaison between this governor and the school's representative for health and safety should occur on a termly basis.

The current review of school policies being undertaken by the Head will mean that the Board will be kept busy in the process of ratifying them. There should be space on the front of the policy for the Chair to sign off that this has been achieved, once discussed and agreed at Board level. The original should then be filed safely. It is recommended that a rolling list of school policies be compiled with their review dates, for awareness.

NEXT STEPS

Ensure there is a governor with responsibility for Health and Safety on the Board and that Health and Safety becomes a standing item on the agenda at all full Board meetings.

Create a rolling list of school policies for review and/or ratification by the Board.

4B**STANDARD**

Measures are in place for governors to register interests and to manage any conflicts of interest

COMMENTARY

All governors are required to declare any conflicts of interest on an annual basis, (or at the start of any Board meeting, if conflicts arise). Declarations are signed, noted on the Single Central Register and copies kept in the relevant governor files.

NEXT STEPS

None noted.

4C**STANDARD**

There are written procedures / protocols for the remit of the work of the governing body

COMMENTARY

The growth in membership of the governing body of the school has facilitated a thorough review of the Board constitution; namely its Articles of Association, which include the terms of reference for the Board. Consolidating this information in a Handbook for Governors will facilitate easier access for all and make regular updates more manageable. It would also cement the recruitment process further, by providing clarity on how new governors are appointed. Since the visit took place but before the finalising of the report, a first draft handbook has been produced which contains all of the recommended elements.

Further, gradual expansion of the Board is envisaged, recognising the need to continue adding to the various competencies already inherent in its membership, to support the school in achieving its future strategic aims.

The Board would do well to consider ways to evaluate its own performance as the school moves forward.

NEXT STEPS

Discuss the newly produced Handbook for Governors, at the next Board Meeting in February 2024.

Continue to be vigilant towards attracting new expertise, interests and competencies onto the Board.

Consider ways the Board can evaluate its own performance.

4D

STANDARD

There is appropriate support for new governors

COMMENTARY

There is now a clear governor recruitment process in place, which has been successfully trialled this year, with the addition of two new Board members. In terms of the induction of new governors, the importance of safeguarding training is recognised as a key aspect. The current Board are in the process of considering other essential procedures to follow, to render the induction process for new governors clear, pertinent and successful. One new governor has been tasked with this research, to bring to the next Board meeting in February 2024 for discussion and eventual ratification.

NEXT STEPS

Include the process for recruiting new governors in the Handbook for Governors and discuss in February 2024.

4E**STANDARD**

Governors have a commitment to their own training and development

COMMENTARY

In addition to safeguarding courses, governors are recognising the need to commit to their own training, to ensure their knowledge regarding governance is up to date and/or refreshed. Some have undergone safer recruitment training and a 'Welcome to the Board' online programme. They may also like to consider attending courses for governors provided by COBIS, as well as joining AGBIS, thus benefiting from further current, impeccably sourced advice.

Equally important will be opportunities for the new governors to visit the school and learn from first hand how the school functions.

NEXT STEPS

Consider the many opportunities available either online or through various agencies, to support governors in their role, so that this new Board can continue strengthening their knowledge and understanding of governance as they move forward.

Develop the good relationship that exists between the school and governance by providing opportunities to support them in their roles as active and committed members of the Board. For example, the school could invite governors to attend 'special school events' or arrange a programme of learning about how the school functions on a particular day, which might involve some discussion with staff and students, plus some accompanied learning walks.

4F**STANDARD**

The governors provide records of meetings and decisions which show evidence of active and committed governance

The profiles and contact details for the governors are available to parents along with key policies

COMMENTARY

The Articles of Association show that there are at least three full Board meetings a year, with the Head present at all of them. The meetings are formally minuted and made available to all Board members and the Head.

Parents are presently being kept informed of Board developments through the Head's regular Parents' Newsletter and the school's website, on which there are photos and soon to be added, profiles of all governors, along with a link for parents to contact the Chair of the Board if they so desire.

The recent development and growth in competencies of the Board is providing welcome support for the new Head. Governance and thus the Board's role within the school, now needs to be clearly communicated to parents, staff and the wider school community. An introduction page on the school's website works for those who look at it, but more effective is an Annual Report to Parents, following the Board's Annual General Meeting, especially if it reaches all parents via the school's Communication APP. Finding time to attend school events and being invited into school on a particular day to understand how the school works in practice, are also good examples of active involvement that highlight the Board members' commitment to the school and its strategic development.

NEXT STEPS

Discussion is ongoing regarding an annual Board of Governors' Report to parents, following the annual general meeting in the summer term. It is strongly recommended that this comes to fruition.

Facilitate easier and more effective communication between the Board and the school community, particularly the parents, by supporting the use of a parent communication APP.

5.0 ETHOS AND VALUES

The school has an evident British educational ethos, is outward-looking and promotes international mindedness.

5A

STANDARD

British educational ethos and values are at the heart of a holistic approach to learning and to the development of learner qualities

COMMENTARY

A British educational ethos pervades the everyday life of the school. Teachers are committed to educating the whole child and have been trained in UK methodologies and approaches to learning to understand how this can be achieved. They are familiar with assessment processes and procedures that support students' learning and are now interested in subscribing to some form of quality assurance that would enable them to understand where their students sit within a broader student population. The school provides formal reports twice yearly and gives structured feedback to parents at the termly parent teacher evenings. More informal communication about students' progress also happens at the end of day pick up!

Driven by the Head, the whole school community has recently contributed to reviewing the vision, mission and values of the school. The mission states clearly and concisely the aim to 'nurture a compassionate community in which all children flourish'. This was born out through discussion with KS2 students; one boy said, 'My friends have my back,' and another mentioned, 'A friend helped me, so I helped my friend.' Younger students in KS1 spoke about their first day at the school and one said, 'I felt calm, but I didn't know what to do. Then, at the end of the day I felt I belonged to the school.' Policies and procedures are in place to support the day-to-day management of the school's ethos and values.

A draft copy of a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice Policy outlines the inclusive approach the school aims to take toward diversity. Whilst this draft policy reflects the positive approach that is inherent within the school, it will benefit from further discussion at all levels, before going to the Board for ratification.

Most students require support in learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) and there is qualified specialist support within the school to provide this. For students with Special Educational Needs, (SEN), whilst there is a register of needs, specialist support is not presently available. Class teachers are acutely aware of these students' needs and feel frustrated in their inability to provide the necessary

specialist support. Some of these needs are quite severe. The leadership team are aware of this and are looking to find an appropriate solution soon, which could involve staff reassignment coupled with additional training. It would be important to include in this job description the development of a network of trusted, external professionals with whom to liaise, for students' further assessment and support.

The school is committed to providing its staff with quality continuous professional development, with an Inset Day included termly. Staff have undertaken E-safety training from a UK organisation recently, and training in the use of Google classroom. Their well-being is also considered, with a meditation session included at the beginning of every staff meeting and planned well-being afternoons for staff, which include yoga, team building and guided meditation.

NEXT STEPS

Aim to resolve the lack of specialist support for those children with special educational needs as soon as possible.

Ensure the recent Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice Policy undergoes good discussion with staff, perhaps at future staff meetings, before being presented to the Board for ratification.

Consider subscribing to a form of quality assessment in the core subject areas to understand the progress and achievement being made by the students within a larger context than the school.

5B

STANDARD

The school has an outward-looking perspective promoting its values via a wide curriculum and through opportunities to develop awareness of other cultures and global issues as far as this is permissible within the host country

COMMENTARY

The school enriches its broad curriculum with local and international themes, a range of after school activities and a varied programme of day and residential trips that explore the local community and the different linguistic areas of Belgium. Parental permission, medical forms and risk assessments are all required before any off-site trips go out.

Students in Years 3 to 6, have regular 'Skills Fridays' when they hold their school day off-site, either in a local park or visiting one of the many museums in the city and travel either on foot or use public transport. At the parks they learn and practise a

variety of skills, such as orienteering, wide games, dance, photography and even archery; as well as running, keeping active and learning how to use the public transport systems! One parent spoken to said how surprised she was that her young child knew where to buy his tram ticket and how to validate it on the tram.

All parents spoken to were full of praise for the opportunities afforded by the 'Skills Friday' initiative. Residential trips are organised once a year for Years 3 to 6 students too and last a full school week. All offsite experiences are at no additional cost for the parents, to ensure all students can attend.

The School Council provides a voice for students to develop their ideas, respond to local and world issues and consider ways to improve their school. Presently, the students are involved in working with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and have already taken eight bags of electrical and electronic equipment to the local recycling point; having independently removed the hard drives first, of course!

COMMENDATION

The exploration and learning that takes place within the local area and further afield in Belgium certainly enhances the students' life skills and knowledge about the country they are living in. Staff initiative drives this and ensures the school's values are truly 'lived', so that students become the passionate life-long learners aspired to in the school's mission.

NEXT STEPS

None noted.

5C

STANDARD

The school teaches the majority of subjects through the medium of English

COMMENTARY

English is the medium of instruction in all areas of the curriculum except for lessons teaching one of the host country's languages; French. Learning French provides important preparation for those students who move into a local senior school. French lessons in the upper KS2 classes therefore also focus on the curriculum covered in these years at Belgian junior schools.

There is a clear programme of support for the significant percentage of English as Additional Language (EAL) students within the school. An experienced and dedicated EAL teacher on the staff assesses the level of the

students' needs and works with them methodically (and with their teachers), to aid their learning. She has been assigned an adequate and quiet space within the school in which to withdraw students, either individually or in small groups, as well as sufficient lesson time. Students make rapid progress as a result and through the encouragement offered by their teachers to participate in all aspects of school life, thus providing total immersion in a supportive, friendly environment. One young KS1 student spoken to commented about his arrival at the school, 'I just knew Tamil. Only a few (students) knew Tamil, it was helpful to learn English.'

COMMENDATION

The rapid progress at which English is acquired as an additional language for learning, by all the students, is noteworthy and commendable.

NEXT STEPS

None noted.

OVERALL OBSERVATIONS

Founded in 2000, there is a very special 'family feel' to this school, mainly due to the size of the student population, the fact it is housed on two sites which have maintained the intimacy of their former town house status and the dedication to the students shown by the school's often long-serving staff. Strong relationships are built between staff, students and parents based on respect and understanding. Daily contact between staff and parents at the beginning and end of the day cements the trust within the community, making the school a singular and notable place in which to teach and learn.

Whilst roughly 90% of the students are of Indian nationality, the variety of languages, customs and religions within this vast sub-continent means that the character of the school remains essentially international. Recently there has been the addition of students from Ukraine, Greece and Hungary too. This is important for the sustainability of the school as the Indian families are all contracted by a small number of IT companies working in Brussels. The mother and toddler group which was started this year and meets every Wednesday afternoon at the Acorn site, is a deliberate effort by the school to reach out to the local community and publicise the education it provides to attract future, local families into the school. It is a worthy endeavour and illustrates the strong belief the staff have in their school.

The arrival of a new Head has heralded a decisive moment in the development of the school. The energy, drive and commitment she brings to her role have already seen important changes within the governance and overall vision for the development of the school. Continued support and cooperation from key players within the organisation will be crucial in enabling the school to move forward and achieve the goals to be agreed on and outlined in future strategic planning.

PRIORITY NEXT STEPS

Seek professional advice to enhance safety at both school sites; firstly, regarding entrances and exits and secondly by devising a suitably strong lockdown procedure which is practised regularly. Use this advice and the recommended procedures to create a rigorous Critical Incident Policy. Not only will this greatly enhance the overall safeguarding of the staff and students in the school, but it will also ensure the excellent off-site experiences offered to the students are carried out with a better understanding of how to act in the case of any incident that might jeopardise the standing of the school within the community.

Ensure administrative support, including human resources and financial personnel are in place to support the Head, enabling her to carry out her appointed role

effectively and retaining her focus on the strategic development of the school.

It is strongly recommended that the school consider training for a suitable member of staff, perhaps from within the current teacher body, to coordinate the AEN needs of the school and lend additional support to teaching staff for these pupils.

Governance and thus the Board's role within the school needs to be clearly communicated to parents, staff and the wider school community. An Annual Report to Parents from the Board would provide a good first step, especially if it is delivered via an effective Parents' Communication APP.

Recommendation to COBIS Director of Accreditation:

As of February 2024, all action points that had prevented the school from gaining Compliance have been addressed and it is recommended that British International School Brussels should now gain Member School (Compliance) status.