

# An Introduction to Middle School

 INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL  
OF ZUG AND LUZERN  
respect | motivate | achieve





## OUR MISSION

We are a community of learners determined to make the world – or our corner of it – a better, kinder place. We reflect our values in everything we do so that we make the most of opportunities and challenges in a spirit of enthusiastic inquiry.

## OUR VISION

We help every student turn their learning into action, creating the opportunity to stretch themselves further and achieve more than they believe possible.

## OUR VALUES

**We respect.** We show empathy and are inclusive and thoughtful in our interactions with others. Every person is valued and valuable.

**We motivate.** We inspire each other and grow by building on everyone's individual and collective passions.

**We achieve.** We create an exceptional learning environment focused on academic achievement and holistic development.



As adults, we often look back at our school days as our point of reference or comparison to our own children's experiences. I wonder what your Middle School years were like as you made that transition from childhood to adolescence? From my own perspective, those Middle School years were a mix of wonder and joy alongside the occasional frustration. Sometimes it seemed my school was serving my needs whilst at other points, I felt it was intentionally making life difficult. I believe passionately in the importance of articulating and sharing our school's vision and beliefs about these vital years in a student's life. This is something to which the Middle School Assistant Principal, Pete LaFrance and I have been committed since our appointment in 2019. We want to be able to celebrate this unique time for our early teens and to provide community members with a greater insight into what life looks and feels like in the Middle School.

At ISZL, we consider ourselves all to be learners. Utilising educational research and the vast experience of our staff, we continuously push for excellence in our dedicated and purposefully designed programme. This guide celebrates our school, demonstrating our deep understanding and recognition of the needs of our 11-14-year-olds.

This document is the culmination of 18 months of information gathering, with input from students, parents and staff alongside globally recognised research. It provides a framework for all members of our community, demonstrating how we support our students as they go through profound personal change and identity development.

Come and join us in celebrating our journey and our Middle School; we look forward to welcoming you into our community.

**Stuart Byfield**

Middle School Principal  
International School of Zug and Luzern

This document was developed through a community process begun in October 2019 gaining insight and feedback through Middle School staff, parent advisory committees, and student voice groups. This version was completed in June 2021.

Additional reference material: International Baccalaureate: Middle Years Programme; From Principals to Practice. • International Baccalaureate: What is an IB Education? • International Baccalaureate Website ([www.ibo.org](http://www.ibo.org)) • Association of Middle-Level Education (2020) The Successful Middle School: This We Believe, AMLE, Ohio • Association of Middle-Level Education ([www.amle.org](http://www.amle.org)) • ISZL Mission and Values • ISZL Learning Principles • ISZL Student Support Services Guide



## ISZL Middle School - A Unique Place in Time

### A Unique Moment

Middle school is an exciting time of great development for students – for many of them, the journey to adulthood begins to take shape. At ISZL, we take this unique stage of their journey seriously and structure our programme to meet the needs of students at this crucial inflection point in their lives.

Along this journey, we recognise that students are building, reflecting, and strengthening the attitudes, values, and dispositions that will shape and guide the adults they will become. We embrace these moments as learning opportunities, eager to support them in building the skills they need for their overall sense of well-being and future success.

Most students express an increased desire for independence during these years, so we see it as essential that our school environment provides them with a growing opportunity to have more control over their experience, preparing them for the more complex life choices they will face. Their interactions with peers become increasingly more influential alongside connections with family members, teachers, and a wider community. We see students becoming much larger consumers of media, particularly online, and looking for ways in which to express themselves creatively. Their world is expanding.



### A Unique Opportunity

In order to support students in making sense of their world, who they are and who they are becoming, we introduce them to a wide variety of learning experiences and opportunities to help cultivate their understanding of themselves as learners and as citizens of a global community. We see ISZL's Middle School as providing a safe space for growth, for exploration, for play, for risk-taking, and for mistake-making. Through a broad exposure of subjects, activities and experiences, we share in the responsibility to help students understand their strengths, their passions, and their interests, so that they are equipped to make informed decisions ready for the next stage of their education.

At ISZL, students are valued and their opinions matter. We continuously work to balance their need for leadership with an understanding of their role in a diverse community. We see them as our next generation of changemakers so we go beyond academic skills – we help them to build the skills of empathy and compassion so they can indeed make our world a better, kinder place.

This change begins in our own school. We take advantage of our setting, a campus shared between our early Middle School teens and our youngest students, enabling our Middle School students to enter their teenage years without additional pressure to grow up too soon.

We are ISZL Middle School: purposefully designed to meet the needs of our unique early teens.





## ISZL Middle School - Supporting the Individual

Understanding and meeting the individual needs of our students is at the core of our Middle School. Our teachers are organised in grade-level teams to provide the opportunity for all teachers to know each child as an individual and to ensure that all children are supported. These teams meet regularly to discuss individual student progress across subjects, and work alongside the counselling team to address social and emotional concerns. Each child is unique - it takes a diverse group of experts working together to help ensure that each student has what they need to thrive.

Our Student Support Services Team (SSST) is dedicated to providing proactive, holistic student support that is caring, inclusive, and individualised. Working in conjunction with our homeroom and Grade level teams, we utilise additional professional expertise to address and support the medical, socio-emotional, and academic needs of every child. The SSST consists of professionals from our counselling, English as an Additional Language (EAL), learning support, and nursing teams.

Students are placed in homerooms of up to 22 students with two dedicated homeroom teachers, who work together to support and guide students throughout the year. This group of students travels together for most lessons. They also work closely together through our Personal, Social, & Health Education programme (PSHE) led by the homeroom teaching team. Throughout the Middle years, there is a developmentally-appropriate focus upon relationship building and supporting the development of key communication and collaborative skills that are integral for working partnerships.





## ISZL Middle School - Learning Together

Our teachers build relationships and create learning environments that support, affirm, challenge and celebrate our students. They expect and plan for a range of capacities and capabilities, offering varied opportunities for each student to grow, develop their curiosity, and acquire essential skills for research, critical and creative thinking, communication, collaboration and self-management.

Our ISZL Learning Principles help to shape experiences in ways that matter. We seek to cultivate the conditions in which successful learning can occur for all our students. We use a set of principles to guide how we design and facilitate learning in the classroom and beyond. We ensure that learning remains:

### Centred on the Learner

Every learner is unique, bringing with them a diverse set of skills, experiences and prior knowledge. We see students as key drivers of learning with the potential to develop the skills and strategies needed to take responsibility for their own growth.

### Meaningful

Learning that is active, constructive, intentional and authentic empowers students to retain information and apply what they learned to solve problems in different contexts beyond the classroom. Learners have the opportunity to access knowledge from many different starting points, transferring their understanding in ways that hold meaning for them.

### Challenging

We communicate high expectations and encourage learners to achieve to the best of their abilities in order to motivate students to reach their potential and keep them engaged in learning. Learning which focuses on enduring concepts and encourages curiosity challenges each student to reach their goals.



### Emotional

The interplay between emotional well-being, motivation and cognition influences a student's ability to learn. We support students in building the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

### Informed by Multiple Assessment Approaches

We facilitate learning with high expectations using assessment strategies consistent with those expectations. There is a strong emphasis on formative feedback enabling both students and teachers to receive feedback that leads to action.

### Connected

Knowledge and understanding are built through social interactions in a collaborative culture. Learners reach deeper levels of understanding when they have opportunities to inquire into diverse viewpoints, address misconceptions, and solve problems together in respectful, equitable ways.

We use these principles to develop a programme grounded in the International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Years Programme (MYP) framework. The Middle School at ISZL comprises the first three years of the MYP programme on Zug Campus, with the final two years taking place at our High School Campus in Hünenberg. This framework matches our values, fostering the development of skills for communication, intercultural understanding and global engagement - essential qualities for young people who are becoming global leaders.

It is an academically challenging framework that encourages students to make practical connections between their studies and the real world. Inquiry-based teaching and learning is the cornerstone of all International Baccalaureate Programmes. In this case, the teacher is not simply the provider of information for students to absorb, but a facilitator who guides the curious minds of his or her students through questioning and collaborative classrooms.

Building upon the strong foundation of the Primary Years Programme, our Middle School students are introduced to eight subject areas with specialist teachers working to build subject-specific and interdisciplinary understanding. It includes a robust service learning programme as well as time dedicated to exploring the personal, social and health topics necessary for students to understand their changing reality as they enter adolescence.

By complementing the MYP with our learning principles, the ISZL Middle School programme reflects the developmental needs of the child. When our students leave us at the end of Grade 8, they are young people who are creative, critical and reflective thinkers, confident as learners, connecting their understanding to the larger world and hopefully, committed to acting as responsible and empathetic global citizens.





## ISZL Middle School – A Subject Overview

### The Arts

Middle School students have the opportunity to explore and delve deeply into the three disciplines of Drama, Music, and Visual Art on a rotational basis throughout Grades 6 – 8. Recognising the positive impact on the cognitive and physical development of the body, all Grades 6 and 7 students choose a musical instrument to study, which Grade 8 students are encouraged to continue. As a division, we are dedicated to the Arts, recognising how important they are in expanding a child's ability to interact with the world around them, developing key skills for self-expression, creativity and communication.

### Design

Design challenges Middle School students to apply practical and creative thinking skills to solve genuine real-life problems. Students engage in a three-year cycle in which each year has a targeted focus. In Grade 6, students are introduced to design thinking through physical products and construction methods. In Grade 7 they deepen their understanding and appreciation of Design through filmmaking and digital media creation. In the final year of Middle School, students develop digital design abilities including coding, robotics and 3D rendering. At the heart of the programme is the element of enthusiastic inquiry, where students engage in self-directed projects to apply their understanding of the conceptual framework of Design in meaningful ways. There are clear connections between MYP Design and elements of science, technology, engineering, arts & Mathematics (STEAM) which are explored throughout the three years in Middle School.

### Individuals and Societies

Individuals and Societies includes disciplines traditionally associated with the Humanities, such as Geography and History, but also incorporates elements of Economics and the Social Sciences within its framework. It provides opportunities to consider the diversity of human culture, attitudes, and beliefs which allows students to explore their own identity within their local, and increasingly interconnected, global community. There is a strong emphasis on inquiry and investigation to test hypotheses and the interpretation of primary and secondary material. At the heart of the programme is the focus on real-world examples to develop empathy and encourage open-mindedness to nurture the values and the commitment needed to make the world a better place.

### Language Acquisition and First Language

The ability to communicate in more than one language is essential to the concept of international education. In our Middle School, we believe that learning languages opens opportunities to students for multicultural understanding, promotes global citizenship, develops their international mindset and supports our students' future careers.

All Middle School students have access to German classes, with French, Spanish or EAL being offered as second language options. There are also opportunities to study the student's First Language (mother tongue) independently as a course or as part of our extensive after-school programme.



### Language and Literature

Language, communication and the sharing of stories are at the heart of who we are as humans and integral to understanding our personal and cultural identity. Middle School students will interpret, explore, and create a huge variety of texts from scripting plays to speeches, from poetry to creative writing, all as a means of fostering a love of stories and language. They will develop the skills and knowledge to be able to communicate effectively and creatively, in a range of contexts.

### Mathematics

Our key aim is to instil an appreciation of Mathematics in all our Middle School students. We strive to nurture confident, engaged mathematicians, able to analyse, think critically and creatively, communicate their ideas clearly, and collaborate effectively. We follow an integrated course, developing strong conceptual understanding and procedural fluency across all strands of Mathematics, with strong emphasis on the relevance to the world around them. All students are encouraged to be active participants in the discovery of patterns, relationships and concepts through differentiated inquiry and investigation, thus developing problem-solving skills that transcend the discipline.

### Physical & Health Education (PHE)

Middle School students are offered the opportunity to experience a wide variety of sporting and physical activities. PHE fosters the development of knowledge, skills and attributes that will contribute to a balanced and healthy lifestyle. We use local community gymnasiums, our High School facilities and the wonderful natural landscape that surrounds us here in Central Switzerland. The curriculum is balanced to include individual and team sports incorporating a variety of transferable skills, techniques and conceptual understanding. We want our Middle School students to experience the satisfaction of performing an activity well whilst developing a greater understanding of their bodies and how they can use them to express themselves. Ultimately we want students to develop passion and love for physical activity and understand the life-long benefits that sport offers their physical and emotional well-being.



### Science

The overall aim of the study of science in the Middle School is to deliver an effective student-centred programme that engages students kinesthetically and cognitively in a rich and rigorous inquiry-driven laboratory programme. Students will study Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Environmental Science, which will give them a strong foundation in scientific literacy, along with sound knowledge and understanding of scientific concepts, theories and processes. The programme provides students with opportunities to expand, change, enhance, and modify the ways in which they view the world. Students actively participate in safe, hands-on, scientific investigations and develop the skills associated with the formation of scientific explanations. For many children, this is their first opportunity to experience working in a fully-equipped laboratory environment, and our Science team captures this excitement and wonder.





## ISZL Middle School - Beyond the Classroom

Our Middle School responds explicitly to the academic and personal development of every young adolescent. We believe that any academic progress is deeply connected to their socio-emotional learning journey and that we are responsible for fostering the development of the whole child. Socio-emotional development is not a separate area of study in its own right – it is intertwined in everything we do to help support our students' understanding of themselves and the world around them.

The Middle School Personal Development Programme is designed to support and challenge students in the development of key life skills. One aspect that runs throughout the year is our Personal, Social Health Education (PSHE) programme which focuses upon developmentally-appropriate and relevant areas of discussion and experience. Examples include sexuality and relationships, addiction, and digital citizenship. The purpose of our PSHE programme is to arm our students with vital communication skills and strategies and to develop empathy and healthy relationships to aid their growth into caring, responsible global citizens.

A second, equally important, aspect of our Personal Development Programme is our dedication to service learning. Students choose from a variety of options or create their own groups as they seek to work together towards an agreed common goal. The real-world setting, team collaboration, and the cycle of work and reflection combine to see genuine action taking place. Action comes in many forms, from environmental advocacy to awareness and ensuring we are a safe space for our LGBTQ+ community; from global charity work to supporting the transition of our Grade 5 students into Middle School. We believe that service extends learning beyond the classroom, fosters key interpersonal skills, and provides an important experience of working with diverse members of the ISZL and wider communities.



Personal Development Week, usually taking place in September, sees each grade level travelling to a suitable central European location outside of Switzerland. It is an ideal opportunity for students to further develop independence as well as strengthening relationships with peers and teaching staff across the Grade level. The activities and experiences the students take part in provide natural links to the academic curriculum, whilst developing social awareness, team building, and leadership skills. For students and staff alike, this is an integral part of the beginning of their academic year, enabling them to make strong connections that build a strong foundation for the rest of the year.

The after-school clubs and sports programme is an important supplement to our academic offering. Students can elect to participate in a number of activities ranging from clubs centred on the arts and sciences to those involving competitive and non-competitive athletics. The diversity of activities on offer ensures that there is something for everyone, and that students have the opportunity to explore their interests in a more relaxed setting outside of the traditional school day. The clubs are a time for students to connect with one another around a mutual interest, supporting students' development while cultivating skills that can serve them throughout their lives.



## ISZL Middle School - Parents, Children and School Working Together

Developmentally, in seeking greater independence, Middle School-age students increasingly separate school and home life, and can become more reluctant to share their daily stories and experiences. However, we believe that the partnership between the child, school, and home is integral to success and in providing the support mechanisms that children need at this age. We know through experience, that when life becomes difficult at this age, we do our best work for the child when the home-school partnership is strong, and communication is timely and effective.

Parents are encouraged to play an active role in their children's Middle School learning journey, participating in activities within the school setting such as parent-teacher-student conferences, volunteer work, and attending school functions and workshops. A home-school partnership involves genuine collaboration and coordination between families and schools on key issues relevant to both the school's and the family's goals for their children's education. It involves two-way systems of support that cross both home and school settings.

As a Middle School, we aim to be proactive communicators, utilising the strength of the grade-level teams and support services to help home and school work together in an effective partnership. We recognise and celebrate the school's and home's shared interest in, and responsibility for, the child. An informal motto of 'no surprises' is in place; with clear and timely communication in place, where possible, no group in this partnership should be surprised by the conversations taking place.



ISZL Middle School is a safe and welcoming environment specifically designed to engage, challenge, and inspire our early adolescents.

We are a community of learners determined to make the world - or our corner of it - a better, kinder place.

We do this by ensuring we value each of our Middle School students, celebrating their successes and supporting their journey as they develop a greater sense of self.

We look forward to welcoming you into our Middle School community.





## A WORLD CLASS LEARNING COMMUNITY

The International School of Zug and Luzern (ISZL) is an independent co-educational, non-profit day school serving the international community of Central Switzerland by providing a comprehensive education from Early Years to university preparation, from ages 3 to 18.

As an International Baccalaureate (IB) World School, ISZL is authorised by the IB Organisation to offer the Primary Years, Middle Years, IB Diploma and Career-related Pathway Programmes. In addition, students in Grades 11 and 12 have the option of taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses and exams, which are audited by the College Board.

ISZL has been accredited by the prestigious and highly respected Council of International Schools (CIS) and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). ISZL is a member of the Swiss Group of International Schools (SGIS) and the Educational Consortium of International Schools (ECIS).

ISZL is supervised by the Educational Authorities of the Canton of Zug and operates with their approval.

## A NON-PROFIT FOUNDATION

ISZL is registered as a non-profit foundation (Stiftung) in Switzerland.

## EINE LERNGEMEINSCHAFT DER WELTKLASSE

Die International School of Zug and Luzern (ISZL) ist eine unabhängige, gemeinnützige Tagesschule die der internationalen Gemeinschaft der Zentralschweiz eine umfassende Ausbildung vom Vorschulalter bis hin zur Universitätsvorbereitung für 3 – 18 Jährige anbietet.

ISZL ist als International Baccalaureate (IB) World School durch die IB Organisation autorisiert die Primary Years, Middle Years, IB Diploma und Career-related Pathway anzubieten. Ausserdem haben Schüler der 11. und 12. Klasse die Möglichkeit, Advanced Placement (AP) Kurse zu belegen und Examen abzulegen. Alle AP Kurse werden vom College Board überprüft.

ISZL ist akkreditiert vom renommierten und hochangesehenen Council of International Schools (CIS) und der New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). Die Schule zeigt damit, dass ihre akademischen Programme von höchster Qualität sind.

ISZL wird von der Bildungsbehörde des Kantons Zug beaufsichtigt, und wird mit deren Genehmigung geführt.

## EINE GEMEINÜTZIGE STIFTUNG

ISZL ist nach schweizerischem Recht als gemeinnützige Stiftung organisiert.

