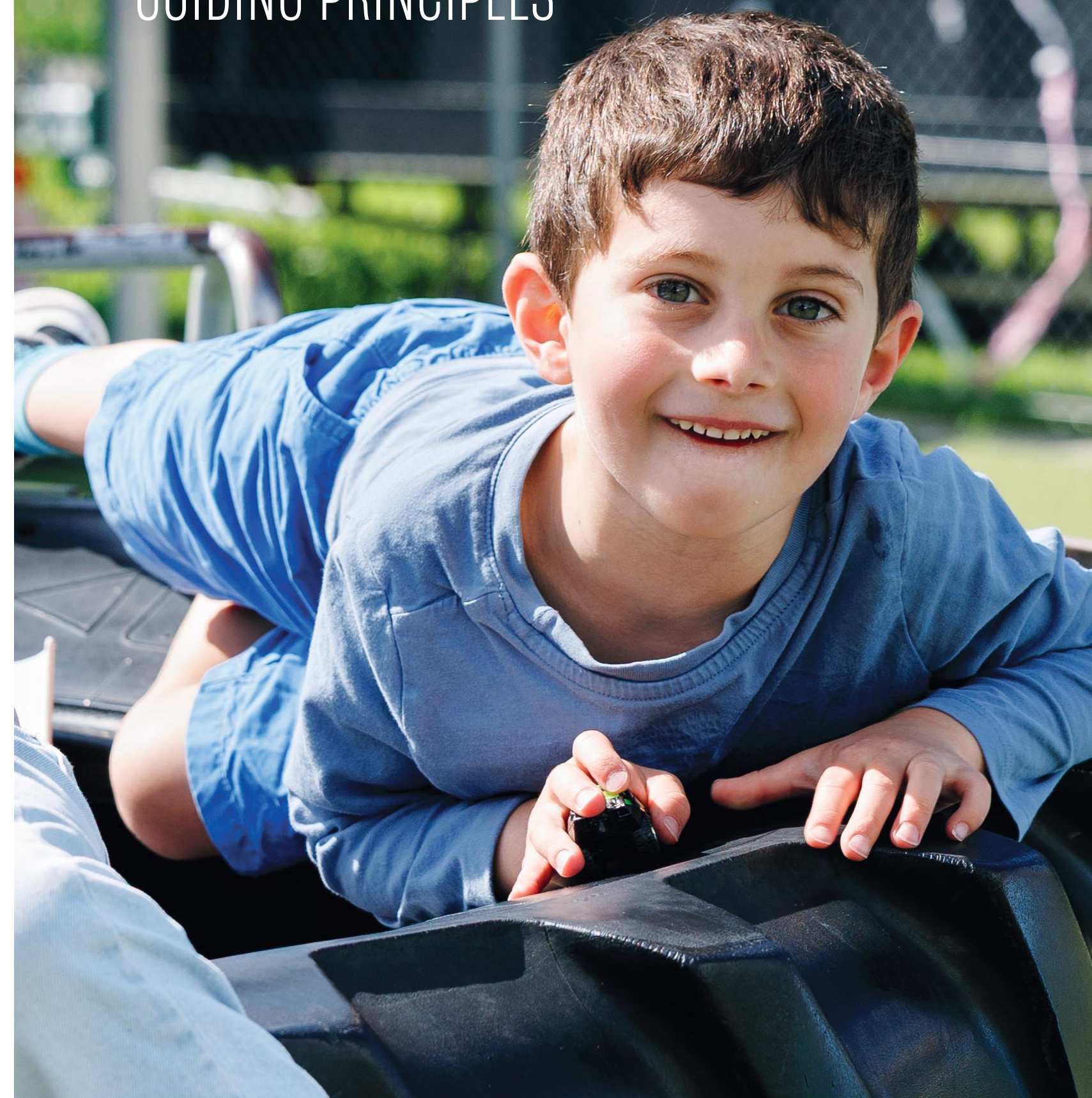


THE EARLY YEARS AT ISZL

GUIDING PRINCIPLES



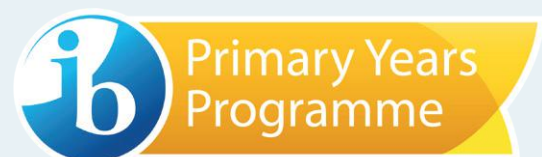


The original Early Years Vision was written in 2011 as a statement for our shared commitment to reimagining Early Years education at ISZL. This document was later revisited in 2016, resulting in the *Vision in Action*, where additions were made to acknowledge our growing thinking about outdoor learning, to re-emphasise our belief in play as a tool for meaning-making, and to include potentially challenging post-modernist perspectives on learning that continue to provide provocations for our shared beliefs.

The Early Years Guiding Principles is the most recent iteration. This review is timely, reflecting several key developments within the programme, particularly the development of free flow in its different forms across the Early Years, an increased emphasis on outdoor learning, and the concept of taking learning inside, outside, and beyond. It also aligns with the latest guidance from the Primary Years Programme (PYP) Principles into Practice, which includes expanded documentation from the International Baccalaureate (IB) regarding the Early Years in the PYP.

The Early Years Guiding Principles also place significant emphasis on the central tenet of student agency, a focus on practices that support a democratic view of early childhood education, and the implementation of school-wide developments such as the introduction of the MTSS (multi-tiered system of supports) model.

In line with our continued commitment to reflective practice, we continue to draw on and reflect upon evidence-based practices to refine our programme and deepen our understanding of how young children learn. We present these reimagined statements, moving beyond a vision, to outlining our current shared beliefs and practices as '*The Early Years at ISZL - Guiding Principles*'.



OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. The mission and learning principles of ISZL and the values and beliefs of the IB PYP framework underpin our programme
 2. Our early childhood programme must have intellectual and pedagogical integrity
 3. Children are competent, creative, rich in potential, critical thinkers and problem-solvers
 4. Teachers are researchers
 5. Play is inquiry and a powerful vehicle for exploration and learning
 6. Children are unique individuals and inclusive practices are a valued element of our programme
 7. The development of positive relationships, social and self-management skills are an essential element of our programme
 8. The establishment of a flexible, resource rich learning environment is an essential element of our programme
 9. The natural world and outdoor environment provide a unique context for connection, learning and well-being
 10. Language development is fundamental to learning
 11. Mathematics is a conceptual language for thinking about and describing the world
 12. Collaboration between teachers, children and parents produces positive, productive relationships
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THE MISSION AND LEARNING PRINCIPLES OF ISZL AND THE VALUES AND BELIEFS OF THE IB PYP FRAMEWORK UNDERPIN OUR PROGRAMME

Therefore, our programme is concept-based and is designed around the needs of our learners. We value the Early Years as a time when play serves as a powerful vehicle for inquiry, fostering choice, agency, and exploration.

We believe that as students with agency, children are able to take ownership of their own learning through making meaningful choices and taking action based on their own interests and inquiries. Children are active participants and meaning-makers rather than passive recipients of information, which fosters self-confidence, self-belief and responsibility.

Learning experiences and provocations are planned within the framework of the PYP Units of Inquiry and the ISZL Scope and Sequence, and also draw on children's interests, ideas and questions. This ensures that learning is engaging, meaningful, and appropriately challenging for all children. Learners are motivated when their questions guide deep investigations, nurturing a genuine enthusiasm for learning.

Ongoing monitoring and documenting of learning recognises both individual development and group achievements. There is a particular focus on developing Approaches to Learning, which are a set of interrelated skills:



These transferable skills help learners of all ages become increasingly self-regulated and independent.

OUR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMME MUST HAVE INTELLECTUAL AND PEDAGOGICAL INTEGRITY

Therefore, we are committed to keeping up to date with research with the aim of discussing and creating shared understandings alongside holding a critical view of our practice.

We view reflection as a key element of professional development. We are committed to engaging in ongoing dialogue about teaching and learning.

Our approach to early education is research-based and reflects our interaction with theorists aligned with our school mission and the beliefs of the IB PYP framework. We also consider other international perspectives on Early Childhood Education, such as the Reggio Emilia Approach®.

We recognise, value and draw on the funds of knowledge that children have already gathered from home and family, from peers, from popular culture and from their experience of the world.

We acknowledge that learning takes place in a social context and is an activity in which “children construct knowledge, make meaning of the world, together with adults and equally importantly, other children” (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2007).

Through direct experience and social interaction, “children wonder and theorise about themselves, others and the world around them” (IBO, 2021).



CHILDREN ARE COMPETENT, CREATIVE, RICH IN POTENTIAL, CRITICAL THINKERS AND PROBLEM-SOLVERS

Therefore, we are conscious of our image of the child. We acknowledge that this impacts all the decisions we make, including how we structure and value time, and the choices we make for spaces and materials. Our interactions with children are deeply rooted in respectful dialogue.

We view young children as citizens with a right to contribute fully in their life and community. Their voices and ideas are listened to, respected, and they are empowered to make decisions. The democratic values of participation, listening and empathy are key features of children's experiences at ISZL.

Our learning approach also reflects this powerful image of child and is characterised by numerous opportunities for solving problems, creative thinking and research. We listen to and respect children's working theories (Hedges, 2021) as provisional, dynamic, evolving ideas and understandings they construct to make sense of their world.

We place an emphasis on children's symbolic languages as a means for exploration and expression of individual understandings. As children proceed in an inquiry, generating and testing their ideas, we encourage them to express their understanding and theories through these many symbolic languages which may include drawing, sculpture, painting, dramatic play, mathematics, writing, music-making, singing, movement and the use of technology.



TEACHERS ARE RESEARCHERS

Therefore, pedagogical documentation informs the planning of teaching and learning by making thinking and learning visible. Pedagogical documentation can be described as any visible evidence (written notes, photos, videos, audio recordings, children's work) that is interpreted by multiple people in pursuit of collective meaning-making.

We believe pedagogical documentation plays an important role in supporting reflective practice (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2007) and building a professional learning community. Teachers' daily and ongoing observations inform and widen the perspective we have of individual children's competencies. Observations and documentation of students' learning may also be used as an ongoing assessment of learning.

Pedagogical documentation also fosters democracy by encouraging active participation between teachers and children. By capturing children's voices and perspectives, it challenges traditional power structures, recognising children as capable contributors rather than passive recipients.

Sharing documentation with parents invites them to engage, reflect and contribute to the learning process and widen their own view of young children and learning. Additionally, we value the expertise and insights that teachers with specialist training, such as music, P.E. art and languages bring to our transdisciplinary approach, enriching the ways we work with children.



PLAY IS INQUIRY AND A POWERFUL VEHICLE FOR EXPLORATION AND LEARNING

Therefore, to enhance the complexity of the play, the daily schedule for our youngest learners is intentionally designed to include extended periods of time for both adult-supported, student-initiated play and adult-led small-group activities. Children make the most progress when there is a balance between these approaches. Teachers thoughtfully consider the needs and developmental stages of their students as they plan opportunities for play.

Our transdisciplinary Programme of Inquiry also provides an authentic context for projects, and for students to play and inquire into concepts that are significant and relevant to their own lives.

Research also supports play as a powerful approach for developing executive function skills. Play offers multisensory experiences that refine a wide range of skills (IBO, 2021).

At ISZL, the concept of 'free flow' has evolved over time as a model for elevating play and playful learning. Through this approach, students in the Early Years are the drivers of their learning. They have the freedom to move between different spaces, make choices, follow their interests, and engage deeply with experiences that capture their attention. At other times, children can choose to participate in specific proposals to sustain their inquiries.

The teacher's role in supporting play and inquiry is to observe, document and pose thoughtful, open-ended questions that challenge children to think more deeply and encourage sustained, shared thinking.



CHILDREN ARE UNIQUE INDIVIDUALS AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES ARE A VALUED ELEMENT OF OUR PROGRAMME

Therefore, we model and foster an appreciation of diversity and international mindedness and aim to provide inclusive resources that authentically represent and reflect a diversity of cultures, experiences and backgrounds.

We recognise that language is a key aspect of a child's identity and we value translanguaging as a process through which students draw on all their linguistic resources, cultural backgrounds and home language to make meaning. We are committed to supporting the needs of students who are learning English as an Additional Language (EAL). In Kindergarten and Grade 1, EAL students receive targeted support from specialist teachers who work closely with classroom teachers.

Individualised instruction plays a key role in learning, and we view differentiation as an integral part of the planning of our programme. Multi-model approaches to learning promote equality in children's opportunities to learn.

Learning Support (LS) is available to provide resources, guidance and personalised strategies to ensure students have the tools and support needed to access the curriculum. Through collaboration with school faculty and families, Learning Support teachers support students with identified learning needs to develop and implement a toolkit of strategies that not only foster independence and self-advocacy, but also cater to each student's unique learning profile.

We also understand the effect of children's emotional well-being on learning. Children are supported with the development of social and emotional skills with the support of school counsellors who provide social-emotional support, skill development, and a range of strategies to support self-regulation.



THE DEVELOPMENT OF POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS, SOCIAL AND SELF-MANAGEMENT SKILLS ARE AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT OF OUR PROGRAMME

Therefore, we aim to establish a climate of respect through the development of positive relationships within a caring environment. Respectful interactions are modelled by all staff across the school, fostering trust, kindness and a strong sense of belonging. We view academic and social-emotional development as complementary, working together to support each child's holistic growth.

Morning meetings are an essential part of the school day, providing every child with the opportunity to be greeted, seen and heard. During these gatherings, children engage in check-ins, mindful practices, circle discussions and other reflective practices that help them build greater self-awareness and empathy for others. Class meetings also serve as a proactive place for addressing conflict in restorative ways, encouraging children to actively listen, problem solve and build strong relationships.

In addition, reflection meetings allow children to revisit and share their ideas. These moments encourage collaborative learning, where children are supported to respectfully evaluate each other's contributions with the shared aim of achieving deeper understanding.

Mealtimes and preparing food to share are also valued as communal experiences. Cooking, sharing and serving meals and snacks provide meaningful opportunities for children to practice self-management, responsibility and cooperation. These routines nurture a spirit of generosity, encourage independence and deepen the children's sense of community and belonging.



THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A FLEXIBLE, RESOURCE-RICH LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IS AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT OF OUR PROGRAMME

Therefore, our learning environments, both indoors and outdoors, create a variety of opportunities for social interaction and learning. These environments support individual, small-group and whole-group involvement with a variety of materials.

Flexible and open-ended educational resources are chosen both indoors and outdoors in order to activate a process of re-search, reflection, creative thinking and the development of working theories.

We value the inclusion of loose parts (Cankaya et al., 2025) as resources for fostering creativity, exploration and representation. We recognise the unique affordances of different materials and the potential that emerges through the interplay between children, loose parts and the environment where the boundaries between play and learning naturally blur.

Other supportive elements of the environment that are intentionally considered include lighting, storage, furniture design, a connection to the natural world, and an emphasis on aesthetics.

While some materials are always available, spaces and elements are frequently changed or rearranged to draw attention to their features or provoke inquiry and exploration.

Children are able to access materials as and when they need them, and we recognise the vital role of real-life, first-hand experiences in children's learning.



THE NATURAL WORLD AND OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENT PROVIDE A UNIQUE CONTEXT FOR CONNECTION, LEARNING AND WELL-BEING

Therefore, the development of physical well-being is an essential element of our programme. Providing daily opportunities for children to move freely in larger spaces supports the growth of gross and fine motor skills, as well as body and hand-eye coordination.

It is well-documented that spending time outdoors benefits children's health and overall well-being (Unicef, 2025). For this reason, we design learning opportunities that take place inside, outside and beyond the boundaries of our school buildings.

Daily outdoor learning sessions and regular forest visits give children the chance to be physically active, explore freely and engage with appropriate levels of challenge and risk within a safe and secure framework. We place trust in both the children and the environment to provide these meaningful challenges.

Our outdoor experiences also foster social development. They enable children and adults to build relationships, strengthen communication skills, develop social skills and nurture a sense of belonging.

In our school outdoor environment, we place particular value on the garden, pond and other areas as spaces for inquiry, discovery, exploration and research.

Direct experiences of the natural world, especially when guided by adults who model care and respect for the environment, provide meaningful opportunities to develop empathy and a deeper understanding of nature. Through real-life experiences, children come to see the interconnectedness of the world, encouraging them to consider broader questions of sustainability and our place and role in the natural world.



LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IS FUNDAMENTAL TO LEARNING

Therefore, we view children's early experiences with reading and writing as embedded in a larger system of oral communication.

Throughout the day, children engage in rich conversation with both adults and peers. Children have numerous opportunities to share ideas, express experiences and participate in activities that develop oral language communication skills.

Through play and adult-facilitated experiences, children are supported to develop competence in using a range of symbolic forms, including language. There is a focus on developing phonemic awareness and foundational skills such as the sound and symbol correspondence, alongside making meaning from print. The relationship between reading and writing is emphasised through everyday experiences and reinforced in print-rich environments.

Children are encouraged to explore and represent using many forms of writing, which are valued and appreciated as they gradually develop into more conventional forms of writing. Stories and storytelling play a central role, both for generating ideas for children's own writing and for developing listening skills that foster deeper comprehension. Classrooms provide access to carefully selected texts alongside regular visits to the school library.

Learning German as an additional language is an integral part of our Early Years Programme. We are committed to supporting and developing multilingualism, fostering an appreciation of the German language and Swiss culture, and creating authentic connections to our local community through our German language programme.



MATHEMATICS IS A CONCEPTUAL LANGUAGE FOR THINKING ABOUT AND DESCRIBING THE WORLD

Therefore, we view mathematics as another key symbolic language form that supports students to gain ever more sophisticated understandings over time as they explore mathematical concepts and communicate their thinking through their own representations.

We recognise the value of these representations and mathematical 'mark-making' as a valuable means for children to explore the 'written' language of mathematics. These early, personally meaningful experiences support and contribute to the development of an understanding of the abstract language of mathematics.

We acknowledge the importance of the analysis of children's mathematical graphics to assess children's current thinking as we plan to support and develop their mathematical understandings.

We recognise the value of play and real contexts for mathematics and place emphasis on the processes of mathematical thinking such as reasoning, problem-solving, playing with possibilities and co-construction of understanding.

Young learners develop their number capabilities every day. Through play, routines and teacher-guided activities/inquiries, they explore and make sense of the world by finding and describing patterns, manipulating shapes, measuring, sorting, comparing, grouping, counting and estimating (IBO, 2021).



COLLABORATION BETWEEN TEACHERS, CHILDREN AND PARENTS PRODUCES POSITIVE, PRODUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Therefore, we aim to foster strong, supportive relationships between home and school, recognising parents and guardians as essential partners in their child's education. We value a community built on collaboration, trust and open communication.

We believe that parents/guardians, teachers and children all contribute meaningfully to shaping school experiences. Family involvement in sharing their perspective, decision-making, exchanging ideas, shared approaches at home and school and building on students' experiences adds depth and richness to the early learning community (IBO, 2021). Through our digital learning platforms, we ensure parents remain regularly engaged in their child's learning journey.

As a community of learners, we also provide opportunities for parents to engage with our approaches to teaching and learning through workshops, coffee mornings and celebrations of learning. These experiences strengthen connections between home and school and empower parents to be informed, active members of the collaborative team supporting their child.





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A WORLD-CLASS LEARNING COMMUNITY

The International School of Zug and Luzern (ISZL) is an independent co-educational, non-profit day school serving the international community of Central Switzerland by providing a comprehensive education from Early Years to university preparation, from ages 3 to 18.

As an International Baccalaureate (IB) World School, ISZL is authorised by the IB Organisation to offer the Primary Years, Middle Years, IB Diploma and Career-related Pathway Programmes.

In addition, students in Grades 11 and 12 have the option of taking Advanced Placement® (AP®) courses and exams, which are audited by the College Board.

ISZL has been accredited by the prestigious and highly respected Council of International Schools (CIS) and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). ISZL is a member of the Swiss Group of International Schools (SGIS) and the Educational Consortium of International Schools (ECIS).

ISZL is supervised by the Educational Authorities of the Canton of Zug and operates with their approval.

EINE LERNGEMEINSCHAFT DER WELTKLASSE

Die International School of Zug und Luzern (ISZL) ist eine unabhängige, gemeinnützige Tagesschule die der internationalen Gemeinschaft der Zentralschweiz eine umfassende Ausbildung vom Vorschulalter bis hin zur Universitätsvorbereitung für 3 - 18-Jährige anbietet.

ISZL ist als International Baccalaureate (IB) World School durch die IB Organisation autorisiert die Primary Years, Middle Years, IB Diploma und Career-related Pathway anzubieten. Ausserdem haben Schüler der 11. und 12. Klasse die Möglichkeit, Advanced Placement® (AP®) Kurse zu belegen und Examen abzulegen. Alle AP Kurse werden vom College Board überprüft.

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ISZL wird von der Bildungsbehörde des Kantons Zug beaufsichtigt, und wird mit deren Genehmigung geführt.

ISZL IS A REGISTERED SWISS NON-PROFIT FOUNDATION (STIFTUNG)

Our mission-driven status ensures that every resource is dedicated to the education and future of our students.



- **Legal Status:** Registered Foundation under the supervision of the Canton of Zug Foundation Supervisory Authority.
- **UID Number:** CHE-107.327.678
- **Independent Audit:** Our financial statements are audited annually by BDO Limited Switzerland to ensure full compliance with Swiss Code of Obligations (CO) and Swiss GAAP FER.
- **100% Reinvestment:** As a non-profit, ISZL has no shareholders. 100% of our surplus is legally mandated to be reinvested into our students, staff, and campus infrastructure.



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