

Oeiras, 31 March 2023

Dear Miguel,

We would like to start by commending and expressing our gratitude to all teachers and staff members of the educational, counselling, and administrative services that every day give their best to provide quality education and a safe space to our children.

This letter is to raise your attention for key issues requiring urgent addressing and implementation at the management level. We write in a constructive spirit, with the intention of helping ISS improve the education service within the sharing spirit that presides our school. We are conscious that education is crucial to our children's wellbeing and future success. That is what motivates us parents to invest in ISS. Therefore, it is not only in the school's best interest but also in ours that ISS is able to improve certain aspects of its educational service, while responding to the quality standards that parents expect. It is also in our – and yours - best interest that ISS achieves its full potential in terms of being an internally acclaimed school, with an impeccable reputation, and commendable acceptance levels in renowned universities.

To achieve these objectives, we believe immediate action needs to be taken to ensure the following outcomes are implemented at the latest by the start of the next school year, very soon in September 2023:

Hiring a Head of School

- Many of the problems reported below are the result of a lack of observation, coordination and understanding of pedagogical needs of students and teachers. This outcome is not unexpected, considering that ISS still doesn't have a head of school acting as a principal, as a pedagogical director and IB programme coordinator. While some of these roles may at present be assigned to teachers or consultants, we do believe consolidating these important functions in one qualified staff member is the best way to achieve results in the short term.
- The foregoing is in line with Article 5.6 of the Rules for IB world schools.
- It is essential that the school is coordinated, and its educational service managed, by a person with international and academic experience, who is or has been a teacher, with pedagogical attributions and sufficient capacity and authority to ensure the management of the educational service.
- This person should be responsible for communicating with parents, teachers, and students. Communication by management team members should be exceptional, objectively justified and kept in strictly civil terms.

Improve student-teacher ratio

- Many of the undersigned parents chose ISS because of its excellent student-teacher ratio until last year, when classes had 12-13 children max. This year, with the exponential increase in the number of students, classes grew to 20-22 students.
- This is impacting the educational service and enhancing learning problems, given that not all students are at the same level or pace. Bigger classrooms are known for not helping with attention and enhancing indiscipline issues. This kind of effects is being reported by several teachers across MYP. These unintended effects will inevitably affect the grades and learning outcomes of our children.
- ISS should bring the student-teacher ratio back to 12-15 children per class at the start of the next school year. This is in line with the level of fees currently paid by parents.
- In doing so, it's important that ISS establishes appropriate compensation terms to retain its current talent/teachers, while being able to secure new quality teachers in a time when several international schools are opening in Portugal.

Increase the ratio of international teachers

- Part of the experience of an international school, especially an IB certified schools, is the diversity of nationalities, cultures, and life paths among teachers.
- ISS should conduct hiring processes with appropriate timelines, well in advance before the start of the school year, to ensure that international quality teachers are hired for next school year.

Enhance SEN team

- With the exponential growth of the number of students, the number of children requiring assistance from the special education needs service increased by 4 times.
- Currently, about 40 children receive assistance from 2 teachers (who also teach other classes) and one part time coordinator (as the coordinator's role includes coordination functions and not only counselling). This is unsustainable, unproductive, and failing to meet parents' expectations. Many of us enrolled our children at ISS because of the SEN service, which must be restored to effectively support all the children who need it.
- We ask that more staff members are hired for this team. Each staff member should not have to be responsible for overseeing and supporting more than 6 children/year.

Enhance counselling support team

- Given the exponential increase in the number of students and the fact that seemingly many students currently require assistance by the school therapist, who is often on back-to-back appointments, ISS should hire additional supporting staff.
- At the moment, a student counselling service, to provide strategic advice and guidance regarding future studies, does not exist. This service should be made available next year and appropriately staffed.

Enhance admin support to teachers

- Teachers are teachers. Yet, at ISS teachers are required to perform all sorts of administrative roles, including drafting and distributing newsletters, correspondence with parents, promoting events, taking care of registrations, organizing study visits, organizing extra cv activities, etc., etc., etc.
- As a result, often communication is left to the last minute or problems happen due to lack of coordination. We do not think this is the teachers' fault; actually, all the contrary. Teachers should be teaching. ISS should staff teachers properly, with sufficient staff members to ensure that administrative and communication tasks are performed seamlessly at all times.

Review the IB rules to ensure compliance with all duties set out in said rules

- While ISS' website and intranet continues to evolve, it would be useful to assess whether all the materials and terms & conditions set out in Article 5 et all. are being complied with, and whether other required mechanisms (such as the internal complaint and other redress processes) are in place. We stand ready to assist the school in identifying any gaps that may exist and/or in establishing any mechanisms that may be required.
- Sound internal processes are crucial to avoid complaints being vented on social media and other channels that can damage the school's reputation.

Prepare a strategic presentation at the start of next school year

- At the start of this school year, parents heard about building plans and businesses that are unrelated to school or to our children's education in the short term. While at the start of ISS' journey parents asked to be informed of plans regarding infrastructure, given the existing building at the time was not at adequate standards, in 2023 parents want to know what is being done in the present for their children's education, well-being and future, as well as what is being done or planned to support overwhelmed teachers, including how many teachers will be teaching in the next school year and information about their professional background.
- We kindly invite management to work closely with the future head of school to present a strategic plan on how ISS will get 10-20% of our students accepted in top universities, how will

ISS provide counselling to our children in shaping their educational paths, and other desired academic outcomes.

- We also expect basic problems such as absence of sports facilities and playgrounds, or insufficient number of classrooms, labs, and other teaching premises *vis a vis* the current number of students, to be addressed at the latest by then.

We hope you can appreciate our communication in a constructive manner. We would like to request a meeting during the first week of term 3 to discuss the points raised above in detail. We also expect to receive a written answer to this letter, with a plan and a timeline to address the foregoing key issues, including representations about the teachers that are currently engaged for this and next school year.

CC: Sharing Foundation founders and curators

This letter represents the views of 171 signatory parents of children currently in MYP, PYP and DP

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