

“We’re an ambitious school and we want to do even better!”

These are the concluding remarks of school governor Peter Kaestel’s speech of thanks to the four visitors who had just spent a week at The German School London.

But these were rather special visitors.

In preparation for their visit, they had processed 6,000 to 7,000 pages of school documents. During their visit, they spoke to parents, pupils and teachers, as well as with the heads of administration and the kindergarten. They spoke to the school governors and the school management personnel. And they observed 20-minute segments of 63 lessons.

Who were these guests?

They were four inspectors who represent the federal states and the government of Germany and they are responsible for carrying out so-called BLI inspections (the equivalent of Ofsted in the UK). These ensure standards in German schools abroad, all 140 of which undergo this process every 6 years and, if they are successful, receive the seal of approval: ‘Excellent German School Abroad’.

This was the second BLI inspection at The German School London and was more demanding than the previous one. Was the school successful?

Yes, indeed! And particular congratulations are in order as the school managed to repeat its success of 2011 under conditions that were not exactly easy. The inspection took place in a period of radical change and reorientation in which a new head teacher, a new head of administration and several new teaching staff joined existing staff in the task of restructuring work and changing strategies.

For his leadership and direction of the new school strategies based on openness and participation, head teacher Christian Nitschke was highly commended by the inspectors. They indicated their recognition of the introduction of round tables, which facilitate dialogue between parents, pupils and teachers, and innovative team-building measures within the teaching staff with 4 times ++ : outstanding and exemplary.

That is a source of great satisfaction not only to the head but also to all the members of staff who have embarked on this process with commitment and increasing motivation.

Observing a school in the process of change was not a straightforward undertaking. For example, some projects are in their infancy and the school’s formats for bilingual language development are not a precise fit with the standardised values of the inspection. As a result, the inspectors repeatedly stressed that their findings should be regarded as stimulus for discussion, particularly on issues where external perceptions and one’s own feelings diverge.

The to-do list focuses mainly on teaching methods. It is true that the standards of results achieved are high and the pupils are consistently active and responsive in lessons, even when they have extremely demanding timetables. Nevertheless, teaching could be more tailored to the needs of individual pupils and more differentiated; the learning environment

could be more stimulating and media could be used more intensively. In these areas, the secondary school could learn from practice in the primary school, as suggested by a member of staff in the evaluation session. In addition, the promotion of German language skills should be reinforced – and this should be done in all subjects. According to 1st inspector Wilhelm Kruesemann, pupils should learn to speak the standard of German that will equip them for the demands of a future academic career in Germany.

During the evaluation session there was a lively discussion and the school governors and staff had numerous queries for the inspectors. “I hadn’t expected the assessment of lessons to be like this,” said one teacher, “but I still think we’re good teachers.” The inspectors recommended that their criticism be regarded as opportunities and pointed out that the school had already identified some of the challenges ahead, which has prepared the ground well for the implementation of the next phase.

Both inspectors and pupils were in agreement on the subject of the pupils at The German School London, whose consistently active participation and open, factual discussion style greatly impressed the inspectors. “The pupils at The German School London are absolutely fantastic,” said Inspector Wilhelm Kruesemann, echoing the words of Dr Cannon, the IB Co-ordinator: “Yes, we have a lot of students who are eager to flex their brain muscles.”

What next, after such an exciting BLI inspection?

Celebrate, take a deep breath, let it all sink in and then unpack the gifts our 4 guests left and try them out.

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