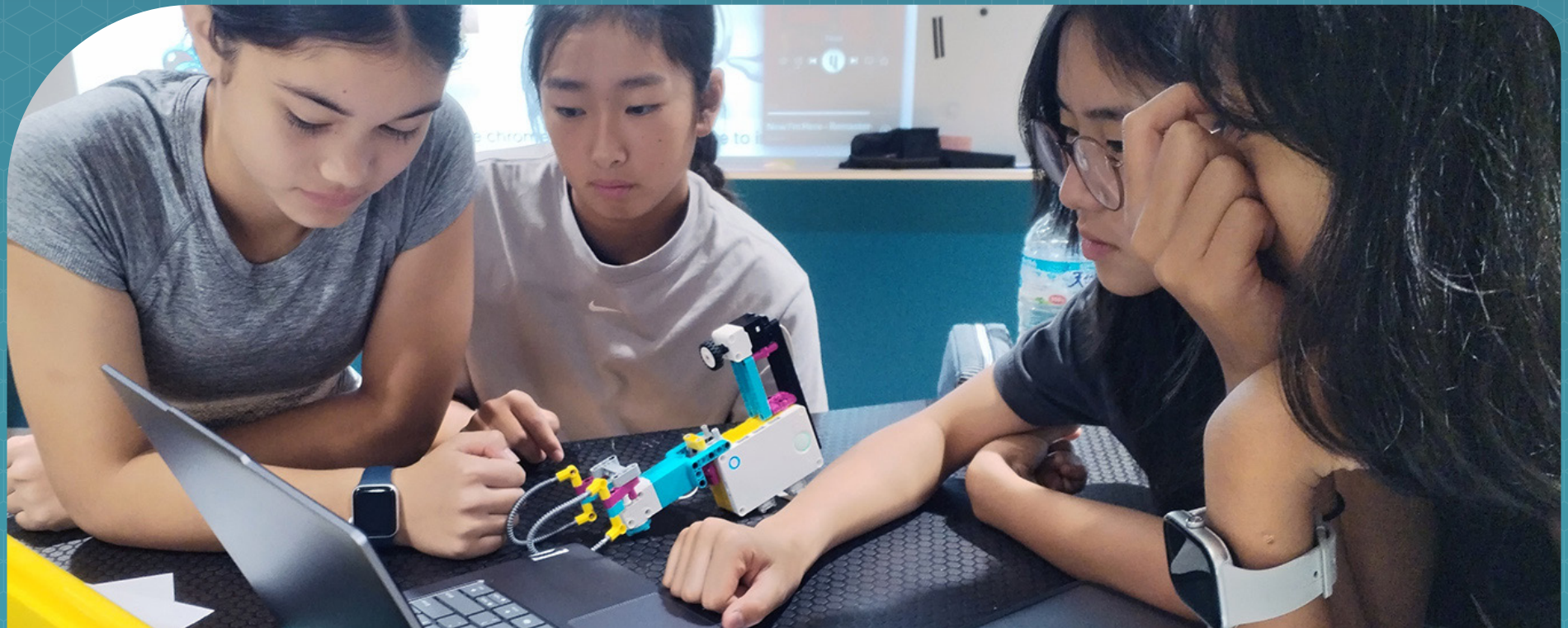
The Science of Learning in Action at NIS

NIS LEARNING PRINCIPLES & TEACHING STANDARDS



THE NIS LEARNING PRINCIPLES AND TEACHING STANDARDS

A Research-Informed Commitment to Learning





We believe that excellent teaching is the most powerful force in your child's education

Excellent learning does not happen by chance. It is intentionally designed, carefully supported, and grounded in a growing body of research about how children learn best. The *Science of Learning & Teaching at NIS* brings together cognitive science, educational research, and professional practice into a coherent model that shapes every classroom experience.

This model reflects a simple but powerful belief: academic rigor and whole-child learning are not competing priorities. Research consistently shows that students learn most deeply when they feel safe, challenged, connected, supported, and actively engaged in the learning process. Belonging, emotional safety, meaningful challenge, feedback, and student ownership are not additions to rigorous learning; they are the conditions that make rigorous learning possible.

Our five Learning Principles describe the conditions under which learning becomes deep, lasting, and meaningful. These principles are grounded in widely recognized research in cognitive science, educational psychology, motivation, feedback, and child development. They shape how teachers design learning experiences, structure classrooms, support student growth, and foster engagement.

From these Learning Principles emerge the NIS Teaching Standards; the professional expectations that define what effective teaching looks like in practice at NIS. Organized across five domains, the standards articulate how teachers create safe and inclusive learning environments, design active and inquiry-based learning experiences, use assessment to improve learning, challenge and support every learner, and uphold the professional responsibilities of teaching.

Within each domain, the Foundation and Core Standards make excellent teaching visible and observable. They define the practices, habits, and professional expectations that ensure students experience consistent, high-quality learning across the school. These standards also guide professional reflection, collaboration, coaching, and continuous growth, ensuring that teaching at NIS continues to evolve alongside both research and the needs of learners.

Together, the Learning Principles and Teaching Standards form a shared commitment to learning at NIS: one that is intellectually rigorous, deeply human, research-informed, and intentionally designed to help every child inquire, inspire, impact, and belong.

How Learning Happens

At NIS, our Learning Principles describe the conditions under which learning becomes deep, lasting, and meaningful. Grounded in research and shaped by classroom practice, these principles guide how teachers design learning experiences, support student growth, and foster engagement across the school. Together, they create learning environments that are intellectually challenging, emotionally supportive, purposeful, and connected to the world beyond the classroom.

THE FIVE LEARNING PRINCIPLES:

1. Good Struggle

Learning happens when students are working just beyond their comfort zone — experiencing a 'good struggle' that stretches their thinking without overwhelming them.

Research shows that learning strengthens when challenge is carefully calibrated: demanding enough to promote growth, but supported enough to remain productive. At NIS, teachers intentionally design learning experiences that encourage students to think deeply, persist through difficulty, and develop confidence through effort and reflection.

AT NIS, THIS MEANS:
Students work just beyond what they can do independently, with enough challenge for genuine thinking and enough support to succeed and grow. They try, revise, persist, and learn from mistakes.

2. Real and Authentic Contexts

Learning is most meaningful when it connects to the real world. We design experiences that are as genuine and purposeful as possible.

Research on motivation and transfer of learning shows that students engage more deeply and retain learning more effectively when they understand its relevance and purpose. At NIS, learning is intentionally connected to authentic issues, real-world experiences, and meaningful inquiry.

AT NIS, THIS MEANS:
Students connect learning to meaningful situations and use what they know in new contexts. Learning matters when students can take it beyond the lesson and apply it elsewhere.

3. Rich Feedback Loops

Students grow when they have ongoing, meaningful feedback that develops their ownership, autonomy, and love of learning.

Research consistently shows that timely, specific, and actionable feedback is one of the most powerful influences on student growth. At NIS, assessment is not simply about measuring performance; it is used continuously to guide learning, shape instruction, and develop student ownership.

AT NIS, THIS MEANS:
Students regularly reflect on their learning. Feedback flows three ways: students show teachers what they understand, teachers respond with clear next steps, and students use self- and peer-feedback to revise, improve, and grow.

4. Shared Ownership of Learning

What we learn, how we learn, and how we demonstrate that learning is negotiated between teacher and learner to maximize relevance, engagement, ownership, and effectiveness.

Research on self-regulated learning and guided instruction shows that students become more effective learners when they are supported in planning, monitoring, and reflecting on their learning. At NIS, teachers intentionally create opportunities for students to contribute to goals, success criteria, inquiry, and reflection while maintaining strong instructional guidance.

AT NIS, THIS MEANS:
Students help shape what they learn, how they learn, and how they show their learning. Teachers guide the journey, while students have a meaningful voice in it.

5. Emotions Matter in Learning

We recognize that learners have emotions and that these emotions profoundly impact learning.

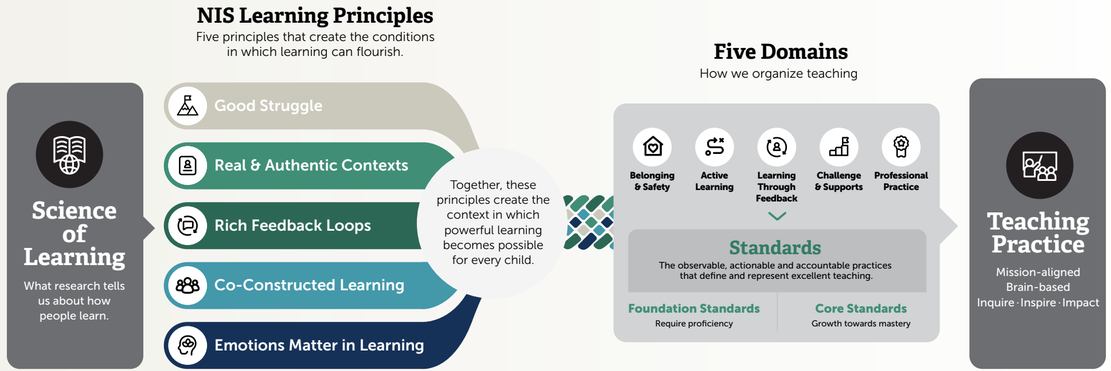
Research shows that students learn best when they feel psychologically safe, emotionally supported, and connected to the learning community. At NIS, we recognize that belonging, trust, and emotional well-being are essential foundations for engagement, risk-taking, and academic growth.

AT NIS, THIS MEANS:
Learning is shaped by emotion. We pay attention to what students bring, what teachers bring, and what the learning itself creates, so students feel safe, engaged, and ready to learn.



From Learning Principles to Teaching Practice

Teaching excellence is not defined by a single lesson, program, or philosophy. It is defined by the consistent daily practices that create classrooms where students feel safe, challenged, engaged, supported, and empowered to grow. Our Learning Principles describe the conditions that help students learn deeply and meaningfully, and our Teaching Standards flow from those principles, translating them into intentional classroom practice. They do not function independently of one another; they are intricately and intentionally connected. The Learning Principles answer the question: *How do children learn best?* **and the Teaching Standards answer the question:** *How (and how well) do teachers intentionally design learning opportunities to meet those criteria?*



The Five Teaching Standard Domains

The NIS Teaching Standards are organized into five domains that describe the essential dimensions of excellent teaching practice. Within each domain, the Foundation Standards represent the required competencies of daily professional practice; the essential elements every teacher must consistently demonstrate. The Core Standards extend this foundation toward mastery. They describe what it looks like when teachers move beyond proficiency to model, lead, and refine their craft, ensuring that our vision for learning takes deep and lasting root.

DOMAIN 1	**Belonging & Safety**	**Learning occurs best when all community members feel safe, valued, and respected.**	Strong learning environments are built on trust, emotional safety, positive relationships, and an inclusive classroom culture. Students learn best when they feel known, respected, supported, and able to participate authentically in the learning process.
DOMAIN 2	**Active Learning**	**Effective learning is active, real-world, and inquiry-based; "owned" by the students.**	Learning becomes more powerful when students are actively engaged in constructing understanding, solving problems, asking questions, and connecting learning to authentic contexts and meaningful inquiry.
DOMAIN 3	**Learning Through Feedback**	**Assessment is an essential teaching strategy for improving learning.**	Assessment is most effective when it helps students understand their progress, guides instructional decisions, and creates ongoing opportunities for reflection, revision, and growth.
DOMAIN 4	**Challenge & Support**	**All NIS students deserve to be challenged, supported, and successful.**	Excellent teaching responds to individual learner needs while maintaining high expectations for every student. Learning should be appropriately challenging, inclusive, accessible, and designed to help all students grow.
DOMAIN 5	**Professional Practice**	**Teaching is an honourable profession, and this should be reflected in our work.**	Teaching excellence depends on professionalism, reflection, collaboration, preparation, and a commitment to continuous growth in service of student learning and well-being.



TEACHING
DOMAIN 1

Belonging & Safety

1 DOMAIN 1 BELONGING & SAFETY

Learning occurs best when all community members feel safe, valued, and respected

Research consistently shows that students learn best when they experience psychological safety, strong relationships, inclusion, and emotional connection within the learning environment. When students feel safe participating, asking questions, taking risks, and making mistakes, they are more likely to engage deeply, persist through challenges, and develop confidence as learners.

At NIS, belonging and safety is not viewed as separate from academic learning. It is one of the conditions that make rigorous learning possible. This domain defines the professional expectations that guide teachers in creating classroom environments where students feel respected, supported, included, and ready to learn.

Through intentional relationship-building, responsive classroom management, collaboration, safeguarding, and strong partnerships with families, teachers create communities where every learner is known, valued, and able to participate meaningfully.

STUDENT IMPACT

Students who feel safe, valued, and connected are more willing to participate, share ideas, ask questions, and take intellectual risks. A strong sense of belonging helps students develop positive relationships, self-confidence, and the trust needed to fully engage in learning and community life.



Learning occurs best when all community members feel safe, valued, and respected.

Foundation Standards (REQUIRED PROFICIENCY)

Positive Relationships & Inclusive Culture

Teachers build positive, trusting relationships and foster a classroom culture rooted in respect, empathy, and inclusion, where every student feels emotionally safe, valued, and in which every voice can be heard.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Classrooms feel warm and emotionally safe: students take risks, share ideas, and experience a community where they are known, welcomed, and treated with dignity.

Classroom Management

Teachers deploy sensitive, appropriate and responsive classroom management strategies that support safe, effective and inclusive learning for all students.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Classrooms feel structured yet compassionate: students experience boundaries that are clear, consistent and equitable in meeting learners where they are, behaviour is addressed in ways that preserve relationships, and management strategies ensure every learner feels emotionally safe and able to engage.

Collegial Collaboration & Professional Culture

Teachers actively contribute to a professional culture grounded in collaboration, respect and trust.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Teachers treat colleagues with kindness, respect, and care, and adhere to the NIS Staff Norms of Collaboration: they are appropriately transparent and inclusive, put ideas on the table at the right time and through agreed processes, presume positive intent, communicate professionally but directly, respect colleagues' time, and speak up promptly when behaviour undermines trust, dignity, inclusion, or safety. In doing so, they create interactions that leave colleagues feeling heard, respected, safe, and valued, even when conversations are direct, difficult, or in disagreement.

Upholding the NIS Safeguarding Policy

Teachers know, follow, and act in accordance with the NIS Safeguarding Policy to protect every student from harm.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Safeguarding responsibilities are understood, proactive, and enacted consistently as an embedded part of daily practice.

Core Standards (MASTERY GROWTH TARGETS)

Relational Leadership & Deep Belonging

Teachers intentionally cultivate deep relational capacity across the classroom community by modelling inclusive dialogue, supporting positive peer relationships, and leading practices that strengthen belonging for all students - especially those who may feel unseen.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:

The culture exists within and beyond the classroom: students use inclusive language with one another, resolve tensions with empathy, and contribute to a community where every learner feels recognized and connected; practices that are explicitly taught, modelled, and reinforced by the teacher.

Partnership with Parents & Caregivers

Teachers build trusting, transparent relationships with parents and caregivers through timely, professional, and student-centred communication.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Families feel informed, supported, and involved in their child's progress; communication focuses on learning, growth, and shared responsibility.



TEACHING
DOMAIN 2

Active Learning



2 DOMAIN 2 ACTIVE LEARNING

Effective learning is active, real-world, and inquiry-based; “OWNED” by the students

Research consistently shows that students learn more deeply when they are actively engaged in constructing understanding rather than passively receiving information. Learning becomes more meaningful and transferable when students can connect ideas across contexts, apply knowledge authentically, and participate actively in the learning process.

At NIS, Active Learning reflects our belief that students learn best when they are intellectually engaged, challenged to think critically, connected to authentic contexts, and given meaningful ownership over their learning. Teachers intentionally design learning experiences that are purposeful, inquiry-driven, and grounded in real-world relevance while maintaining clear structure, guidance, and high expectations.

This domain defines the professional practices that help students become curious, reflective, capable, and independent learners.

▸ **STUDENT IMPACT**

Students become curious, independent thinkers who actively engage with ideas rather than simply receiving information. Through inquiry, authentic learning experiences, and meaningful ownership, they develop critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving skills, and the ability to apply learning in new and unfamiliar situations.



Effective learning is active, real-world, and inquiry-based; "OWNED" by the students.

Foundation Standards (REQUIRED PROFICIENCY)

Purposeful Design, Careful Preparation and Effective, Aligned Delivery

Lessons are intentionally designed, well-prepared, carefully sequenced, and delivered with clarity, with all activities aligned to and advancing students towards, the learning intentions.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Classrooms feel calm, organized, and purposeful: students settle quickly into meaningful learning, transitions are smooth, resources are ready, and every moment reflects thoughtful planning focused on learner progress towards the planned learning intentions.

Active Learning

Lessons are agentic and engaging, with students actively constructing meaning, making decisions, and doing the cognitive heavy lifting needed for deep learning.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Classrooms feel energetic and purposeful: students exploring, questioning, manipulating ideas and materials—while teacher talk is intentional, timely, and only as much as learners truly need.



Core Standards (MASTERY GROWTH TARGETS)

Co-Constructed Learning

Learning is co-designed with students through shared goals, inquiry questions, and success criteria that give learners genuine ownership of the process.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Students know why they are learning, help decide how to learn it, and can articulate what success looks like in their own words.

Interdisciplinary Impact

Lessons intentionally support students in applying knowledge and skills across contexts, within and beyond a subject area, to deepen understanding and promote meaningful transfer.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Students make connections across ideas, disciplines, or situations; apply learning to new problems or inquiries; and reflect on how knowledge can be used flexibly in different contexts.

Real World and Contextual Engagement

Learning experiences are grounded in authentic contexts, personal, local, community, or global, that help students make meaningful connections and think critically about the world they inhabit.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Classrooms buzz with discussion of real issues; students explore multiple perspectives and take informed action appropriate to their age, context, and level of understanding.

Digital and Media Fluency

Technology is seamlessly integrated to enhance inquiry, collaboration, and creativity, supporting ethical and responsible engagement with information.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Students confidently use digital tools to research, create, and communicate ideas, showing discernment and responsibility in online spaces.

TEACHING
DOMAIN 3

Learning Through Feedback

Assessment is an essential teaching strategy for improving learning

Research consistently shows that learning improves when students receive timely, specific, and actionable feedback that helps them understand where they are in their learning, where they need to go next, and how to improve. Effective assessment is not simply about measuring performance at the end of learning; it is an ongoing process that makes learning visible, informs teaching, and develops student ownership and reflection.

At NIS, assessment is viewed as an integral part of the learning process. Teachers continuously gather evidence of understanding, adjust instruction responsively, and create opportunities for students to reflect, revise, and grow. Through purposeful feedback loops, assessment becomes a tool for deeper understanding, greater independence, and continuous improvement.

This domain defines the professional practices that help students understand their progress, develop confidence as learners, and actively engage in improving their learning over time.

STUDENT IMPACT

Students develop a deeper understanding of how learning happens. Through reflection, feedback, and revision, they become more self-aware learners who can identify strengths, recognize areas for growth, and take increasing responsibility for improving their own performance.



Assessment is an essential teaching strategy for improving learning.

Foundation Standards (REQUIRED PROFICIENCY)

Clear Learning Intentions and Criteria for Success

Learning targets and success criteria are explicit, visible, and actively used by teachers and learners to guide progress throughout the lesson.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:
Learning intentions and success criteria are clear, shared, and visible; classrooms feel focused and purposeful as teachers and students alike can explain what is being learned, why it matters, and what success looks like.

Formative Assessment & Adjustment

Teachers constantly use formative assessment strategies during the course of a lesson to gather evidence of where students are in their learning and to adjust their teaching in response.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:
Classrooms feel responsive and tuned in: teachers are not guessing where students are, they know. Mid-lesson checks and quick plenaries make learning visible, with strategies such as circulating, no-hands-up questioning, whiteboards, and think-pair-share ensuring instruction stays focused and adaptive.

Closure and Synthesis

Every lesson ends with purposeful closure that helps students consolidate their learning and gives teachers clear evidence to guide next steps in planning.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:
The closing portion of the lesson is dedicated to deliberate closure and synthesis: students might synthesise key ideas, identify "muddy points" and areas of clarity, self-assess their progress, and/or name next steps while teachers gather quick, visible evidence to shape the following lesson.



Core Standards (MASTERY GROWTH TARGETS)

Effective Questioning

Teachers use purposeful questioning to engage all learners, extend thinking, and reveal insights that inform next steps in teaching and learning.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:
Classrooms sound like inquiry - with students responding, reasoning, and questioning back; teachers probe to stretch understanding rather than check recall.

Peer and Self-Assessment

Students routinely engage in meaningful peer and self-assessment that deepens reflection and improves learning outcomes.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:
Students give and receive feedback aligned to success criteria, using rubrics, exemplars, or protocols to guide quality reflection and next steps.

Feedback for Growth

Feedback is timely, specific, and actionable, guiding students to understand where they are, where they need to be, and how to close the gap.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:
Teachers provide feedback that is dialogic, not one-way; students act upon feedback, make revisions, and show visible improvement in subsequent work.

Data-Informed Teaching

Teachers collect and interpret assessment evidence over time to personalize instruction and ensure every student's progress and achievement.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:
Assessment information, from observation, dialogue, and data, shapes future planning; lessons feel responsive, inclusive, and intentionally adaptive.

TEACHING
DOMAIN 4

Challenge & Support



4 DOMAIN 4 CHALLENGE & SUPPORT

All NIS students deserve to be challenged, supported, and successful.

Research consistently shows that students learn best when learning is appropriately challenging, responsive to individual needs, and supported through inclusive and intentional teaching practices. Learning strengthens when students experience productive struggle, receive appropriate scaffolding, and engage with learning that is accessible, meaningful, and ambitious.

At NIS, we believe that high expectations and strong support must exist together. Excellent teaching does not lower standards for some learners or provide challenge only for others. Instead, teachers intentionally design learning that is responsive, inclusive, and appropriately demanding so that every student is able to grow, participate meaningfully, and experience success.

This domain defines the professional practices that ensure all learners are challenged thoughtfully, supported intentionally, and empowered to develop confidence, resilience, and independence as learners.

STUDENT IMPACT

Students learn to embrace challenge, persist through difficulty, and develop confidence in their ability to grow. By experiencing both high expectations and appropriate support, they build resilience, adaptability, and a strong sense of personal agency as learners.



All NIS students deserve to be challenged, supported, and successful.

Foundation Standards (REQUIRED PROFICIENCY)

Differentiation, Support & Challenge

Learning is responsive to individual needs and ambitious for every learner, ensuring that each student is appropriately supported, extended, and able to succeed.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Classrooms feel intentionally varied and inclusive: students work on tasks that reflect their readiness, interests, or learning needs; and learners with support plans or specific learning or behavioural needs are clearly supported through purposeful adjustments that help them thrive.

Language for Learning

Teachers intentionally develop and model the language needed for learning, creating opportunities for students to speak, listen, read, and write as ways of constructing and expressing understanding.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Classrooms feel linguistically rich and inclusive: key language is visible on walls and in routines; students use talk, writing, and academic vocabulary to develop ideas; and teachers draw on students' full linguistic repertoires—using strategies like translanguaging, sentence stems, and structured talk—to ensure every learner can access, express, and deepen understanding.



Core Standards (MASTERY GROWTH TARGETS)

Responsive Differentiation

Instruction, tasks, and assessments are intentionally varied to meet readiness, interest, and learning profile, while maintaining high expectations for all.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Lessons feel inclusive and dynamic; teachers adjust in real time to student responses, offering multiple entry points and pathways to success.

Strategic Challenge

Learning experiences are designed to push every student beyond comfort toward mastery through complex thinking and problem-solving.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Students experience productive struggle; grappling with ideas, making mistakes, and persisting with support, while teachers scaffold and extend understanding.

Inclusive Curriculum Design for Access, Representation and Belonging.

Teachers make deliberate curriculum choices - content, pedagogy and assessment - to ensure learning reflects diverse voices and perspectives, avoids "single story" narratives, and promotes inclusion and equitable access for all learners so every student feels capable, valued, and empowered to succeed.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Students recognise themselves and others in the curriculum, have multiple entry points to learning, and engage critically and empathetically with the world.



TEACHING
DOMAIN 2

Professional Practice

5 DOMAIN 5 PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Teaching is an honourable profession, and this should be reflected in our work.

Research consistently shows that the quality of teaching has one of the greatest impacts on student learning and well-being. Excellent teaching depends not only on instructional skill, but also on professionalism, reflection, preparation, collaboration, and a commitment to continuous growth. Strong learning environments are built by educators who approach their work with integrity, care, accountability, and a deep sense of responsibility toward students and the wider community.

At NIS, professionalism is viewed as an essential part of teaching excellence. Teachers are expected to model the values, behaviors, and standards that support a positive and high-functioning learning community. This includes how they prepare, communicate, collaborate, reflect on practice, and represent the school in both formal and informal settings.

This domain defines the professional expectations that help ensure consistency, trust, high standards, and continuous improvement across the school.

STUDENT IMPACT

Students benefit from learning environments that are consistent, purposeful, and grounded in high professional standards. Strong professional practice helps create classrooms where expectations are clear, learning time is maximized, communication is effective, and students experience a high-quality education throughout their journey at NIS.



Teaching is an honourable profession, and this should be reflected in our work.

Foundation Standards (REQUIRED PROFICIENCY)

Professionalism, Presence & Partnership

Teachers uphold high professional standards in how they speak, act, and present themselves, representing NIS with integrity in all settings and maintaining appropriate boundaries within the school community.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Classrooms and corridors feel calm and professional: teachers model respectful language, maintain a positive presence, and dress and behave in ways fully befitting an NIS staff member. In the wider community, and especially at events where parents and students are present, including those involving the children they teach, teachers navigate blurred boundaries with sound judgment, sustaining warm relationships while upholding clear professional expectations. Whether on campus, online, or at community gatherings, their conduct and boundaries reinforce the culture, trust, and reputation of the school.



Core Standards (MASTERY GROWTH TARGETS)

Reflective Practice & Lifelong Learning

Teachers actively seek feedback, reflect on their impact, and pursue ongoing professional growth to improve student learning and wellbeing.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Teachers inquire into their own practice, invite feedback from students and colleagues, act on it, and use reflection to guide continual improvement.

Professional Excellence & Accountability

Teachers maintain high professional standards through meticulous preparation, organization, and documentation that support learning, wellbeing, and smooth school operations.

IN PRACTICE, THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Planning, grading, and reporting are completed on time and to a high standard; classrooms and digital spaces are organized, purposeful, and professional.

OUR LEADERSHIP STANDARDS

Leadership at NIS is held to the same high expectations. Our leaders are expected to keep learning and student wellbeing at the centre of every decision, grow the people around them, build effective systems, and model professional integrity.

NAGOYA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

The Science of Learning & Teaching

NIS LEARNING & TEACHING STANDARDS