

22 March 2016

Dear Parents,

### Middle Years Programme (MYP)

This is an open letter to the Community of South Island families – including those families considering or expecting to move into SIS in the coming years.

Some of you will have already picked up from reading ESF materials or through casual conversations, that ESF has made a decision to move towards the **IBO Middle Years Programme for Years 7 to 9**. In this letter I set out the reasons for this decision, the South Island approach to implementation and I try to anticipate some of the questions that parents may have.

### Who will this decision affect?

Probably the first thing to say is that this is a development that will engage future SIS learners rather than current learners. Families whose children are already enrolled at SIS, can expect to experience the curriculum and assessment structures that have been explained in parents' evenings and are detailed on our website.

The second thing to emphasise is that this curriculum development applies to **the first 3 years of secondary education ONLY**. This is a move that is likely to take up to three years to accomplish for the ESF community of Schools. Although the full MYP is a 5-year programme, the Foundation is not looking to end iGCSE examinations. The IBO are very happy to accommodate this situation and to consider ESF Schools for accreditation as a 3 year programme only.

### Why the Change?

For a number of years, as ESF schools have moved away from rigorously following the UK National Curriculum, all of the Schools have been developing their own versions of Middle School Learning. This has been a rich and creative process and I believe that all ESF students receive a really engaging and international learning experience from Years 7 to 9. One of the downsides of that broad development is that our Primary Schools, some of which feed into as many as three different Secondary Schools, have found it hard to articulate the different offers to prospective parents. Another is that, although we feel that learning at SIS is strong, we have spent a lot of time trying to find appropriate ways of feeding back to parents. MYP gives us a clear and helpful framework to do that.

As ESF continues to strengthen and develop, we feel that the MYP offers us a degree of coherence and a common language across all of the Secondary Schools that can only help

parents to understand more easily what we offer and how their children are making progress.

### **How is it better?**

MYP is not 'the same' as the PYP, which many of you will have experienced; MYP is the *next step* for learners. All of the academic subjects that appear on our current secondary timetable will continue to be identifiable in the future.

The pedagogy of the MYP is orientated firmly around concepts and skills for deeper understanding and progression. Subject specific content remains and will be enhanced by conceptual understanding and skill development. The ambition is to build better learners, more equipped to deal with the challenges of iGCSE and the IB Diploma programmes. There is a strong push to encourage children to make connections from one subject to another and to understand that all of their learning has context – in their own community and in a global setting.

Very much in line with our commitment to Making a Difference, the MYP promotes Service at its heart and classroom experiences are linked to the application of this philosophy in practice. To us at SIS this is a really strong positive.

### **Will there be exams?**

The externally assessed part of MYP is based upon learning that takes place in Year 5 (our Year 11) of the programme. This will not affect us as our programme will end in Year 3 (our Year 9). There will be a Community Project, undertaken in groups, in Year 9 and there will be regular recording and reporting against the MYP framework. This framework will give parents and children feedback against 4 identified strands in each subject area. We will also comment on attitudes to learning, as we do now.

### **When is this happening?**

Each ESF school has been invited to set their own pace with implementation, within a three-year window. Our intention is to take a measured pace but to get started right away. Much of the MYP framework is attractive to us as teachers and will lead, I believe, to better understanding of learning and better communication with parents (a key issue from the last SIS Parent Survey).

Our plan is to use the next 4 terms – until June 2017, as the pilot phase leading us towards full implementation. From August of 2017, we hope to be running MYP curriculum in Year 7 and Year 8. Year 6 students joining us in Year 7 in 2016 will not see any change in our current assessment and reporting systems as we make sure that we take our time to be ready to switch to a new system. During that time we will hope to workshop with parent groups and to provide a really good understanding of what we are doing.

We have already met with the Principals of Quarry Bay and Bradbury School to start a dialogue about what we are doing and how we can keep the full community informed. If I may speak on their behalf, there is a completely positive view of this innovation from our Primary colleagues and we all see benefits to the change.

### **Is MYP a good curriculum?**

I hear people sometimes saying that one curriculum or another is 'better'. Truthfully, how good any curriculum is depends entirely upon how well it is planned, taught and reported upon. The focus will be on us to make this change a great change for SIS – I have no doubt that this will be the case.

The programme leader will be Vice Principal, Carolyn Andrews. I know that she already enjoys the trust and confidence of many of you and I am confident that her Team and our teachers will make this a really positive development at our School.

Please feel free to ask questions – we will be running some parent 'Roadshows' at our two main Primary feeder schools as soon as we can and I will work with our South Island PTA to look at the most appropriate forum to do the same thing at SIS.

Thank you for reading to the end of a long letter – we are excited about what lies ahead and looking forward to sharing the journey with you.

Best wishes



Graham Silverthorne

