

**ACS WASC MID-CYCLE VISIT
VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT**

**ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR SCHOOLS
WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES**

FOR

COLUMBIA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

153 Matsugo, Tokorozawa, Saitama 359-0027

February 19-21, 2024.

Visiting Committee Members

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I. Introduction

Established in 1988, Columbia International School (CIS) has evolved into a prestigious K-12 international institution, providing an English-language curriculum accredited by the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). Located in Tokorozawa, Saitama, a western suburb of Tokyo, CIS has become a hub for students from diverse backgrounds, reflecting its commitment to fostering global citizenship.

School Overview:

Columbia International School serves as an overseas-inspected private school, catering to students from a wide geographical radius. The school is comprised of three divisions: elementary (K-6), junior high (grades 7-9), and high school (grades 10-12). With a mission to prepare students for post-secondary education in North America's finest universities and nurture international perspectives, CIS actively engages its community in promoting academic success, personal growth, and social awareness.

Demographics:

Currently enrolling 298 students, with 60.6% being Japanese nationals, CIS embraces a rich cultural diversity, with students from Korea, China, and various other countries. The school actively recruits students from the Japanese public school system, and approximately 70% of students are English as a second language learners. The school operates a small boarding program a five minute walk away from campus that currently accommodates 24 students in single occupancy rooms. The engagement of parents and guardians is facilitated through an active Parent-Teacher-Staff-Association (PTSA), working collaboratively to enhance students' well-being at home, in school, and in the community.

Academic Programs and Performance:

Aligned with the Ontario curriculum, CIS places a strong emphasis on academic achievement. The Expected School-wide Learning Results (ESLRs) outline key areas of focus, emphasizing personal and interpersonal growth, academic success, and global citizenship. The school's commitment to continuous improvement is evident in its self-study process, with a particular emphasis on instructional improvement and student achievement since the first WASC-Focus on Learning Self Study visit in 2002.

Matriculation and Achievement Data:

CIS has demonstrated success in preparing students for post-secondary education, as reflected in matriculation data. The school's core academic achievement grades in English, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies reveal a commitment to maintaining high standards and fostering

longitudinal growth.

Significant Changes and Developments:

Since the last visit, a few changes to the staff have occurred. Most notably, the previous WASC coordinator retired and has been replaced by another teacher. Additional teachers have also been hired as some teacher's roles have been shuffled around due to school growth. CIS has made efforts to develop the technology in the school, as they begin to slowly implement iPads and large screens into classrooms. Finally, parts of the exterior of the school have also been upgraded, such as a new astro turf field and a gardening area installed for the elementary school. No new major curriculum changes have been made since the last visit, other than adding MCV4U (Mathematics, Calculus, and Vectors) a class that was requested by parents and students.

Stakeholder Engagement and Progress Monitoring:

Stakeholder engagement at CIS is facilitated through an active PTSA, monthly meetings, schoolwide PD days each term, and collaborative efforts between parents, the executive director, the principal, teaching, and office staff.

Regular monthly PTSA meetings provide a platform for open communication and the exchange of ideas, ensuring that various perspectives are considered in the decision-making process. The student council acts as an effective liaison between the students and school leadership, and the leadership supports them in facilitating and running various school events.

The Mid-Cycle Progress Report, was prepared by CIS teachers separated into focus groups (action plan groups) and reviewed by the principal and WASC coordinator. The finalized report was made available to all faculty and staff for final input. The faculty panels the visiting committee spoke with were familiar with the contents of the report and were able to speak about the work that had been completed on the schoolwide action plan. The engagement of stakeholders has ensured a comprehensive and accurate representation of the school's current state. The PTSA's involvement, alongside the collaboration with parents, and various school personnel, reflects a commitment to transparency and accountability.

II. Progress on Implementation of the Schoolwide Action Plan

Action Plan #1

The school's action plan #1 initially aimed to prioritize schoolwide improvement processes through systematic data collection and analysis, utilizing objective standardized measures akin to MAP and PSAT assessments. At present, the only standardized test they currently use is the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) for the high school division. The actions taken for this step involved the analysis of current data collection methods, which identified limitations in standardized data collection, and its use to inform instruction and policies. Thus the school has taken steps to improve by planning to implement surveys to gather stakeholder opinions. School leadership and faculty are still considering and discussing the need for other objective standardized tests in addition to their current practice of tracking course grades, based on the Ontario learner goals, as the primary source of information to gauge the level of student learning. The visiting committee feels this is still an area for further improvement, where additional objective standardized testing could be used to quantifiably assess the effectiveness of the CIS curriculum across all grade levels and subjects, both the strengths and areas of improvement. Moving forward, the school could focus on integrating other objective standardized measures alongside existing data collection methods to provide comprehensive insight into student learning outcomes and areas for improvement. While the school has made strides in making data-informed decisions, efforts to implement additional forms of data collection will contribute to further growth in effectively using data to drive schoolwide improvement processes.

Action Plan #2

The school has demonstrated significant growth in addressing action plan step #2 related to regularly updating written policies, charts, and handbooks that define professional roles and responsibilities. The actions taken include the comprehensive review and update of various documents such as the student handbook, curriculum expectations, standardized contracts, health and safety protocols, safeguarding documents, and ongoing efforts to update laptop and mobile device expectations as well as sports/activity safety guidelines. The recognition received from childsafeguarding.com attests to the school's proactive efforts in safeguarding students and staff. Additionally, the current review and redevelopment of the teacher appraisal program indicates a commitment to continuous improvement in supporting the development of the teaching staff. The visiting committee encourages CIS to maintain this improvement by following a documented process for the regular review of handbooks and other policies, ensuring they are consistently updated over time as needs arise. Implementing a structured approach will contribute to sustained growth in maintaining up-to-date and relevant documentation. Overall, the school has made commendable progress in this area, and improvement in the review process will enhance the sustainability of these efforts.

Action Plan #3

The school has demonstrated progress in addressing action plan step #3 related to consistent curriculum planning and opportunities for professional collaboration. Action Plan #3 resulted in the creation of an organized folder on the school's network containing Ontario curriculum documents, primarily containing the Ontario academic standards, for all grades and divisions.

This initiative is intended to provide teachers with easier access to these documents, fostering a more cohesive approach and minimizing overlapping content. The visiting committee found that much of the curriculum, and by extension the standards, are then translated into the course outlines and student descriptors. The course outlines are renewed each year and written following the standards and guidelines of the Ontario Ministry of Education. These outlines are accessible to all teachers and staff, so curriculum planning can be meaningfully completed. However, a more cohesive framework for more professional collaboration opportunities would ensure that the curriculum planning across the school would have more meaningful scaffolding. The commitment to providing dedicated time for professional collaboration, as evidenced through monthly divisional meetings and informal interactions, reflects progress toward improvement. Overall, the school's efforts to streamline curriculum planning and enhance collaboration contribute to a more cohesive and effective educational experience for students.

Action Plan #4 / #6

The school has made substantial progress in addressing the action plan step #4/#6 related to the development and adoption of a comprehensive child protection policy. The actions taken, including the review and enhancement of the Child Protection Policy in collaboration with external specialists, the creation of the CIS Student and All Staff Protection Protocols and Guidelines, and the implementation of mandatory annual professional development courses in child safeguarding, demonstrate a strong commitment to ensuring the safety of students. The school's proactive efforts have been recognized and awarded by childsafeguarding.com, indicating compliance with regulations and best practices. Additionally, the strides made in providing counseling professional development, such as through TELL, indicate excellent progress. Ongoing efforts in policy review, language inclusivity in the handbooks, and continuous professional development will further enhance the effectiveness of the child protection framework and contribute to the overall safety and well-being of students. The visiting committee encourages CIS to continue to formalize and document the review process for continuous improvement creating an opportunity to enhance transparency and accountability in the policy's ongoing evaluation and refinement.

Action Plan #5

The school has demonstrated responsiveness to the action plan step #5 by recognizing the need for a curriculum review cycle, particularly focusing on science and math-related fields. The recognition of student and parent desires for additional on-site course offerings in science and math led to the introduction of the MCV4U (Mathematics, Calculus, and Vectors) option and the consideration of more courses in the future based on expressed needs. CIS's recent review of the curriculum against university entry requirements reflects an awareness of global academic standards and the school's commitment to meeting them. At present, due to the limited interest in the advanced science physics course, with only three students taking it this past year, the course is not offered on-site but is still made available through the online provider. Some students did voice their concerns to the visiting committee about the ability to take more advanced math classes, implying that they may be unaware of the options available to them online. More clear communication of all course offerings may be needed to help mitigate these concerns.

Action Plan #7

The school has demonstrated progress in addressing the action plan step #7 concerning

clarifying the role of the governing authority and enhancing transparency in the budgeting process. The creation and sharing of an updated organogram for the business office and support staff, along with ongoing efforts to expand its scope to include all teaching staff, reflect a commitment to clearly defining roles and responsibilities related to decision-making on resource allocation. The school's robust accounting and budgeting system, aligned with Japanese business and education authorities, is a noted positive aspect. The inclusion of resource allocation and acquisition policies in the teacher handbook also adds a layer of transparency. The visiting committee acknowledges that the school is owned by a private company and therefore certain aspects of the company's budget may not be made public. Despite some requests for total transparency of the budget breakdown, it is understandable that it is not fully possible or necessary. It was noted by the visiting committee that the school appears to be well-resourced and that requests for necessary materials were generally approved by the Principal with board approval required for large capital requests such as the building of the new turf field. Overall, the steps taken showcase progress, and continued efforts in response to stakeholder feedback will contribute to ongoing improvement in transparency and governance.

Action Plan #8

The school has made significant progress in addressing the action plan step #8 related to reviewing marketing strategies to promote the school and student enrollment. Following a comprehensive analysis of their marketing strategies, the school has taken proactive steps to enhance its reputation and visibility. The updating of the school website, creation of promotional videos, and initiation of live-streaming events demonstrate a commitment to showcasing the school's strengths and engaging the wider community. Furthermore, the involvement of staff in developing an online newsletter and organizing community events such as speech contests reflects a collaborative approach to promoting the school. The recognition of the school's success, evidenced by near-capacity enrollment and waiting lists in many grade levels, underscores the effectiveness of these marketing efforts. Moving forward, the planned survey to prioritize promotional methods will provide valuable insights for further refining marketing strategies to sustain and build upon the school's success. Overall, the proactive approach and positive outcomes indicate a successful implementation of the action plan step.

III. Schoolwide Areas of Strength and Critical Areas for Follow-up

Schoolwide Areas of Strength:

1. CIS faculty and leadership demonstrate caring, concern, and high expectations for students in an environment where individual and cultural differences are honored, and where students across all divisions feel safe, supported, cared for and accepted by their peers and their teachers.
2. CIS has built a collaborative culture of mutual respect, inquiry, and effective communication between faculty, parents, and students, in which student self-esteem is fostered through character education, high expectations, and recognition of student success.
3. The governance and leadership collaborate effectively in the best interests of the school and maintain appropriate professional distinction of roles and responsibilities. The leadership is highly responsive to the needs of the school community.
4. The well-qualified CIS faculty is proactive in developing and refining their practices and dedicated to student and collegial needs, offering individualized classroom attention.
5. CIS teachers have developed high-quality Learning Goals, Success Criteria, Course Outlines, and Student Descriptors which are well communicated to students. Students know from the beginning of a unit what is expected of them, and how they can demonstrate achievement of the standards.
6. CIS has a well-developed ESL program that allows students to progress at their own pace, with the goal of passing the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test as one of their graduation requirements. The ESL reading program is consistent through the Elementary, Junior High, and Senior High divisions.
7. CIS effectively supports professional development with time, personnel, material, and fiscal resources to facilitate all students achieving the academic standards and the schoolwide learner outcomes.
8. The school community (faculty/staff, students, PTSA, parents) collaborate well to develop high quality student events (Christmas Fiesta, Halloween, Spirit Cup, etc.) that are recognized as a strength of the school.
9. The leadership and faculty have developed and adopted a child protection policy that includes a code of conduct for appropriate behavior of adults toward children and children toward other children, reporting procedures, and mandatory faculty/staff training programs to ensure the safety of students at all times.

Critical Areas for Follow-up that have not yet been fully Addressed:

Leadership and faculty should prioritize schoolwide improvement processes driven by the systemic collection and analysis of data by all appropriate stakeholders in order to effectively guide the work of the school and provide accountability and monitoring of the schoolwide action plan. The school should seek objective standardized measures, in the vein of the MAP and PSAT assessments, to measure the effectiveness of the CIS program. Leadership should work with the faculty to use these measures to inform a regular review of the curriculum and other school programs that involve all relevant staff.

Leadership and faculty should continue to develop processes to regularly review and update written policies, charts, and handbooks with particular attention focused on child protection policies and practices, professional growth plans, and teacher appraisal procedures. Trust-Based Observations (Craig Randall) may be one option CIS may want to explore as a way to maximize teaching and learning growth.

Leadership and faculty should implement a cohesive framework and process for consistent curricular planning throughout the subjects and school divisions, with the priority being to provide dedicated time for professional collaboration.

New Critical Areas for Follow-up:

CIS has recently developed a technology committee for the purpose of researching and bringing in new technology for the classroom that will better support student learning. Additionally, the technology committee has been responsible for determining faculty professional learning needs that will support the use of new instructional technology. This prioritized work should be included as part of their schoolwide action plan moving forward.

Columbia International School should continue to make progress on their current schoolwide action plan which is outlined in their [Mid-Cycle Progress Report \(2023\)](#) with updates made as necessary.