St. Paul's School is a leading British school in Sao Paulo, Brazil with 1,100 students aged 3 - 18. The school follows the National Curriculum of England through Key Stage 4, working towards IGCSEs and then students study the IB Diploma Programme.

Eighty percent of the school's intake is local Brazilian children and twenty percent expatriates. The teaching staff of approximately 170 teachers and assistants includes Brazilian trained nationals, UK trained expatriates, plus a small percentage of other qualified expatriate teachers from the European Union and America. Around 100 teachers, who are mostly Brazilian trained, work with the IPC.

As a British school, the children receive full English immersion from age 3. Formal Portuguese learning begins in Year 2. The school eventually becomes a bilingual school but 85% of the curriculum coverage is British, 15% Portuguese. St. Paul's introduced the International Primary Curriculum in 2011. Siobhain Allum is Head of the Prep School. Here Siobhan talks about the way the IPC has evolved during that time and shares advice for other schools considering a curriculum change:

“Introducing the IPC

We started using the IPC in 2011. At that time the Prep school (for children aged 6 - 11) was subject based, most teachers had never been class teachers, and most were not trained using the UK curriculum (they had completed the Brazilian education degree which is very limited in its practical elements and focuses much more on the theoretical aspects of education). As a British school, delivering the UK curriculum was really important to us.

As a British school, the IPC has helped us achieve the requirements of the National Curriculum of England in a way that is relevant for our international context.”
We said to the teachers: don’t worry about not knowing everything, just do what the unit tells you to do; it’s like painting by numbers! This ensured that those teachers who weren’t as confident or experienced, could follow not only the IPC framework but also the detailed lesson structure. It enabled them to fake it until they could make it which gave our teachers reassurance that they were achieving the basic principles of the IPC from day one.

It was amazing the difference we saw in the teachers as they progressed with the IPC. As they followed the IPC units, the teachers became more familiar with the methodology of how to deliver the learning, focused more on skills-based learning rather than simply focusing on content, and gradually developed their understanding of the IPC. Alongside this, we supported them closely and provided them with the training they needed.

The teachers are now at the stage where everything makes sense to them; they really understand why they do everything they do, they’ve become competent in their delivery of good learning because of the IPC, and much better teachers as a result.

As we moved the teachers to being class teachers (teaching subjects they did not necessarily have great familiarity with), I felt we needed something that would help them to feel supported and confident. We saw the IPC as a means to do this and to enable us to continue to deliver the UK curriculum. I attended an IPC conference in London in 2010 and was able to hear first-hand from schools that were using it. As a result, I got very enthused about its possibilities for St. Paul’s.

So we trialed one IPC unit in Year 4 (Footprints from the Past). The feedback in terms of pupil engagement and enjoyment was huge, so too was the reaction from parents, and we felt confident enough to try the IPC full scale.

We started implementing the IPC fully in the 2011-2012 academic year, so adjusted teaching from subject to whole class (with class teachers teaching literacy, numeracy, topic and PSHE). We arranged a week’s training with IPC for all the teachers in Prep and Pre-Prep (ages 3-6) for the start of our academic year.

We appointed an IPC coordinator to help oversee its implementation who received specific training from IPC for this role. We also appointed Milepost coordinators to look at how the IPC units would work between the year groups.

Learning to teach, the IPC way

Because of the excellent pedagogical base that the IPC is constructed on, which incorporates brain-based learning; pupil engagement, knowledge harvests, and learning styles, flow, assessment for learning and more, we realised that it would be ideal for our teachers. It meant they would be following excellent strategies and including some of the best components for successful learning.

The excitement of the IPC themes and entry points, combined with its rigorous structure meant we were immediately able to focus on elements of great learning in engaging ways.
Learning with the IPC

The impact of learning with the IPC on our children has been huge! The IPC helped us to make our learning much more child-centered and allowed us to shift the onus for learning onto the students. The children now have a huge part to play in their learning; what we teach is adjusted according to what they know and want to know (this is thanks to the Knowledge Harvests which take place at the beginning of every IPC unit). The open-ended nature of the research and assessment possibilities mean that extension is also wide open; the children can go as far as they like with their learning!

The IPC is preparing our students very well for their future studies. It helps them to develop such skills as presenting, working in groups, being an independent learner, researching and recording, viewing their learning from a global context, and creative thinking; all essential learning skills for the IB Diploma.

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Five years on with the IPC

Now that we’ve been using the IPC for five years, it’s hard to remember just how much has changed in the way we plan and deliver lessons. During that time we have followed the IPC manual and the units explicitly, and then gradually deconstructed them; adapting units, identifying gaps and responding to them, introducing our own approach to assessment for learning, and making the IPC right for our school. What hasn’t changed is that the IPC has continued to help all our teachers to see what great teaching is all about.

“I think we have used the IPC in the way we understood it should be used; as a tool and resource to help us push the children’s learning in exciting directions. We have changed, adapted and modified many things along the way to make it relevant for our school, but I absolutely believe that the IPC was fundamental to our success. The fact that we still use it, but use it so differently nowadays, is a testament to its ultimate success.”

IPC in the Early Years

The IPC Early Years’ focus on four strands (communicating, exploring, healthy living and independence and interdependence) has helped us bring different objectives, assessments, modes of teaching and strategies together. It has helped us think about making learning more meaningful and contextualized, by linking all the different areas of Early Years development to the IPC unit.

The Early Years teachers choose units that will be meaningful for the children and that give them great ideas for how to support learning with the children’s developmental objectives in mind. The Entry Point (to launch a new unit) and Knowledge Harvest then help teachers to find out what interests the children have in the theme. From there, teachers plan meaningful learning that connects to the children’s own lives. Different classes end up carrying out different learning activities that make sense for those specific children, but due to our very rigorous formative assessment through the use of rubrics, the teachers make sure that all development milestones are addressed.

Using the IPC has had an important difference on the children during the Early Years. Learning is now engaging, purposeful, interesting and meaningful, and the most important thing at this early age is that the children love learning. So as they move through school, they bring with them that love of learning, a curiosity to know more, and a desire to be challenged.

Internationally-minded

The IPC focus on international mindedness has been significant and really important for our school. Given that our children are a largely Brazilian cohort, the IPC’s consistent and implicit focus on international learning has helped these children to think much more about the world outside Brazil. Equally, it has also been important for the more transient expatriate community and, as a result, means that all cultures are valued. This component is considered and planned for in our IPC units and has certainly helped our pupils to have a much more global perspective.
This September, hosted the first ever South American IPC conference! This brought closer ties to other IPC member schools in the region.

IPC membership has also been beneficial because of the professional development and support we have been able to receive. This was crucial in our initial stages of implementation and I would always advise any school that is moving ahead with IPC to invest in expert training and support.

We no longer have an IPC coordinator as we have really evolved in the way we use the IPC, but it was essential at the start, and instrumental in our success.

**Worth the investment?**

IPC is absolutely great value for money! The initial outlay for the curriculum and the training for all staff is significant, but it’s a one-off cost and having access to the curriculum structure, route plans and the online community have all been really useful.

The yearly subscription fee for IPC membership is not significant and, although we use all of the resources much less than we did (as we’ve developed the IPC to suit our school), the updated units are very helpful as starting points for our planning as well.

**Integrating IPC throughout all learning**

IPC learning takes place mostly in English although our Portuguese department tries, where possible, to connect to the IPC themes being studied. We increasingly do this through shared planning sessions when the Portuguese specialists sit with the year groups as they’re brainstorming a unit so that they’re clear on the objectives and can see where links can be made.

Literacy and numeracy are closely linked to the IPC already and our plan next year is for full integration of all subjects within the thematic-based learning.

**The benefit of IPC membership**

Being able to connect with other IPC member schools is beneficial. In particular, we have had various links with the British School in Rio. Before they decided to adopt the IPC, we invited them to bring a large group of teachers to see the IPC in action. We also sent some of our teachers there at the start of their implementation to share our best practice.

Advice for other schools

- Great teachers instinctively use many of the strategies within the IPC, but to ensure consistency amongst your teaching staff, the IPC is hugely valuable. It will give your teachers as much or as little support as they need.

- I recommend trialing a unit with one year group to see what the potential challenges and opportunities are. This will give you teacher, pupil and parental feedback and also set you up for success in your full implementation.

- All staff should be properly trained so they feel fully confident in their use of the IPC.

- The IPC coordinator role is crucial, especially in the early stages of implementation, and especially if your staff cohort is fairly changeable. Invest in specialist training so your coordinator can support staff in the appropriate way.

- If, like us, you are committed to being a British curriculum school but want an updated and pedagogically sound approach to children’s learning, then the IPC is a brilliant starting point.
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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