



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

BRITISH SCHOOL OF AMSTERDAM

**INSPECTION OF GOVERNANCE,
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

British School of Amsterdam

Full Name of School	British School of Amsterdam
Address	British School of Amsterdam Anthonie van Dijckstraat 1 1077 ME Amsterdam Netherlands
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Email Address	info@britams.nl
Principal	Mr John Light
Chair of Governors	Rev John Cowie
Age Range	3 to 18+
Total Number of Pupils	604
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (306 boys; 298 girls)
Number of Day Pupils	Total: 604
Inspection date	February 2011

PREFACE

The Independent Schools Inspectorate

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is a body approved by the British Government for the purpose of inspecting schools in England and overseas. As such, ISI reports to the English Department for Education (DfE) on the extent to which schools meet the relevant Standards for British Schools Overseas and the *ISI Framework* requirements. ISI is also the agency responsible for the inspection of schools in membership of the Associations of the Independent Schools Council (ISC). Accordingly, ISI inspections of British schools overseas are required to:

- help schools to improve the quality and effectiveness of pupils' education and of the care for their welfare;
- provide objective and reliable inspection reports which help schools to recognise and build on their strengths and to identify and remedy any weaknesses;
- inform parents and the wider public of the quality of British schools overseas by placing reports in the public domain;
- report to the DfE the extent to which schools comply with the published Standards for British Schools Overseas;
- where applicable, assure ISC Associations that their member schools maintain the quality of provision expected.

ISI inspection is for the benefit of the pupils in the schools and through public reporting makes the information available to parents, governments and the wider community.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, though inspectors will comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

- (i) **an exhaustive health and safety audit**
- (ii) **an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features**
- (iii) **an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures**
- (iv) **an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment law.**

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 The British School of Amsterdam is a non-selective, co-educational international school for pupils from the age of three to the age of eighteen, situated on four sites in the South borough of Amsterdam. It was founded in 1978 by a group of parents to provide a British-style primary education. Since then, it has expanded both in numbers and in age range so that at the time of the inspection there were 479 pupils up to the age of eleven and 120 from the age of eleven to the age of eighteen; the first group of eighteen-year-old pupils left the school in 2010. There are approximately equal numbers of boys and girls.
- 1.2 Pupils represent a wide range of nationalities, with a significant proportion from the United Kingdom and a growing number of Dutch children. Many pupils are children of expatriates working short or long-term in the Netherlands, in particular for multi-national companies in the business and commercial sector. On average, pupils stay at the school for two to three years and very few remain for more than six years. A high proportion have English as their second language, for which they receive support. Pupils are of a wide range of ability.
- 1.3 The school has two key aims: to provide a high quality English education for families of the international community in Amsterdam; and to create a stimulating and caring environment which enables all individuals to realise their potential and, by doing so, develop skills and confidence for a fulfilling and responsible life in a changing society.
- 1.4 In 2010, the school changed its structure from an association (*Vereniging*) to a foundation (*Stichting*). It is now governed by a supervisory board of not less than seven members, of whom one-third to one-half must be current parents, elected at a meeting of the parents' association. Other members are co-opted by the board. The chair must be an independent, non-parent, member. The supervisory board elects a management board, at present consisting only of the principal. The management team consists of the principal, together with the heads of the four sections of the school: early years, lower junior, upper junior and secondary. The chair was appointed in November 2010 and most other members in the last six months. The principal was appointed in June 2010.
- 1.5 The last full inspection of the school took place in March 2009. This inspection was of governance, leadership and management only and took place to report on progress in these areas during this period of change.

2. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

2.(a) The quality of governance

- 2.1 A considerable sense of purpose is evident in the school. This is underpinned by the developing leadership provided by the supervisory board, reflecting the fact that relationships within the newly constituted body are good. It works in a purposeful, harmonious and effective way with the principal and school management team in the successful achievement of the school's aims. The shared vision, the considerable commitment and the experience and expertise of board members enable them to oversee, monitor and evaluate most of the school's work effectively. In the few weeks that the new board has worked together, they have improved financial controls and planned carefully to make best use of the school's facilities. The board is aware of the need to review its membership to further broaden its range of expertise to cover all aspects of its areas of responsibility. However, in view of the many recent appointments, it is too early to make a substantive judgement on its effectiveness across all areas over a longer period of time.
- 2.2 Staff said they appreciate the interest taken by the board in the school and value the time spent by some members as they visit its various sections. Parents said, both in meetings and in the pre-inspection questionnaire, how much they value the communications they receive. However, although the school informs parents of board membership, as recommended in the last inspection, biographical information and full details of governors' roles are only available for the most recent appointments. Board members are aware of the need for further training in school governance, but there has not yet been time to arrange it, though suitable courses are being actively investigated. The board is properly involved in setting strategic objectives, initially through setting up a school action plan with the principal, and it is currently planning further opportunities to examine more long-term aims with the management team.
- 2.3 In addition to educational issues, the board effectively discharges its responsibilities for child protection, welfare health and safety well throughout the school; for example, they receive regular reports on these matters which are discussed fully at board meetings.

2.(b) The quality of leadership and management

- 2.4 The school benefits from strong, clear and well-focused leadership which is warmly welcomed throughout the school community; many staff said how much it gives them confidence. Following a period of change, leaders at all levels say they share a common sense of working together towards a shared goal. For example, staff appreciate working with colleagues from other parts of the school on joint training days and when sharing in joint meetings. Policies and procedures, including those relating to child protection, are well communicated to new members of staff. Pupils say they feel safe, enjoy school, find it easy to make friends and report no significant degree of bullying, though they are sure any which occurred would be sorted out. They also enjoy the varied programme of activities and say how supportive teachers are to them in their work. The school is successful in achieving its aims to enable pupils to develop into confident young people who are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

- 2.5 The division of the school into its various sections works well, with individual heads saying they enjoy appropriate autonomy within a well-integrated and supportive whole-school framework. Alongside other staff, they appreciate the clarity of purpose and open style of leadership in the school as a whole. Meetings are specific and well focused, with adequate time for discussion. Staff reported that they are much more involved in whole school planning than at the time of the last inspection; a recent whole staff training day gave opportunities for them to contribute to the new strategic plan.
- 2.6 Staff value the focus on in-service training. Within each section of the school, there are clear arrangements for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. Appraisal of the principal has been established. New staff say how helpful their induction programme was, both in managing the move to Amsterdam and in joining the school. The school carries out almost all the recommended checks on new staff though, until recently, references were not obtained on visiting staff when other background checks were made; more robust procedures are now in place.

2.(c) The quality of links with parents, carers and guardians

- 2.7 The confidential parents' questionnaire, carried out before the inspection, showed that parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school, about the education it provides and about the attitudes and values it inculcates in pupils. They also appreciate the speed of response to any questions. These views were supported by parents who talked to inspectors during the visit. In comments and conversation, parents spoke of a nurturing and caring environment, a strong community feeling, and an exciting and interesting education. A small minority of parents who completed the questionnaire felt that they would appreciate more regular feedback on their children's progress, but virtually all parents felt they were well informed. Parents receive necessary information about school policies through the school website, and also about their children's progress through informative reports and meetings.
- 2.8 Parents said how much they appreciate the level of day-to-day contact they enjoy with teachers and senior staff, as well as the open approach they experience at all levels. Both the parents' organisation and the works council value the current ethos in the school and the contribution they can make to the school community. Parents say that, as pupils progress through the school, they receive education which is appropriate to their changing needs whilst feeling part of the whole. Pupils benefit from the clear educational direction and supportive ethos which permeates the school.
- 2.9 Parents from all parts of the school said they appreciate the opportunities they have to come to informal school occasions, such as the weekly coffee mornings, or to help in class. They value the accessible school leadership. They enjoy the school-based weblog and the way it gives an up-to-date picture of school life. They appreciate being part of the school community and say they feel welcome in school. The parents' organisation works hard to promote links between parents, to raise money for the school and external charities, and to be a forum for discussion with the school.
- 2.10 The school has a clearly documented and appropriate procedure for handling any complaints from parents. The school keeps full records of all complaints received, though none have required reference to an independent panel; the sample of issues

reviewed by inspectors followed the documented procedure and were dealt with appropriately. Parents said it was easy to talk to class teachers and others about any concerns.

2.(d) Recommendations

2.11 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Ensure that references are sought for all staff before appointment.
2. Provide fuller biographical information on all members of the supervisory board for parents without delay.
3. Implement the school's plans for the supervisory board to receive training in school governance.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

This was a reduced inspection of governance, leadership and management aspects only. The inspectors conducted interviews with pupils, and held discussions with staff at all levels and with governors. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Ian Newton

Reporting Inspector

Mrs Sara Wiggins

Reporting Inspector