

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS COUNCIL
(ISC)**

INSPECTION OF

THE BRITISH SCHOOL IN THE NETHERLANDS

By the

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE
(ISI)**

on

3rd to 7th November 2003

OVERVIEW

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1. From November 3rd to 7th 2003, teams of ISI inspectors visited four of the constituent schools of The British School in The Netherlands (BSN). The purpose of this Overview is to explain the context in which the schools operate and make some evaluation of the whole.
2. The BSN was founded in The Hague in 1935 with 20 students. It has grown rapidly in recent years and the roll now stands at over 2000 students. Currently, five separate schools and an international education centre constitute the BSN family on different sites. The four inspected were the Foundation School, the Junior School and the Senior School in The Hague, and the Junior School at Assen. The Junior School at Diamanthorst, opened in autumn 2003, and the International Education Centre were not inspected.
3. Each establishment has its own head, who has a high degree of autonomy, but all are bound by common values and systems, and are centrally governed and managed. They serve a diverse and fluid international community and offer what is largely the English National Curriculum, adapted to the circumstances of an international school in The Netherlands. They especially value and promote education for international understanding.
4. The BSN is a member of the European Council of Independent Schools (ECIS) and the Council of British Independent Schools in the European Community (COBISEC). The principal is a member of the Headmasters' and Headmistress's Conference (HMC).
5. The arrangements for governing and managing the school provide a suitable framework for its educational direction and future development. The BSN is a not-for-profit association, independent of both the Dutch and the British governments. The governing body of eight, which is responsible for all the schools, is elected from the 35 members of the over-arching association council drawn from companies, organisations and communities in The Netherlands. Central leadership and management are provided by the principal, supported by service departments, including finance, human resources, admissions and marketing, and information services support. The heads of the constituent schools are members of the board of management of the BSN, which includes the principal and the heads of the main service departments. The structure is clear and coherent and it works very well, combining unity of purpose and vision with healthy diversity.
6. The governing body of eight consists of one representative each from the British Embassy and from the parent body, together with six members elected from members of the BSN Association. The latter are not meant to be representatives of any particular interest but are chosen for the range of expertise and experience that they bring to the task. They appoint the principal and, with his advice, they determine and monitor the strategic direction of the school. Governors meet at least eight times a year and take part in project groups or other committees, for instance the building project steering group and the remuneration group. They hold the schools to account for the results and the quality of education provided. A recent development has been to link individual governors to a specific school, enabling them to gain a clearer first-hand view, a move that is appreciated by the schools.

7. The outstanding vision, strategic leadership and management of the principal have been crucial to the current growth and success of the school. Two elements are particularly important.
8. The first is the BSN development plan, which the principal drew up after his appointment. It was the result of very extensive and open consultation with all interested parties in each of the schools. These included parents, teaching and non-teaching staff, students, the expatriate and local community and major companies who support the school financially and whose staff send their children to it. Those who were consulted were asked open-ended questions, for instance: 'How should the school develop?' and 'What should the priorities be?' The result is a comprehensive, three-year plan, now approaching the completion of its first cycle, which has the widest possible support.
9. The second element was the setting up of central services for finance, human resources, marketing and public relations, and information services support. They take care of tasks that would otherwise be duplicated by the senior teaching and administrative staff of the individual schools. They provide a higher quality of service than schools could manage for themselves. They ensure that management and administrative practices are consistent across all schools and, in so doing, help to unify them and develop a recognisable BSN identity.
10. The finance department has brought budgetary rigour to the schools, without determining educational priorities. Its reputation in the banking community is such that, when BSN needed to raise money quickly for the Diamanthorst project, it was able to do so without difficulty. Major companies that support the BSN have equal confidence in its financial probity.
11. The human resources department deals with the administrative side of recruitment but it has also put together a relocation package, including visits to The Hague, help with finding accommodation and lessons in Dutch for those wanting them. It has done much of the detailed negotiation about staff welfare and has put in place a forward-looking scheme whereby staff approaching retirement have a remission in their teaching load.
12. The public relations and marketing department is responsible for admissions, though the decision to admit a student rests with the head of the individual school. It uses its database to alert existing parents of the arrival of new families in their area and prepares a welcome package that is delivered by a local parent representative. In the same way, it puts families with a common language in touch with each other. Of vital importance has been the contact with companies in The Hague, learning their intentions regarding the recruitment and transfer of personnel. The BSN uses this information to plan ahead and to act quickly, as in the case of the Diamanthorst project.
13. The information services support team has been successful in ensuring a consistent ICT network and the purchasing of compatible equipment and software. However, day-to-day problems often remain in the schools, as a result of which they are to receive some technician support.
14. In the pre-inspection survey of their views, a few parents were critical of the expenditure on these central services. The inspection team does not agree. On the contrary, they provide good value for money; they enable the individual schools to operate more effectively; and they make a significant contribution to the cohesion of the BSN enterprise.
15. The principal is a very effective manager. He gives almost complete autonomy to the high quality heads he has appointed, subject to the constraints of the over-arching

structure of the BSN. This works exceptionally well. The confidence he expresses in them by not involving himself in the daily running of each school is amply repaid. Nevertheless, he spends time with all of them each week. The visits enable him to maintain contact and keep abreast of issues; they form part of the monitoring process. Heads submit regular reports and are accountable for their stewardship both to the principal and to the governing body.

16. The cohesion of the BSN is assured by a number of cross-school committees, including staff development, school liaison, health and safety and staff communication. The most important, however, is the board of management, chaired by the principal and consisting of the heads of school and the heads of the finance and human resources departments. This group determines policies to be put to the board of governors. A crucial element concerns the finalising of the budget proposals, where heads are involved in negotiating increases and savings concerning their own schools. The process gives heads a role outside their own school, which they value.
17. Of crucial importance in the development of the BSN is the 'works council', 'Ondernemingsraad' or 'OR'. Dutch law requires such a body for all organisations with more than 50 employees. At the BSN, its nine members are elected from among all school staff (teaching and support) for a four-year term of office. The principal meets regularly the chair and secretary in informal meetings and formal meetings are held twice a term. The OR has statutory powers – requiring the employer (represented by the principal) to seek its advice and sometimes approval for school initiatives. For example, advice must be sought formally for any significant change in school organisation or structure. The OR must approve any change in staff remuneration, contractual conditions or the introduction of any scheme of staff appraisal or observation; the OR monitors and legally approves the employer's conduct of health and safety.
18. At its best, this is a positive opportunity in the Dutch tradition to ensure constructive consultation on employment matters. In practice, however, the BSN provides conditions of service that go beyond strict legal requirements. Nevertheless, in recent years, the OR has been very reluctant to accept the introduction of classroom observation either as part of an appraisal scheme or as part of a drive to identify and disseminate good teaching practice. The situation has now been resolved and a scheme is due to start, following extensive in-service training. It is clear from inspection evidence that the lack of classroom observation has had a negative effect on curricular consistency, the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of any monitoring of the work in the schools.
19. The cohesion of the BSN is demonstrated by the similarity of three of the four reports. All three schools in The Hague itself have good or very good standards, good teaching, good or very good specialist support for pupils with special educational needs or English as an additional language, very good pastoral care and good or very good leadership. The common weakness lies in monitoring the work of the schools, particularly through direct classroom observation. The Helen Sharman Junior School has the same good teaching, very good specialist support for pupils with special needs or with English as an additional language, very good pastoral care and good leadership. It is affected by its isolation from The Hague and particularly its small size. Both affect the quality and cohesion of the curriculum, standards, the deployment of specialist teachers and the ability of the very small management team to monitor effectively the implementation of the curriculum and the work of the school.
20. The issue of classroom observation now appears to be resolved. Applied sensibly, it has the potential to contribute to an improvement in teaching and lead to even higher standards in all four schools.