You will find Franconian International School in Erlangen, Germany. It was established in 1998, has an enrolment of 650 students from Early Years to Grade 12, and continues to expand. There is a diverse student and teacher body with over 50 different student nationalities attending the school. Twenty-eight percent of the total student population is German and there are also significant numbers of Indian students. The elementary school currently makes up two thirds of the school with approximately 60 staff including specialists.

Curriculum Director, Carolyn Gedling; Elementary School Principal, Patricia Appel; and Elementary School Curriculum Co-ordinator, Darryn Thomas talk about the International Primary Curriculum at Franconian International School and of achieving IPC Accreditation with Mastering Level in three of the nine accreditation criteria:

Franconian International School opened with a self-made curriculum in the elementary school. Over the years we felt we needed to have something more structured and more in line with what other international schools were doing. We considered the IB’s Primary Years Programme (PYP) and the International Primary Curriculum (IPC). We had discussions and meetings to decide which curriculum was the best fit for our students, the teachers and for the school as a whole, and decided to go with the IPC. We introduced the IPC during the 2006-2007 academic year.

The IPC as a curriculum choice

There are several reason why we chose the IPC and why we still believe the IPC is right for our school. IPC gives us a rigorous and international curriculum with more scaffolding; more flesh on the skeleton. The International Baccalaureate’s PYP doesn’t always give this. There’s plenty of structure in the IPC without being restrictive. It gives us a common core, but it’s flexible and gives us freedom to adopt - or not adopt - certain components, meaning we’ve been able to make the IPC our own. It allows us to differentiate for our children and gives us the opportunity to make sure the curriculum is accessible to all, including our non-English-speaking students. It allows us to extend learning when we need to.

The IPC is great for new and experienced teachers. It provides the ideas and framework and, for experienced teachers it allows them to consider how they can modify, extend and meet their needs. There’s something for everyone.
For children, there is joy attached to learning. There’s excitement all the time; when there’s a new IPC unit, during entrance and exit points, when working towards mastering a skill and when children are working collaboratively to achieve something. Learning becomes such a shared experience with the IPC. It’s been a shared experience for the staff too, particularly as we’ve united the school during change and as we’ve worked toward accreditation.

Uniting the school during change

Last year, our new principal wanted us to find something to launch each new school year and unite all grade levels. We decided to use the IPC Brainwave unit for this, implementing it as a whole school initiative. It was an inspiring way to bring together grade level teams. Everyone was starting something from scratch; on a level playing field. This brought out creativity in everybody, from the new teachers, to those who’d been at the school for a period of time.

We launched the Brainwave unit at a time of expansion. All but one of our grade levels were going from two classes to three. This was changing the dynamic as we were going from two well established teachers within a grade, to a third teacher coming in from either a different grade level, or who was completely new to the school. This created a different energy, and opened up questions that might not have otherwise been asked, such as why we were doing the unit, how we were teaching it, and what we were expecting the children to learn. It helped to bring the new third teacher into a collaborative group.

For the students, the Brainwave unit was very successful. It helped them to understand more about how they learn. Many of the teachers found they were frequently referring back to it throughout the year when helping students with their learning. We’re now planning the Brainwave unit for the beginning of each school year.

Invigorating our teaching

Over the years we have refined our IPC unit selection and this year we’ve started a two-year rolling cycle, keeping some of the old favourites and adding new themes that will keep the teaching and learning fresh and more exciting. We think this will also help to develop more cohesion across the mileposts.

Our initial discussions around which new IPC units to choose centred around assessment for learning, and which targets would be the focus for each individual unit. We used the Route Planner on the IPC Members website to give us an idea of the subject balance of each unit and to identify where there were gaps. Once we’d selected the units, we talked about what we wanted the students to know and how we could fill the gaps. We don’t do every task that the IPC suggests within a unit; we select what we think the students need to do to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding. The flexibility that we get with the IPC is very good.

Working towards IPC accreditation

Taking on IPC accreditation helped us in several ways. It gave us the opportunity to ensure our learning was rigorous. It encouraged us all to look at the IPC as a whole curriculum, rather than looking at it as separate components. It focused us on assessment for learning. It also made us realise how important the IPC Personal Goals are. And it helped us to refine the learning experiences. The benefit of accreditation was
These discussions are helping people to see the bigger picture of what we’re now aiming towards as a school.

There’s certainly a different drive within us now since accreditation. It’s rejuvenated and energised the staff. In hindsight, we wish we had started accreditation sooner as it’s had a very positive effect on us. For our new principal coming in, accreditation gave Patricia the springboard to further develop an elementary community focused on learning.

Advice for IPC member schools considering IPC accreditation

Based on our experiences working towards IPC accreditation, we would offer this advice to other IPC member schools:

- Do it! Accreditation is worth doing because it helps your school to reflect and to set goals in a very focused way.
- Accreditation will inform your whole school strategic plan – it’s valuable having external recognition and impetus.
- The earlier you can start working towards your accreditation, the better. Don’t put it off!
- Start collecting your evidence way before you think of organising a preliminary visit. You need to gather a lot of evidence to get a big picture of what you’re currently doing.
- During our pre-accreditation visit, we could see we weren’t being judged. We didn’t feel intimated, instead we felt supported, it was a very valuable experience. It started us off on our work towards accreditation in the right way, and was fabulous help.
- Aim to have an IPC expert come in to your school two years before you do accreditation to give you pointers and confidence to move in the right direction.
- Visit other schools - you’ve got to see the IPC in action.
- The accreditation rubrics are very helpful, but you’ve got to make them work for your context.

A focus on assessment learning

Accreditation focused us on Assessment for Learning. It has helped us to think in a different way: not just ensuring coverage but to make sure we are achieving depth of learning.

The children have always enjoyed IPC, but we had often wondered how best to measure their learning. Using the IPC’s Assessment for Learning has given us the clarity that we needed to know what learning is happening.
For example, some of the children were working on argumentative writing recently, so the teacher talked about the IPC personal goal of morality within this context, and the children were able to identify morality within the writing. For the younger children, we have created characters to represent each of the personal goals which has helped them to start to recognise the different values. We are trying to make sure everyone really understands them.

It's hard to ignore the personal goals in school now; they are so prominent. They're part of teacher's planning, and part of the consistency across the grade levels. Go into any classroom and you're always hearing them being referenced by the children and the teachers.

There is an inherent kindness and caring nature within our school. It might be to do with the ethos of the school, but it's also as a result of the IPC personal goals. What the personal goals has definitely given us is a common language and opportunities to develop behaviours we value.

We looked long and hard at our approach to international mindedness because of accreditation. Our school has its own definition of international mindedness but the relationship between the IPC and international mindedness is symbiotic; it naturally works well together. Our children live and breathe international mindedness. International mindedness is reflected in how our children act every day. The IPC enhances this by always encouraging them to collaborate with their peers, many of who are from different backgrounds, and to look at their learning from different perspectives and different contexts. We have now made international mindedness our ninth IPC Personal Goals.

Accreditation also made us realise how important the IPC personal goals are. When we had our first pre-accreditation visit, we were asked to draw three circles showing how the international, subject, and personal goals were each represented within our school. We drew a nice big circle for subject goals, a smaller one for international, and an almost minuscule one for personal goals. As a result, we realised how little we were emphasising the personal goals at that time and it forced us to give them some focus.

This prompted many discussions about how the personal goals could be represented in the classes, how we could keep them visible, how we were going to teach them and how we were going to embed them, how we would make sure they were consistent between grade levels, and how we were going to show progression.

Now, the personal goals are part of everything that we do. Children are using words that they never used a couple of years ago and they understand what these words mean.
Taking on IPC accreditation helped us in several ways. It gave us the opportunity to ensure our learning was rigorous. It encouraged us all to look at the IPC as a whole curriculum, rather than looking at it as separate components.

Parents always have some idea about what’s going on and we try to include them as much as possible with their children’s learning. We’re always trying to keep them involved in some way or other. The IPC creates lots of great opportunities for them to be involved. Parents appreciate this. Most of them want to be a part of their child’s learning and wish their learning had been as good when they were kids!
The International Primary Curriculum's growing learning community includes schools in more than 90 countries around the world. Learning with the IPC means that children focus on a combination of academic, personal and international learning that is both exciting and challenging.

The aim of the IPC is to help every child enjoy learning a wide range of subjects and to develop an enquiring mind, the personal attributes that will help throughout teenage and adult years, and to develop a sense of their own nationality and culture, whilst developing a profound respect for the nationalities and cultures of others. Through the IPC approach to learning, children develop the knowledge, skills and understanding necessary to confidently face the world of tomorrow.

The IPC was introduced in 2000 and its continued development today ensures that children are learning a current and highly relevant curriculum based on the very latest research and understanding of how children learn.

The IPC is a part of Fieldwork Education which, since 1984, has been helping schools all around the world to develop children’s learning.
For more information about the International Primary Curriculum visit www.greatlearning.com/ipc

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