

# When art becomes a way of life at the International School of Brussels (ISB)

Imagine a place where a child's creativity becomes their biggest lifeline; where anything is possible as long as they can envision it in their mind. To countless students from all over the world, this is exactly how it feels to learn and grow as an artist at the International School of Brussels.

From a very young age, students are taught to view their craft as something that is much more powerful than the instrument in their hand, or the words they have to memorise. To them, art becomes a way of life, inspiring them to develop a profound sense of respect for themselves and others.



space, students will use a completely different part of their body and mind, and so it is vital that we provide an environment where they feel safe enough to try out different personas, experimenting with themselves and with the perception of others". A similar experience will take place in an Art room, in front of a blank canvas, when a student is given the freedom, trust, and structure they need to pursue their unique artistic vision. Or, when a child picks up their favourite instrument at the end of a long day.

Eric Delson, High School Choral Music Teacher, and Violeta Fernandez, Upper School Strings Teacher, explained how students can experience a tremendous growth when they step outside their comfort zone: "in school, there is always so much peer pressure to conform that participating in the Arts can be a huge step for some students - but once they take it, then they truly come out of their shell and develop important qualities such as poise, confidence, and an eloquent use of language".

## A personalised approach to discovering the world

The Arts programme at ISB offers an impressive spectrum of choice for all students. In the Lower School, the Arts are embedded within the core curriculum while in the Upper School, 98% of the students participate in one of ISB's many Arts Elective classes. Student-artists also have the choice between several different pathways to graduation including the US High School Diploma, the IB Diploma, the BTEC Art & Design and, for those taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses, ISB offers an AP Music Theory course. This unique and personalised journey, which often culminates in a post-secondary arts education, is just one of the many

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## A safe space for all students to thrive

At ISB, Music, Drama, and Visual Arts are an integral part of the learning for all students in the Early Childhood Centre all the way to Grade 12. No matter how much English they speak, or what relationship they may have with the world of Art, every child will step into a safe space where they are encouraged to experiment, and to find their own creative voice. Alan Hayes, Head of Performing Arts at ISB, described the importance of creating a warm community where everyone feels comfortable enough to be themselves and take risks: "in this





aspects that makes the ISB Arts programme so accessible and meaningful for every child.

Another aspect is the way that challenge is embedded at every level. As an inclusive school, there is a real opportunity for students who wish to pursue a professional career in the industry to develop the skills and discipline needed to do so. Leigh Harte, High School Head of Visual Arts, talked about the importance of being able to offer a wide spectrum of choice and challenge to all students: “offering such a personalised programme allows us to help our students become functional artists in their own right: amongst other things, it involves learning how to work in the industry, prepare portfolios, and truly understand what their next steps as an artist will be”. Each year, the Arts teachers build a new curriculum adapted to their students’ needs. They take the time to get to know them as individuals and to evaluate what works well, what doesn’t, and what the students connect with the most. In this way, they are able to provide authentic assessments and real, individualised experiences such as tours, retreats, field trips to some of the world’s most prominent art scenes, opportunities to participate in renowned international festivals, and stunning Art & Design exhibitions.

Christine de Lannoy-Clervaux, Middle School Visual Arts, described just how wide and impactful the programme truly is: “by approaching and celebrating the world both in our curriculum, and in the way that we teach, we do not set out to create the perfect artist but rather to educate the critical eye, helping students develop important life skills and an enriched perception of the world that can support them in any context, in any future”.

## A passionate team of educators who care

At the core of such a vibrant, inclusive, and personalised programme is a strong team of art educators who love what they do and who collaborate closely to support the ideas of all of their students. At ISB, student-artists enjoy a real creative freedom in developing their own path to success, while being supported by a structured pedagogical framework that guides

and directs them. Hayes added how empowering students can lead to a culture of trust and a high work ethic: “giving students so much ownership over their work can be scary for both the teacher and the student, but it is also extremely rewarding: kids learn how to develop a true sense of respect - for their craft, for themselves, and for one another”. Referring to the strong, collaborative spirit that exists amongst the ISB Arts teachers, Harte added: “we are so lucky that nothing is impossible at this school - the kids challenge us every year and there is nothing that we can’t figure out between us, as a team, to help bring their visions to life”.

ISB also has the fortune of being located just 10m from a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the beautiful Forêt de Soignes. The forest offers its students the possibility to be fully immersed in a natural environment, just a short distance from the vibrant and ever-evolving arts scene of the city of Brussels.

Promoted by the International School of Brussels (ISB)

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