



97% The IB Diploma or Certificate pass rate for students with a diagnosed learning disability.

Included, challenged, successful

For the past decade, the International School of Brussels (ISB) has been including students with a wide range of learning differences in all aspects of school life, a practice driven by our simple mission: Everyone Included, Everyone Challenged, Everyone Successful.

At ISB we define inclusion as: successfully serving a managed number of students representing the full range of learning differences: mild, moderate and intensive needs, and the exceptionally able.

That 'managed number' is set at a ceiling of 15 per cent of the student population with mild to moderate needs, and 1 per cent with intensive needs. These numbers represent, approximately, the percentages found in any mainstream population. We believe we should reflect society with all its diversity, rather than create exclusive bubbles inhabited by academic high performers. We would fail to meet our mission if we let one

of the elements dominate at the expense of the others.

Put simply, the mildest levels of need are met predominantly by flexible in-class and pull-out support, the moderate levels predominantly by flexible variations on the theme of co-teaching and the intensive levels by flexible use of self-contained classes embedded in the daily culture of our school divisions.

We have added a range of additional support services, such as Occupational Therapy and Speech and Language Therapy, which are often supplied by external partners. Little is left to chance, although we are constantly learning, frequently from well-intentioned errors.

We have overcome every obstacle through flexibility, imagination and determination and finding the will was the key. We had to move from, 'we cannot and should not serve these

students' to 'we should and we can'. We came to understand that 'ready, fire, aim' was a key strategy – get going and see what we could achieve, then fine-tune.

People often use statistics the way a drunkard uses a lamppost: 'more for support than illumination'. We had to find what the data were really telling us as several Trustees asked whether our inclusive policies were 'lowering our IB averages'.

Our answer was, 'Yes, of course'. We believe in 'everyone challenged', and encourage all students with a chance of success to take the IB Diploma. The chances are, therefore, that we will have lower average scores than a school that is highly selective either at the point of school intake or IB intake. We will also have a high percentage of students who are as successful as they can possibly be, leaving our school with a full IB Diploma or with IB Certificates. Some students

Students with learning difficulties are an integral part of the International School of Brussels.

might not have enjoyed that opportunity in a less-inclusive school.

We wanted to investigate to what extent students with a record of high academic performance were being hindered by our inclusive practices, and to be clear on the performance levels of our IB students with diagnosed learning disabilities.

122 students sat IB examinations at ISB in the May 2012 examination session, including 93 full International Baccalaureate Diploma Candidates. Of the Diploma candidates, approximately 10 per cent had diagnosed special educational needs.

38 The average score of academically high achieving students who would have been able to take the IB in a 'selective school'.

34 The average score, including all students encouraged to meet the challenge of the full Diploma.

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This numerical evidence helped to show that we were achieving 'everyone successful', without compromising the success of anyone. It was also clear that creating and sustaining a fully-inclusive school is perhaps the achievement of which the Board and Leadership could be most proud.

To all of us, promoting success for every student was far more important than promoting ISB through artificially-managed average scores; it is more important that we don't exclude perfectly-capable students from receiving the same high-quality education and opportunities.

These days, the impact of inclusion is apparent everywhere. Student diversity has made us a more humane school. This is reflected in a multitude of policies, practices and cultural norms. It has also made us a smarter school. Rising to the greater challenge of meeting more diverse needs has raised our overall game, making us smarter thinkers, smarter problem-solvers and, critically, smarter teachers. In the end, inclusion has made us a better school, in all senses of the word.

Kevin Bartlett is Director at the International School of Brussels, Belgium.



Amy and Lexi

The naming of her learning disability freed Amy to share with those closest to her the reason why she didn't like reading. Amy wrote and illustrated a book, about a character called Lexi who shares her experiences, to show everyone why and how she couldn't do some things as easily as the other children. In producing this book, Amy had acknowledged and accepted the fact that she was indeed different.

As Amy learned more about her differences, she continued to communicate openly with her peers, some of whom in the past had ridiculed her for not being able to do what they could do. But now, it was different. The children in her class were offering to assist her when needed, knowing that they might be better able in one area, and sharing their talents to support her as a fellow classmate and friend.

Today, Amy continues to strive for excellence, with better than average results in the mainstream classroom. She has been on an inter-school technological project team to offer her advice regarding specific iPad apps that can assist her and other children in their learning. Amy is a natural leader, strong and determined to be successful. She is also unassuming and willing to be vulnerable. In doing so, she has taught everyone around her so much; including me.

If this example of the integration of children with learning disabilities at UWC Maastricht does not emulate the mission, vision, and values of who we are as a community, I don't know what would. Amy has promoted inter-cultural understanding through her book.

She has helped others to recognize that differences are to be celebrated and embraced, using herself through action and personal example. She takes her learning seriously, respecting others, and most of all, respecting herself.

This sense of idealism that Amy exudes is to be revered. I have no doubt that she will continue to grow and mature into a brilliant young woman, full of promise. Such is the experience of young children with learning disabilities at UWC Maastricht.

Janet Desjardins is currently Director of Studies at UWC Maastricht Preschool & Primary.

Amy drew this picture of Lexi as part of the book she wrote.

Amy is an 8-year-old UWC Maastricht Primary school student. Always a capable child and fluent in two languages through her Anglo-Dutch parents, Amy had recognized something strange in her learning journey; she didn't like reading. This was unusual for such an upbeat child who is so creative, communicative and technologically able. Her parents had also noticed this and financed a formal assessment. The outcome: Dyslexia.