

Welcome to the inaugural bimonthly newsletter from the Primary Leadership Team at Ras Al Khaimah Academy – PYP section. Our hope is this newsletter can be informative about issues impacting the primary section of the academy.

Introductions

We have an amazing leadership team in the primary section of RAKA with a wealth of experience.

Steven Thompson - Head of Primary

Qualifications:

- Diploma in Teaching Primary
- Bachelor of Education
- Graduate Diploma in Arts - Leaderships Studies
- Master of Education in Education and Leadership Administration (*Summa Cum Laude*)

Additional Responsibilities:

- **International Baccalaureate (IB)** - Workshop leader, Consultant, School Visitor, Team Leader, Online Facilitator, Program Field Representative
- **Council of International Schools** - team member, Team Chair

Recent Leadership Positions:

- Head of Primary - Raha International School - Abu Dhabi, UAE
- Head of Junior School - St. Dominic's International School - Lisbon, Portugal
- Head of School - Sekolah Pelita Harapan - Bogor, Indonesia



Tania Mansfield - Deputy Head of Primary

Qualifications:

- BSc in Science and Phys Ed.
- Post Graduate Diploma in Teaching
- MBA - Marketing
- Master of Education in Educational Leadership and Administration



Additional Responsibilities:

- **International Baccalaureate (IB)** - Workshop leader, Consultant, School Visitor, Team Leader, Online Facilitator

Recent Leadership Positions:

- PYP Coordinator and Deputy Head of School - Western International School of Shanghai

Morven Bulloch - Deputy Head of Primary

Qualifications:

- BEd Honours Primary Education
- Post-graduate Diploma in School Leadership and Management (Scottish Qualification for Headship)

Additional Responsibilities:

- Aberdeenshire Council - Language Development Trainer and Workshop Leader
- Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) - Teacher Trainer (Methodology) for Eritrean Ministry of Education.

Recent Leadership Positions:

- Deputy Head Teacher, Markethill Primary School (Scotland)
- Principal Teacher, Strathblane Primary School (Scotland)



Rachel Poulton - Deputy Head of Primary

Qualifications:

- *Bachelor of Education (B Ed Hons)*

Recent Positions:

- Phase leader Y1-3 RAK Academy
- Yr 3 Year Leader RAK Academy
- Yr5 Class teacher RAK Academy
- Head of Middle School, Hill House School, UK
- Primary Teacher in UK for 19 years



Valerie Aimakhu - PYP Coordinator

Qualifications:

- BSc in Psychology- Educational Psychology
- Post Graduate Diploma - Early Childhood Development and Foundation Phase
- Master of Education in Curriculum Development and Evaluation

Recent Leadership Positions:



- Yr 1 Year Leader RAK Academy
- PYP Coordinator - Ibadan International School Nigeria

Recent Positions:

- Yr 2 Class teacher RAK Academy
- IB PYP Educator for 12 years

We need change.

Our team is determined to make major positive changes to the quality of teaching and learning in the academy.

While the leadership team has a definite plan to ensure that the PYP section of RAKA will become the leading International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme school in the region there are also some major changes we need to change in the culture of the school too if we are going to reach our goal.

Arriving at school

There are two issues we need address.

Preparation time.

The first issue, prior to the National Anthem at 7.50am, we need our teachers to be planning and preparing in their teams for the day ahead. To ensure their teaching and learning experiences are as high quality and as effective as possible, this time before school needs to be reserved for teachers and their teams.

If parents need to speak to a teacher before the National Anthem, we ask that they make an appointment. If there is an urgent issue to discuss, we ask that parents wait until the National Anthem has been completed when it is then time for the students to enter the class (*currently we are playing the National Anthem in the classroom until September 27*) We do ask that such interruptions occur infrequently as 8.00am is teaching and learning time; generally, a note or email should suffice.

Arriving on time

All students must arrive on time. The settling in time following the National Anthem is a critical part of your child’s day. Students that arrive late miss vital parts of the lesson and more importantly they disturb the learning of the other students who are distracted by the late arriving student entering the class. Arriving late as a practice this is not acceptable. We cannot continue to have students consistently arriving late. We have now begun recording late arrivers and have introduced a system of alerts for late arrivals; there will be consequences for students that consistently arrive late. From the 27th of September onwards students will not be permitted to enter the classroom unless they have filled out a late pass.



Leaving school

Again there are two main issues that require a change in the culture of the school.

Leaving school early

Students leaving early has an impact on both the student and the rest of the class. The student leaving misses out on vital information or is unable to complete the set task. Secondly, when they leave the whole class is disturbed as the teacher has to stop what they are doing and then make arrangements for the student to leave. This is not fair on the student leaving and is definitely unfair for the remaining students. Leaving school early as a practice is also unacceptable and cannot continue.

Waiting outside the classroom.

We have designated areas where the children can be collected. We have arranged this to ensure the traffic in the corridors is limited. However, at present we have parents waiting outside the classrooms until dismissal time and what is even more disappointing is that some parents are taking their child prior to the child's arrival at the dismissal area. This poses two problems, firstly the teacher is trying to deal with a whole class lining them up and taking them to a location, while doing this parents are taking their children. Collecting children, in years 1 - 6 is another practice that cannot continue. Parents need to wait in the designated areas to collect their children, this is to ensure children are collected safely, that the teacher is able to focus on who is leaving (*a major health and safety issue*) and it provides order to our dismissal. The second issue relates to parents waiting outside the classroom. When a child sees their parent outside the classroom they will be distracted and again the focus on learning is impacted. Parents and caregivers, from September 27th onwards, will not be permitted to wait outside the classroom to collect their children.

Conclusion

We want to improve the quality of education for your children. Please support us in this endeavor – if these above issues continue it will significantly impact any of the changes we make within the school. I am absolutely positive, as parents, your first priority is to ensure quality education for your child – help us to help you.

Carpark.

We have now asked our staff not to park at the front of the carpark near the school. These areas have been designated as Parent Parking Only. By freeing up these additional places we hope that the number of spaces available for parents will increase. We are continuing to monitor the situation to ensure we can effectively manage the traffic flow.

Presentation.

Last Tuesday

On Tuesday evening we presented, “A Way Forward.” ([Click here](#) for the link) This presentation focused on introducing the leadership team and also sharing some of the plans we have embedded within our strategic plan. As we mentioned in the Welcome Letter, the leadership went away for a one-day retreat. We had, prior to the retreat, read our last IB report, the Council of International School's self study and the staff survey conducted at the end of last year. We used this information along with our own impressions and knowledge of the school to put together a three-year comprehensive strategic plan to align the Primary section of RAKA with best practice. As a team, we are extremely excited about our plans and we are sure you will be too.

Next Week

Starting next week, homeroom teachers will be present to parents their plans for the year as part of our Parents as Partners sessions. These meeting are vital to ensure good home school communication and we strongly encourage parents to attend.

| Date | Year Level | Location | Time |
|------------------------|------------|------------------------|---------------|
| Sunday September 13 | 6 | Meeting Room | 6pm until 7pm |
| Sunday September 13 | 5 | Music Room - 1st Floor | 6pm until 7pm |
| Monday September 14 | 4 | Meeting Room | 6pm until 7pm |
| Monday September 14 | 3 | Music Room - 1st Floor | 6pm until 7pm |
| Tuesday September 15 | 2 | Meeting Room | 6pm until 7pm |
| Wednesday September 16 | 1 | Meeting Room | 6pm until 7pm |

N.B. Unfortunately, we will not have facilities to supervise children during the meetings.

Class placement

For the academic year 2016/17 we will have a new procedure in place regarding class placements. Our teachers will conduct a sociogram within the year level. Basically this means that the students will indicate the students within the year level they consider to be friends. We will ask parents for input if there is any particular issue that we need to be aware of when making a decision (*this does not mean you choose the teacher but rather share information we need to know when making a decision*). The teachers will then use this information to ensure that, in placing a child the child has at least two friends in the class. Once this is complete will also look at the mix of the class, advice from the Learning Support Team and take into account the way the students interact with each other. Using this information, the teachers will then place the students into classes taking into account what they feel is the best choice for each child. Finally, the leadership team will review the placements and then finalize the classes. Once complete, we will then share class placements. Basically this will mean we move away from the current system - this means that members of the school community including staff with children will no longer be able to choose their teacher.

Attitude and Progress Alerts

We know, as parents you are always interested in how your child is progressing in school. It is important that you are kept informed during their journey through the primary years. If the teacher has any concerns regarding either the progress or the attitude/behaviour of your child you will receive a call and an attitude/progress alert. Any subsequent alerts will not

necessarily involve a call. These Alerts provides an opportunity for us all to work together to address any issues that your child is facing.

Changes

Have you seen the library recently ? We have begun a major renovation of the library along with a change in the way the library is timetabled and utilized. We have also changed the way that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is utilized within the academy. ICT in the PYP is not a subject but a tool to support learning; this philosophy is now reflected in the way we use the ICT labs. We have also made changes to timetables, staffing, scope and sequence, collaboration, meeting times to name but a few.

We are determined to be true to our vision.

Handbooks, Timetables etc.

As we have previously mentioned, we are a new leadership team. We want to make sure that everything is of a standard that reflects the change we want in place. Therefore, we ask for your patience as we work our way through updating and releasing information pertinent to the day to day running of the school.

Developing a welcoming culture

As the Head of Primary, I have visited the majority of the classes (*not all because I have been meeting parents about class placements* :(). With each class I have spoken about the importance of acknowledging each other. When I can I meet everyone who enters the front entrance, a good morning and a hello makes one feel welcome. Likewise, when I am walking around the school I also think it is important that when walking pass someone we acknowledge them regardless if they are a student, parent, staff member, cleaner or nanny. If you see me please say hello – a welcoming school environment sets the right tone for everyone to feel they are part of a great community. – **Steven Thompson**

Article

Each edition of this newsletter we will include an article either about the programme, about education or about parenting. We hope this is helpful to all families as we begin our journey together.

Now about this article, the article examines the role of PYP students within the programme and we are positive you will be surprised with what student can complete independently. As part of the change we are confident that you will begin to see the significant differences between the British Curriculum and the PYP. The philosophy of and the pedagogy of the IB is based on research and best practice and is, as quoted in the following article, “*the educational gold-standard around the world.*” (Source: http://www.tieonline.com/view_article.cfm?ArticleID=89)

Please read.....

PYP students take the lead

by IB Educator on 28 April 2015 in *Approaches to teaching and learning*



The IB Primary Years Programme encourages students to identify and choose the areas of learning they wish to explore. IB World magazine speaks to three PYP teachers about how they support their students in directing their own learning.

“When students feel they have a voice and the freedom to make supported choices in their learning, they will be engaged. It is impossible for them not to be,” says PYP Coordinator Donnah Ciempka from Coatesville Primary School in Australia.

By its nature, the PYP fosters an inquiring mind and empowers students to become agents of their own learning. To aid this, teachers should create, support and encourage a climate for student ownership, believes Ciempka.

Setting goals

The PYP defines student ownership as: “Engaging students as active partners in their own learning, which gives them the skills and the space to make choices, show leadership and take action. Enabling student agency creates autonomous and self-organized learners.

Students recognize that it is possible to make a difference in their own lives and society and they feel empowered to make choices that may lead to action. As their independence grows, students work with their peers and teachers to initiate and lead their own learning.”

Student ownership is recognized in many different ways, from students selecting which books to read, to choosing what to investigate, or how they wish to present their understandings. Where and how students work – whether it be in a quiet setting, individually, in pairs, with a teacher, indoors or outdoors – are also key ways students can have input.

Starting with an end in mind helps to guide the process, says Ciempka: “We encourage our students to plan their learning. Once our students decide on what they want to focus on, we then support them to work towards achieving that goal.

I find that summative tasks for units of inquiry are great ways to explore ownership. Solving problems and answering questions demonstrates how students are taking ownership of their learning and ideas.”

And, with any goal-setting process, students need to identify what will be used as a measure of their success to keep them motivated. Sue Riley, PYP Coordinator from Murrumbena Primary School in Australia, says: “We use a variety of pre- and post-assessments such as self, peer and teacher assessment, which allow students to evaluate their success or

identify how to reach them. Students are empowered to see their strengths and their areas of improvement rather than relying on the teacher to identify them.”

Teacher inquiry

Anne van Dam, Assistant Principal at International School of Zug and Luzern in Switzerland, and her team have investigated Dr Helen Hedges’ idea that the student is a theory builder. This has helped van Dam create a team where teacher-student collaboration is valued. Dr Hedges is the Head of School for the School of Curriculum and Pedagogy in the Faculty of Education at the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

Van Dam says, “Dr Hedges has looked at how researching students’ interests, inquiries and working theories is fundamental to finding out how students learn. We have investigated this idea and, as a result, we have created a discourse where teachers actively listen to children’s theories and then plan accordingly.”

The PYP encourages teachers to continue inquiring into the effectiveness of their teaching practice, reflect on its impact on student learning and remain open to new ideas: “Everyone in the PYP community is a learner with a commitment to lifelong learning. Teachers understand the links between their learning and teaching and the impact these have on student outcomes.”

Although younger students are more eager to learn many new things, Riley finds that they can be unsure of their own capabilities, and encourages students to lead their learning in small ways, initially. “Teachers will identify the focus for a class but, when we plan units of inquiry, we try to consider the interests of the students,” she says.

“We will ask questions about the main idea and lines of inquiry to find out what they already know and what they’re interested in learning more about. This may lead to interest-based groups as a way of inquiring further, or it may lead to action-based groups as students want to pursue a matter that is important to them.”

Allowing students’ questions to guide their learning sparks the interests of other students, and also ignites creativity.

“There is a link between ownership and creativity,” says van Dam. “When you have ownership over learning, students are more likely to think about all the possible solutions, and this helps develop creativity.”

Students in the driving seat

Co-constructed learning offers the perfect opportunity for students to reflect on their learning, and demonstrate their understanding, which establishes an inquiring mindset and puts students in the driving seat for their future, believes Ciempka.

Teachers have seen students develop their thinking and communication skills as a result of student ownership, as well as forming many lifelong skills and dispositions, such as perseverance, resilience and self-reflection. And, as they have been involved in the entire process, Riley has seen her students become more confident in talking about what they have learned.

Van Dam adds, "With ownership comes the necessity to collaborate, express ideas and negotiate. Students learn to listen to others, which is equally important. It is all the skills necessary for the 21st century."

Students are more excited about learning as it is a personal experience that they have control over. "Ownership is a powerful thing to experience," says van Dam. "It is coming to know yourself and discovering what interests and excites you."

Lifelong learners

To embed a philosophy of student ownership, authentically, takes time. For student ownership to be a success, students should set their own goals and plan their learning, with support from the teacher.

"We want our students to be active participants in their learning. We want them to be problem solvers and keep working at something until they get the answer," adds Ciempka.

"Student ownership is the key to creating lifelong learners but, more importantly, it is the key to creating people who not only want to take action but have the mindset, skills and confidence to do so."

Source: <http://blogs.ibo.org/sharingpyp/2015/04/28/pyp-students-take-the-lead/>

And finally.

As leaders we also want to get to know you so please always feel free to stop and say hello. In the coming weeks we will be sharing with you more, both as year levels and also Parents As Partner workshops to help you better understand our programme.

We know that sometimes, there is so much jargon associated with the PYP. Please [click here](#) for a basic guide to the PYP.

Have a great week.

The Primary Leadership Team.