



International Baccalaureate®
Baccalauréat International
Bachillerato Internacional

Bilingual European School

10 YEARS OF ITALIAN EDUCATION WITH AN INTERNATIONAL TWIST

2010

Primary Years Programme offered since

415

Total number of students

Mr. Aaron Downey

IB Coordinator



A unique approach to education

In 2020, the Bilingual European School, located in Milan, Italy, celebrated a milestone achievement and celebrated its 10-year anniversary as an International Baccalaureate (IB) World School. The school has a unique offering for its students aged 6 – 10 years old having offered the Primary Years Programme (PYP) since 2010.

A local school with an international flavour, the school delivers its curriculum in Italian and English. Explaining the international aspirations of the school, Co-Director of School, Mr. John Nicholls says: “We balance our curriculum so that we place value on the local context in which we operate as much as on our international community. We are, at heart, an Italian school that follows an Italian curriculum, but we deliver the curriculum through the PYP to instil international-mindedness and IB thinking.”

Wanting to offer a high-quality education, not just in Italian, but with international dimensions, the school introduced the PYP to strengthen its educational offering and to enable its students to develop their critical thinking skills and international mindedness.

“We put a lot of planning into our curriculum. Each week teachers have six hours of planning time, which is split between English and Italian,

and then all together,” John says. “Our IB Coordinator Mr. Downey does a fantastic job of simplifying documents for teachers to help create links between the Italian curriculum and the IB so that both curricula can be taught successfully alongside one another.”



Each week students have seven hours of co-teaching time with an English-speaking teacher and an Italian-speaking teacher, switching between the two languages multiple times a minute; an approach that was found to be of benefit to students’ critical thinking skills. Reflecting on research findings, John says: “The University of Frankfurt conducted research on our approach to teaching and found that our students had advanced high level critical thinking skills in two languages. The research also found that our students have an intrinsic motivation to learn and reflect on their learning. Something we are incredibly proud of.”



PYP: An aspirational, quality, global education

The school has found that by offering the PYP the school cohort size has grown. The PYP has also assisted in the progression and development of its curriculum, its students' lifelong prospects, and the development of teaching skills for staff. John shares three benefits the PYP provides for his learning community:

- 1 It's aspirational – “The PYP combines academic rigour with the promotion of change. The IB has crafted the PYP framework to teach, and, at the same, put emphasis on the power education has to make the world a better place. The PYP encourages students to want to make a beneficial difference to the world and provides them with the skillset to strive to achieve their goals.”
- 2 It's global – “The beauty of the IB is that it's a global education community. All schools around the world face the same challenges, enjoy the same benefits and can connect with one another through conferences, teacher training and the PYP exhibition. The high-quality education taught in both languages has also created a strong sense of community within our school itself.”
- 3 It's quality assured education – “Through its years of development, the PYP has reached an incredibly high standard of education and the

proof of its quality is its adoption in schools globally. The programme has been refined and developed over the decades, and that is something that will continue as the IB reviews and updates the programme to suit the times. It is because of this constant review process that we know our students will always have the most up to date education they need.”

Despite the many benefits of the PYP for the school community, the school's biggest challenge was getting the parent community to understand the programme and the skills students gain from the programme. John explains: “With a focus on being an Italian school with an international twist, it can be challenging to explain to Italian parents the benefits of the PYP and how it can further their children's development long-term and prepare them for the next stage in their educational journey.”

John found that for parents with a traditional Italian education the PYP seems complicated. To combat this, the school works hard to outline to parents how the programme meets the required Italian educational targets and simplifies the programme to enable understanding of the benefits of the programme amongst the parent community. The school invites parents to workshops so they can see with their own eyes how their children are taught, which John says has been hugely beneficial. The school also has regular learning celebrations where students explain how and what they have been learning at school.



Creating exemplary students

Throughout its decade of being an IB World School, John says that the school has received positive feedback from students, parents and teachers: "Our students love coming to school and this is due to their love of what they are learning. We even have children ask to join lessons via Zoom when they are at home unwell [pre-pandemic]. The IB's units of inquiry undoubtedly help with engagement throughout the school community."

At the Bilingual European School, John asserts that many students have been provided with the skills to be confident to create and drive change. The school's SLT team often finds students approaching them and making suggestions on how to improve school life, which leads to making a difference to the school community. John recalls: "In our Year 3 class we were focusing on investigating plastic use. Our students took it upon themselves to look at the level of plastic used in our canteen and found plastic being used for our cups, plates etc. They approached the school board and developed a solution to reduce plastic consumption at the school which has since been adopted. Our plastic consumption across the school fell by 95% after the students' solution was adopted."

The school also had one outstanding student take part in an Italian nationwide domestic

abuse campaign. The skills the student developed through the PYP provided them with the aptitude and courage to reach out to the campaign organizers and local authorities so they could paint a bench red outside of the school to promote the campaign focusing on ending domestic violence. John says: "We are so proud that this student instigated and pushed for this action to take place. The local Mayor even came to the school to officially 'open' the bench."

John says that a highlight for the school each year is the PYP exhibition; a celebration for students in their final year of the PYP to present the findings of a student-led project. The exhibition aims to encourage students to put the skills of collaboration, inquiry, social action and presentation to the test and show their overall understanding of the outcomes of their project, encouraging critical thinking.

"I look forward to the PYP exhibition every year. It shows the joyfulness of learning and the sophistication of the IB teaching."

Continuing the IB legacy

Due to the success of implementing the PYP, the Bilingual European School has future aspirations to find a site for a high school in order to become an IB continuum school and also offer the Middle Years Programme (MYP) and Diploma Programme (DP).

The school also hopes to go one step further. John explains: "The ultimate achievement for our school would be for other schools across Italy to mirror our approach to teaching the Italian curriculum with a key focus on the development of international-mindedness and critical thinking in students aided by the curriculum being taught 50% in Italian and 50% in English."





The beauty of the IB is that it's a global education community. All schools around the world face the same challenges, enjoy the same benefits and can connect with one another through conferences, teacher training and the PYP exhibition. The high-quality education taught in both languages has also created a strong sense of community within our school itself.

Mr. John Nicholls
Co-Director of School

Find out more about the benefits of the IB:
www.ibo.org/benefits