

*to educate for international understanding*

# Welcome

Each of our lives is molded by the people, places and cultures we experience as we grow. The way we are educated is a part of this- not just in what we learn, but in the ways we learn, and the environment we share.

The International School of Amsterdam is an international community centred around educating for international understanding. Through innovation, and with an open-minded approach, we challenge our community to learn for life and learn with purpose. We inspire our students to be resilient, respectful global citizens and encourage them to find their individual paths to personal success.

We hope that as you learn more about ISA you will find a place your family can call a home away from home, and an international community you will be proud to be a part of.



## Our Mission

To educate for international understanding.

## Our Vision

To create a community of lifelong learners who value inquiry, critical and creative thinking, take informed risks, and act with integrity and compassion.

## Our Beliefs

At ISA, we believe in developing minds, character and communities.





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# Our History

In the early 1960s, Amsterdam was a very different place to what it is now. Back then, only 2% of the city's residents were non-Dutch nationals. The global economy was booming, but the lack of English-language education options in Amsterdam was a major problem for the city in catering for international families and businesses that might have considered relocating. Until 1964, the only English-language day schooling options in the Netherlands were clustered around the large diplomatic and military communities stationed in the Hague. Amsterdam was not yet the hub of vibrant international living that it is today.

The International School of Amsterdam was founded in a collaboration between the city of Amsterdam and local business leaders as a catalyst for internationalisation of the city. In 1964, ISA opened its doors for the first time, to one single student.



*'ISA focuses on allowing its students to grow and find themselves through collaboration and initiative with the various community service and extracurricular activity opportunities. The strong bonds the teachers provide make this school a safe and caring environment where we can explore all possibilities on the path of becoming unique international individuals.'*

**- Karly, Grade 12**



# ISA Today

For more than 50 years, ISA and the city of Amsterdam have grown together as world leaders in international life, learning and understanding. The establishment of our school opened up doors for international families to make their homes in our wonderful city, and in turn the city of Amsterdam has itself proven the ideal home for a school dedicated to embracing diversity and international perspectives.

We now have close to 1,300 enrolled students, representing over 60 different nationalities.

We are dedicated to our school's mission 'To Educate for International Understanding'. As an independent, non-profit foundation, all of our efforts are focused on creating a vibrant, global community of lifelong learners. International understanding was the reason for our foundation, and it is the reason we still come together every day.


The city of Amsterdam has transformed into one of the most diverse international cities in the world, and it is expected that within the next ten years over 50% of the population here will be considered 'international'.



# International Baccalaureate (IB)

The International Baccalaureate is an international education foundation dedicated to creating a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect. To meet their mission, the IB has worked with schools, governments and international organisations to create education programmes that challenge students to become lifelong learners, and promote a deep sense of global citizenship. The IB was founded in 1968, and now counts over 4,500 schools worldwide as IB-authorised. The programmes are constantly evolving and progressing, with input from the schools and teachers, to incorporate the latest developments and innovations in teaching and learning.

The International School of Amsterdam was the first school in the world to offer a complete International Baccalaureate continuum. We offer the IB curriculum all the way from Pre-School to Grade 12. It is a progressive curriculum that places emphasis on critical analysis, while building on previous learning experiences. The IB's philosophy and holistic approach to education have been at the very core of all learning at ISA for over 40 years.



**Education programmes created by educators for educators.**

**ISA** Developing Minds

*At ISA, we challenge and support our students on their individual journeys to self-discovery. Inspiring and developing young minds is what teaching at ISA is about. We believe in the **power of curiosity** and encourage our students to ask questions – because **good questioning leads to great learning.***



# The Learner Profile



Inquirers



Thinkers



Communicators



Risk-Takers



Knowledgeable



Principled



Caring



Open-minded



Balanced



Reflective

*'The aim of all IB programmes is to develop internationally minded people who, recognizing their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world. The IB Learner Profile represents this mission statement in action'*

**'Learner Profile', [ibo.org](https://ibo.org)**





## Early Years at ISA

Early Years education at ISA begins in Nursery (2-3 years old) and continues through our Pre-School, Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten grade levels. We believe that these years of education are amongst the most crucial in a child's overall development. Our Early Years (EY) programme, and our approach to Early Years education, is research driven, and a thoughtful creation centred on providing the best possible environment for children to develop in the areas of:

- Learning Playfully
- Relationships
- Environment
- Student Agency
- Learning Dispositions

By focusing on these areas ISA ensures that our EY programme is wholly child centred, and at all times driven by the needs of our young students.

## Nursery - Kindergarten

*'Experiences during the early years lay the foundation for all future learning. A rapid rate of development during the early years occurs in the physical, emotional, social and cognitive domains. The brain and body develop faster than at any other point in a child's life.'*

**'Inquiry in the Early Years', IB (2019)**

*'Inquiry in the early years looks, sounds and feels exciting, with children actively engaged in questioning, wondering and theorising through play.'*

**'Inquiry in the Early Years', IB (2019)**



## Learning Playfully

It is through play that our EY students create learning opportunities. Play can take many forms, from free play amongst children themselves, to co-opted play between children and their teachers. In all its forms play allows young learners to naturally and actively construct meaning from their interactions with their peers and the world around them. These meanings are continuously built upon and revisited as experiences grow. At ISA, we endeavour to provide space for our students to enjoy authentic, valuable and varied types of play, with a focus on building up positive and strong relationships with their teachers.

## Relationships

Research has shown that the self-regulation and language skills that are learned, both socially and emotionally, through relationship building in early years are the most important predictors of children's future academic success and personal wellbeing. Maintaining positive relationships is a fundamental part of our EY programme, for both our students and our staff. Our school leaders aim to engage and empower our EY teachers, and in so doing improve the learning experience of their young learners.

## Environment

At ISA we are immensely proud of our EY facilities and spaces. The EY centre on our campus is part of, but separate from, the rest of our school and it provides a safe, welcoming home for our young learners in Nursery, Pre-School and Pre-Kindergarten. The physical environment of the EY centre includes the classrooms, playgrounds, EY kitchen, library, gym, music room and art atelier. Each of these spaces is purpose-built, and they have been thoughtfully designed to encourage play and build relationships in a safe and secure way.

## Student Agency

We believe that it is important that EY learners feel a sense of ownership over their own learning. By promoting student agency at a young age we can encourage our early learners to become more at ease with being independent, comfortable at negotiating and compromising together in play, and confident in asserting themselves.

## Learning Dispositions

A crucial element of EY learning is a focus on developing children's attitudes and self-confidence around learning. While encouraging a positive disposition towards curiosity and education doesn't directly affect the academic abilities of a child, it is very important for helping to channel a child's skills and talents into productive action, and inspiring a sense of well-being and satisfaction around school life and beyond. Developing 'soft-skills' and dispositions like perseverance, independence and critical thinking is an important step for young children, and are central to the IB philosophy and Learner Profile.





## Primary Years Programme

Pre-School - Grade 5

### *Development of Understanding Through Inquiry*

The PYP is the International Baccalaureate's programme for children aged 3 to 12-years-old. ISA continues to play a leading role in the development of this part of the IB curriculum, and was the first school to offer the programme in 1997. It is now offered by over 1,700 schools worldwide.

PYP students at ISA are inspired to look beyond simple answers and facts. We embrace a 'constructivist' approach to education, where teachers encourage students to construct new knowledge from their prior experiences. Rather than focusing on rote-learning and quizzes, our Lower School values our students' abilities to describe, explain and evaluate information and ideas from multiple perspectives.

**ISA students rarely experience whole class, one-size-fits-all teaching; rather, they work in groups and with partner students to explore meaningful questions and to pursue different perspectives on those questions. Inquiry, whether teacher-guided or student-led, is the vehicle for learning across all grade levels and subjects.**



## How the PYP Works!

The IB Primary Years Programme is based around 6 transdisciplinary themes. Transdisciplinary means that the themes are not limited to, or specifically focussed on, traditional subjects like science, maths and languages. These subject areas are, of course, an important part of the overall curriculum, but by structuring learning around broader themes the PYP encourages students to reflect on specific subjects as part of wider, real-world explorations of topics age-appropriate and meaningful for them. Each theme in the PYP is returned to at each grade level, with a change in the theme's topic each time.

The six recurring themes of the IB Primary Years Programme are:

- Who we are.
- Where we are in place and time.
- How we express ourselves.
- How the world works.
- How we organize ourselves.
- Sharing the planet.

*'Students have opportunities to reflect on the significance of their learning to take meaningful action in their community and the wider world'*

**'How the PYP works', ibo.org**



*'What I love about ISA is that everyone is always loving and caring and willing to help you when you need it. I also love that the learning strategies the teachers teach make it easier for everyone to understand and are very efficient and helpful.'*

**- Sophia, Grade 5**

# Middle Years Programme

## Grades 6 - 10

### *Learning for Understanding*

The MYP is a 5-year programme that challenges students to make connections between their learning and the world around them, and to prepare them for future study challenges ahead.

At ISA our MYP students are taught 'how to learn' through doing and experiencing. Scrutinising and searching for an understanding of global issues happens within the MYP subject disciplines, allowing students the opportunity to make connections between their subjects and to not view their learning in isolation. At ISA we strive 'to educate for international understanding', and the MYP allows students to appreciate their own cultures and history, as well as the traditions and values of others.

The subject disciplines are:

- Language acquisition
- Language and literature
- Individuals and societies
- Sciences
- Mathematics
- Arts
- Physical and health education
- Design

We do not offer a curriculum that only asks for the memorisation of facts, instead delivering a set of conceptually-based inquiry units that empower and help our students to be responsible members of their local, national and global communities.



**Our Grade 10 students (MYP 5) culminate their MYP learning through the completion of an independent study; called the 'Personal Project'. This project, alongside the eight MYP subject disciplines and the learning skills and dispositions taught, enable a smooth and progressive transition into our IB Diploma Programme (DP).**





*'In class we learn to find our own voice. This means that our teachers encourage us to share our thoughts and viewpoints on different matters. This allowed me to hear other students' opinions, and helped me form my own ideas on the subject. My advice [to new students] would be to not be afraid to ask for help. The MYP system can be a bit confusing regarding the different criteria for grading in each test or even the different types of tests. It is especially difficult in the beginning, but it does get much easier quite fast, and you shouldn't be ashamed or afraid to ask your peers or teachers about the MYP system.'*

**- Emma, Grade 8**







# Diploma Programme

## Grade 11 and 12

### *Global Citizens who Consider Issues from Multiple Perspectives*

The Diploma Programme (DP) is a two-year, university preparatory programme. The DP was the first programme developed by the International Baccalaureate, and has been offered at ISA since 1980. The Diploma Programme aims to offer a balanced education that promotes international understanding. As with the other IB programmes, the DP requires study across a broad range of subjects and disciplines. The Diploma Programme is a great fit for students who do not wish to be limited by focused specialisation at this stage of their academic careers.

In addition, the IB Diploma Programme has been found to be an excellent foundation for preparing students to deal with workload, growing independence and time management challenges in further education and beyond. This is reflected in research consistently demonstrating that IB Diploma graduates display greater persistence through completing subsequent third-level courses.

The DP is a qualification that is recognised and respected by institutions worldwide. Studies conducted by the IB have found acceptance rates to universities in the US and UK to be significantly higher amongst DP students than non-DP students.

**IB Diploma Programme (DP) students have a 57% greater likelihood of attending one of the top twenty UK universities than students who study traditional A Levels, and had a higher acceptance rate to all twenty of the most popular American universities amongst survey respondents.**





*'The Diploma Programme at ISA was an invaluable experience which taught me how to manage my time and to succeed in activities beyond my comfort zone. I'm really grateful for the ISA DP teachers who made the learning fun and interactive, and who gave me the opportunity to develop as a learner and as an individual. Thank you, ISA!'*

**- Zosia, ISA Alumna**







# ISA Developing Character

*Our students develop an **appreciation for individuals, cultures and societies** around the globe. They lead and participate in community service projects that develop **character and the drive to make principled choices**. At ISA, students are taught to push their boundaries and discover how rewarding that journey can be.*

## School Experience

*'The International School of Amsterdam is an outstanding IB World School, implementing and developing the continuum of an IB education with a high degree of fidelity, integrity and sustainability.'* (IB Evaluation report, January 2020)

Being part of ISA is a special experience. Our community is dedicated to this everyday. However, ISA is more than just the sum of its parts, and isn't just defined by its facilities, and current staff and students.

ISA has been a pioneer in international education for decades. Teachers, parents, students and staff don't just enter a building where teaching and learning happens day-to-day, but join a tradition of international understanding and IB education that has flourished over generations.





## A Culture of Thinking

For almost 20 years, ISA has collaborated closely with the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Project Zero and its Visible Thinking Network. Through this innovative, research-based approach to learning and teaching ISA seeks to develop not just student's skills, but their thinking routines and dispositions. Every year, educators come from all over the world to join our staff for 'Culture of Thinking' conferences in our training centre, where we re-enforce ISA's commitment to making student thinking visible.

The years of work ISA has committed into integrating a culture of thinking throughout our school seeks to inspire not just our students, but every member of our community. You can't sit in one of our classes for a day and not notice how our students are absorbing 'how' to think, and not just 'what' to think. To be a part of ISA is to be a part of a long legacy of authentic endeavour for greater self-awareness, genuine open-mindedness, and deeper content learning.

## Academic Excellence

Although a narrow focus on academia alone is not ISA's driving vision, we are extremely proud of the excellent results achieved and the huge effort given by our grade 11 and 12 students in their IB Diploma courses each year.

Over the past 5 years, ISA IB Diploma students have consistently passed their examinations at a rate above 95%, and with an average score of 35/45.

*'When I first joined ISA, the biggest impact on me was the different tests. I was used to multiple choice questions and answers, and having to change to different styles of exams, such as knowing and understanding, developing skills and communication, and thinking critically really allowed me to not only show what I had learned but to also show my own thoughts and ideas. This was a big change for me. These different methods allowed me to understand the topic better.'*

**- Emma, Grade 8**

*'For new students, I would definitely recommend participating in extracurricular activities. It is an **opportunity to make new friends, try something new, and build confidence and independence.** Especially in terms of the sports teams, the tournaments are extremely fun and exciting, to work towards a goal and travel to another school with others. The seasons are relatively short which also gives a chance to try multiple sports or activities. It is overall an amazing experience.'*

**- Francesca, Grade 10**

*'Extracurriculars allow you to **develop an identity** through providing you with things you can identify with. If you are not sure of who you are, finding your passions is a great way of finding out.'*

**- Pieter, Grade 10**

*'I think what makes extracurricular activities so fun is how well organized ISA makes the activities and how fun it is to meet new people and play sports with your friends. I loved being able to go on trips with my friends and staying over at hotels and peoples houses with them. I like how the coaches on the two teams I played on **push for good teamwork and good sportsmanship** and along the way of doing the activities we learn new lessons and excel in the activity.'*

**- Matteo, Grade 7**



## Extra-curriculars

ISA offers a rich programme of extracurricular activities and school clubs to add diversity to the learning experience and an important social element to the lives of the students from Pre-School to grade 12.

The activities and clubs encompass interests as varied as Model UN, weekend forest schools, language academies, Bollywood dancing classes, swimming lessons, drama group and much more. The programme itself is non-competitive, meaning that the emphasis is on enjoyment, participation and improvement.



# Athletics

A healthy balance is essential to success in life, and at ISA we want our students to be strong – in both mind and body. This is why ISA is a member of the Northwest European Council of International Schools (NECIS), a sports organisation consisting of 11 international schools in Northwest Europe who focus on healthy competition, sportsmanship and full participation from student athletes.

Tryouts are held in the Fall, Winter and Spring and there are four different age groups for boys and girls, beginning at under 12, for each sport. Teams practice two times a week and participate, on an almost weekly basis, in practice matches against competitor schools. Each season ends with a 2- or 3-day tournament where all the NECIS schools participating in a particular sport come together.



ISA is a member of the **Northwest European Council of International Schools (NECIS)**. The organisation is made up of 11 international schools situated across 7 countries, and it works to provide a structure for its member schools to participate in competitive, international sports tournaments throughout each academic year. Each year, our students compete in tournaments right across Northwestern Europe, from Norway to Luxembourg to the Hague, and across a variety of both team and individual sports. While students compete to win, the main focus is to learn about sportsmanship, teamwork, dedication and leadership.

*'I challenged myself to **get out of my comfort zone** and try out new things to see what I enjoyed participating in, instead of limiting myself.'*

**- Nehir, Grade 9**

*'I take part in basketball, cross country and track and field. What makes it fun and exciting is the competitiveness and you **learn a lot yet it's still social**.'*

**- Amelia, Grade 8**

# ISA Developing Communities

*In our community, we bridge cultures through **friendship, support and curiosity**. ISA's commitment to **reaching out to others** is deeply embedded in our culture. When showing empathy, **our students reflect on their own views and appreciate the perspectives of others.***

## Community

*'We recognize the integral role parents, families, volunteers, and service providers, i.e. our ISA community members, play as partners in the education of our students' (ISA Statement of Community)*

International understanding stems from much more than what happens in classrooms alone; it also means learning, growing and experiencing life together as a diverse and vibrant community. When you join ISA, you become a member of a special group that numbers thousands: from students to teachers, from staff to board members, from parents to alumni. ISA is a place where people from a wide variety of backgrounds can come together in Amsterdam to find a home away from home; it's somewhere to make friends and to make teammates, to be inspired and to inspire, and most of all, to feel valued as an individual within your new community.





## PTA

The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) is a group of parents, teachers and staff whose aim is to create a deeper sense of community, connection and involvement for everyone at school. Every year the PTA organise and run a wide ranging array of events (including fundraisers and cultural celebrations), activities (such as language clubs and coffee mornings) and school-supporting groups (like the Newcomer's Committee to help welcome new families, and the Booster Club to support the ISA sports teams).

In addition, the PTA has also developed International Community Representative groups for our staff and parents to join, and to share the rich cultures and traditions of the different countries and regions that make up our multicultural school body. You can connect with any national group that you feel a familiarity with, but initially the representative from the country/region you select as your home country will be in contact.



## Alumni

Once you become a part of the ISA community, whether as a parent, student or staff member, you are a community member for life! Even after direct involvement with the school has ended, we love to keep in touch. We have organised alumni events in places as far flung as London, New York and Tokyo, hosted celebrations here in Amsterdam, and are always working on different ways to keep our alumni connected to their ISA family.



# ISA by the numbers

3 Gyms



7 Metre High Climbing Wall

8

3D Printers



1 144 m<sup>2</sup> World Theatre

International Community Coffee Mornings

20



VR Goggles

15





