

DBGS Awarded CIS Accreditation – February 2010

On 24 November 2009, Dhahran British Grammar School was awarded accreditation status by the Council of International Schools (CIS). DBGS proudly joins a list of over 500 schools worldwide that meet highly demanding standards of educational excellence.

CIS accreditation aims to encourage improvement and foster excellence in international education through promoting on-going self-study and peer review. Accreditation is an external, objective and critical view of a school in every aspect of its operations. Stringent selection criteria have to be met for a school to be eligible to undertake the CIS accreditation process. Parents, in selecting schools that have been awarded accreditation status, can be reassured that they have placed their children in the best educational environment for their children. Accredited schools also attract quality educators. In seeking employment in accredited schools teachers know that they will be educating children in a professional, ethical and student-focused school environment, and one that promotes professional growth.

Notification of the CIS award, a culmination of more than two years self study by DBGS staff, has been nearly four years in the making. Ian Jones, Headteacher of DBGS since August 2008, ensured that the process was completed and that any subsequent information required by CIS was presented to them in the appropriate format.

The accreditation process began in November 2006 when DBGS Headteacher, John Chapman (currently the Human Resources Director, ISG) and DBGS early years practitioner, Rosalind Power, attended a CIS training conference. Shortly after, the school submitted an application to formally begin the accreditation process. In May 2007, Dr. Gerry Percy, the head of CIS accreditation, visited the school to assess whether DBGS met the criteria to undergo the accreditation and self-study process.

Dr. Percy also provided a full day of in-service for all staff members. CIS requires all staff members – as well as students, parents and Board members – to be directly involved in the internal review process. Rosalind, in her role as Professional Development Coordinator, guided the staff and school community through the lengthy and meticulous self-study process.

Shortly after Dr. Percy's visit, DBGS received the welcome news that they had met the selection criteria. Part of Dr. Percy's preliminary visit was to interview groups of parents, staff and students. When he fed back to staff he offered a tremendous compliment by saying that, of all the student groups that he had interviewed in his long experience of accreditation, the quality of the DBGS student interviews was outstanding! DBGS immediately launched the internal review process beginning with a constituent opinion survey. In August 2007, staff analysed the survey data and generated a school profile to serve as a framework for the second phase of the self-study process.

Supported by a total of twenty-four staff committees, DBGS's philosophy and objectives, curriculum, governance and management, staff, student support services, resources and student and community life, were rated against standards for accreditation and specific indicators. Internal evaluation was completed with the creation of goals and strategies for improvement.

When asked to highlight the most challenging aspect of the process, Rosalind said, "Coordination." The process was intense with some staff participating in up to five different committees. Finding time for face-to-face

meetings involving school leaders, students, teachers and board members required creative logistical planning, a considerable degree of patience and a generous sense of humour.

Following completion of the internal review process, a CIS site visit was planned for November 2008. Challenges associated with Visa approval, however, resulted in a delay of six months. In March 2009, the CIS accreditation team at last arrived in the Kingdom to evaluate the conclusions of the self-study process and to observe the school in action. According to Rosalind Power, the CIS team felt very welcomed. Everyone was delighted that they had arrived. If the process had been further delayed, the school would have had to redo all the documentation.

During their visit, team members visited classrooms and specialist areas, talked with parents, students and members of the staff and governing body to evaluate the quality of the DBGS educational experience. An impressive aspect of the CIS process is that the team members are current practitioners. They understand the challenges associated with international education and, as a result, the final recommendations are appropriate given the unique educational environment.

Rosalind was delighted to find that, "there was nothing we had missed". CIS representatives noted the thoroughness and honesty in DBGS's final reporting. "The team commented that we were too critical of ourselves," Rosalind remembers. "We felt it better to be hard on ourselves rather than to be over confident. There was no sense in pretending that everything was in place; instead we clearly identified the issues and demonstrated the progress we had made in finding solutions." One of the strengths of the process commented on by Rosalind was that it brought everyone together. Staff mixed with colleagues from different areas of the school that they would not normally have interacted with.

Having received notification of CIS accreditation, DBGS is now in the initial phase of implementation planning. Departmental staff have reviewed CIS commendations and begun to identify and prioritise areas for school improvement over the next five years. Priorities include the examination of the DBGS management structure, such as the possible designation of subject heads. From a curriculum standpoint, staff will closely evaluate the vertical relationship of core subjects, in particular maths, science and English benchmarks, to ensure that desired standards are met.

Before the end of the year, DBGS will finalize an action plan, with a list of planned activities required within the first 18 months to address CIS's recommendations, and provide an initial progress report. A subsequent report is required in five years with another CIS site visit to ensure that the school is on target. Accreditation is based on a ten-year cycle and this is one of the many strengths of the process.

The award of accreditation, as expressed by Headteacher Ian Jones, "is recognition that as a school we value the views of others and are willing to accept advice on areas for improvement. The recognition of CIS Accreditation has value for all members of the school community. Expatriate parents in particular can be reassured that DBGS has been benchmarked successfully alongside quality international schools worldwide."

In an updated post on the DBGS blog, Ian Jones offered his thanks to everyone involved in the process. "Together I think we should celebrate this success and look forward to the exciting developments that lie ahead for DBGS and the benefits that will bring to all concerned."

ISG District Superintendent Norma Hudson commends Dhahran British Grammar School for their continued success and the well-deserved award of the CIS accreditation.