



## Tohoku International School

### Elementary: A Philosophy of Teaching, Learning & Assessing

#### Elementary School Philosophy Statement

As an international community, we believe we learn best with and through one another. This includes teachers, students, parents and the wider community. Learning is viewed as both an individual and collective process, done best through hands-on, meaningful, and relevant inquiries into the world. Our carefully designed curriculum is holistic, with equal value given to language, mathematics, science, social studies, arts and physical and social & personal education (PSPE). Through integration and differentiation we meet the needs of a diverse classroom, providing opportunities for self-expression, reflection, and creative thought. Instruction is done primarily in English with a strong value placed on each student's mother tongue and its development. Along with academic skills, we believe strongly in helping students to embody the characteristics of the Learner Profile and Approaches To Learning (ATL), alongside our TIS 5 STARS.

#### Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Understanding how students learn most effectively is crucial. Assessing student learning throughout the entire learning process is of the utmost importance.

#### Curriculum Implementation and Rationale

- ❖ The TIS Elementary School Programme of Inquiry is constructed within the PYP framework. Six organising themes help frame the identified Units of Inquiry to ensure an engaging, relevant, challenging and significant learning experience is encountered, which is in line with IB philosophy.
- ❖ The TIS Elementary School incorporates learning objectives from different curriculum models (Singapore Math, ACARA English, Ontario PE / Arts, Japanese Gov. Course Guidelines, NGSS Science) for different subject areas into the PYP Scope and Sequence in order to best support our students' learning in our contexts. The following are the criteria for selecting and implementing a curriculum to develop TIS curricula:
  - 1) A curriculum is organised to facilitate students' conceptual understanding.
  - 2) A curriculum implementation supports TIS curricula to be consistent and balanced from K - 10.
  - 3) A curriculum has clear learning targets to support students to gain necessary subject specific knowledge and skills.

- 4) A curriculum has learning targets which can be achieved through learning in global and local contexts within and outside of the TIS Programme of Inquiry.
- ❖ It is understood that curriculum development is an ongoing process, that is continually evolving in a response to meet the ever changing needs of students in the context of an evolving global society, as well as our host country, Japan.
  - ❖ TIS strives to meet the needs of every individual student through differentiation. Smaller class sizes allow for this to be a reality. Teachers value the experiences of students and strive to incorporate opportunities to make connections in their mother tongue.
  - ❖ TIS accepts students at all grade levels, at all times of the school year, with varying levels of English.
  - ❖ English language support is given to those in need at either an Intensive, Intermediate or Monitored level.

## Assessment

Effective assessments are continuous and meaningful to students, teachers and families, giving clear information and evidence of student progress. Teacher facilitation of learning in a rich environment can maximize that progress. Celebration throughout the inquiry cycle helps foster student learning.

In line with IB philosophy, we concur that ‘assessment involves the gathering and analysis of information about student performance and is designed to inform practice’. Through identifying what students know, understand, can do, and feel at different stages in the learning process, we can support students as they make connections and develop their skills.

## Assessment Strategies

Below is a list of assessment strategies:

- ❖ Performance assessments
- ❖ Presentations
- ❖ Projects
- ❖ Interpretations
- ❖ Observations
- ❖ Process focused tasks
- ❖ Technological tools (iMovie; Google Drive; PowerPoint)
- ❖ Selected responses (multiple choice)
- ❖ Open-ended tasks
- ❖ Self and peer assessment
- ❖ Real-life practicality performance
- ❖ Reflections
- ❖ Responses

This list is by no means complete, but a sampling of strategies used throughout the Elementary School.

## Assessment Tools

The following are examples of assessment tools used at TIS:

- ❖ PYP Student Portfolios
- ❖ Tracking folders
  - o Student writing samples (narrative and persuasive)
  - o Dolch sight words
  - o Math assessments
  - o Self portraits
  - o Goal related self assessments
- ❖ Developmental Reading Assessment (K-6)
- ❖ International Schools Assessment (3-6)
- ❖ Rubrics
- ❖ Written and oral tasks
- ❖ Anecdotal records
- ❖ Pictures of learning in action

## Academic Honesty

Students are introduced to the concept of plagiarism. They are explicitly taught to give credit to the thoughts, ideas, examples, and images of others in both their digital and written work. Students will continue to build citation skills throughout their primary years in order to best prepare them for secondary school and future academics beyond TIS. During collaborative work, all students are expected to individually contribute to the thinking process. They should be communicators and share their own ideas, rather than only rely on others' perspectives. However, when they do share other students' ideas, they are expected to give their peers credit as well.

## All Staff Collaboration

- ❖ Elementary Department has three scheduled meetings:
  - Homeroom teacher meets with the PYP Coordinator and TA(s) every week.
  - Homeroom teachers and PYP Coordinator every other week.
  - Homeroom teachers, PYP Coordinator, and specialists meet once a month.
- ❖ The following list is an example of agenda items for these meetings:
  - Unit collaboration that helps to design and moderate assessments, analyse results and plan next steps.
  - Unit reflection that gives effective feedback and communicates learning progress of students.
  - Teachers reflect on evidence and data to improve their own practices and select appropriate tools and strategies for assessment.
  - Share about students' behavioural and emotional development.
  - Share evidence and data about students' learning needs and concerns.
  - Collaborate towards students' conflict resolution.
  - Confirmation of special dates and events.

## The Elementary Team's Beliefs on Assessment

Assessment provides evidence to inform learning and teaching. TIS' Elementary school's assessment aligns with the PYP's assessment philosophy, and it has four dimensions: monitoring, documenting measuring and reporting on learning:

- Monitoring of learning aims to check the progress of learning against learning goals and success criteria.
- Documenting of learning is the compilation of the evidence of learning.
- Measuring of learning aims to capture what a student has learned at a particular "point in time".
- Reporting on learning informs the leaning community and reflects on students' progress and achievement.

The Elementary School believes and acknowledges that:

- The learning process is equally important to the final product.
- Varied, differentiated and frequent assessments are critical in order to meet the diversified needs of our complex student population.
- Rich performance tasks steeped in practicality should be the norm, and not the exception.
- Assessments should challenge students' critical thinking, transdisciplinary skills and promote practical real life applications of content covered.
- Assessments must reflect the IB Philosophy whenever possible, as well as the IB Learner profile.
- Student progress is maximized through frequent and meaningful teacher feedback, self reflection and peer feedback. This regular reflection allows for maximum academic growth.
- Communication between teachers and family supports student learning. Examples of some opportunities when this may occur include:
  - Newsletters, Class Dojo, PT Conferences, 3-way Conferences, Student-led Conferences, Report Cards, Arts Night, The School Musical Production, Open Campus, Sports Day, Alma Grading portal, Google Classroom
- The more meaningful and supportive the teacher interaction with students, the higher the chances of success!
- EAL students are assessed against a different scale than those considered sufficiently proficient in English.

**References:**

- *Making the PYP Happen in the classroom* (2007, Revised edition published December 2009)
- *Enhanced PYP: From principles into practice* (2018)

**Review**

This document was reviewed in December 2020 / January 2021 by the Elementary Team.

This document is to be reviewed yearly in August, during our school development days, by the staff.