

Secondary School

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A Welcome Note from the English Department

Monday, 12th September, 2011

Dear Parents,

To those of you new and unfamiliar with the English Department within Secondary welcome to BISI. I write this letter to inform and reassure you of our high standards, expectations and curricular plans to improve your child's English. To parents already friends, welcome to another academic year in which, once again, we strive to improve on continued success and literary excellence. Our continued goal this year is to enthuse, inspire critical appreciation and better the standard of your child's reading, writing and analytical skill.

This year the English Department has grown and now includes the ESL Department. Already many students have been allocated support with their English to improve accessibility of the school curriculum and raise individualised language targets. As confidence and standards improve these students should quickly find themselves better equipped for mainstream English. I am pleased to inform you that Mrs. Eileen Aydinlar joins us in this quest. Eileen comes from our Etiler primary campus and will be fortunate enough to support many familiar faces from Year 6 as they settle during this transition period.

I am equally delighted to inform you that Mrs. Hannah Oxlade, who joined us early 2010 to cover Miss Lewis' maternity leave, has remained within the department to work alongside my full-time colleagues Mr Muller and Miss Lewis. Hannah has been teaching for five years and is especially focused on Year 12 and 13 owing to much experience teaching upper school in Nottingham. Mr Mark Muller is from South Africa, has been teaching for 18 years and brings a vast amount of experience and wisdom to his teaching. Fiona, currently in her fourth year here, has been teaching English and ESL for over 10 years - she taught for a number of years in London, but her interest in development and human rights led her to spend three years as a volunteer teacher in Nepal. She, alongside Mrs Oxlade, now pursues this interest through the school's MUN programme and dedicates much of her time enabling students to debate with confidence, weighted structure and strategy.

This will be my fourth year as Head of the English Department here at BISI and my sixteenth year of teaching. Prior to my arrival I was a County English AST (Advanced Skills Teacher) and a member of its Literacy Consultant Team aiming to improve the application of the UK National Strategy, Literacy and Learning of English within the authority's school catchment area. During the last years before my arrival here in Turkey too much of this was at inspectorate level with observations, meetings, reports and tick boxes. I am now very happy to be spending most of my working hours with students and once again within the classroom where all good teachers belong. Much of my previous work included the observation and mentoring of some superb assessment focused teaching which I, along with my team, endeavour to bring to the benefit of learners here within the BISI English classroom.

This year then, including myself, there are the five of us. Together we shoulder the responsibility in the main delivery of English across all stages and range within Secondary BISI. We have enjoyed academic success over the last three years, where our IGCSE and IB results have been way above the average of previous years and the UK national average. This year we again exceeded targets where 89% of our students passed English Language with A* to C grades and 100% passed English

Literature - in which 13 students of the 20 entered achieved the highest possible grade. Our pass rate for English as a Second Language was 80%.

It is not just academic success that we strive for however, the curriculum your child experiences within English is designed to 'switch them on' to textual convention and appreciation. This is done as dynamically as is possible but also supported by extra-curricular attention. Plans for this year include theatre trips, workshops on creative writing, media and film studies clubs, visits from touring authors, and focus groups on poetry. All of these will run currently with initiatives laid out last year such as the 'Best Young Writer of the Year' and 'Best Poet of the Year', English intervention and literacy inter-house competitions. This year promises to be even better than previous ones and we all look forward to working with you to raise standards.

To ensure this happens we continue to maintain our high expectations in terms of presentation of work and preparedness for lessons. Please encourage your child to take on board the level of responsibility that this requires. In terms of homework this year, your child can expect one of three following possibilities: that homework, albeit shortened, may be given after every lesson; or perhaps two relatively short pieces may be given per week; alternatively, one extended piece and one short piece could instead be given. Please do support your child by helping them to organise their time and the planning process that much of their English homework will necessitate. On rare occasions where no homework has been set there is an expectation that students complete work, organise their notes or take the opportunity to do wider reading. Involvement with their planning and proof reading stages will encourage them to become better writers and guarantee improvement.

Very shortly I intend to share with you our programme for all years in English and alongside this inform you of our reading lists. This information has yet to be finalised but will help you keep track and support your child's reading and learning experience encountered within English lessons. On the school website you will find a brief explanation of our curriculum and in the English Handbook for Parents find an explanation of our aims and philosophy. Should you wish to contact me and discuss anything relating to your child's experience in English and ESL at BISI please do not hesitate to contact me. My school e-mail address is: r.gunnell@bisistanbul.org . Alternatively, phone the school reception to make an appointment to see me.

I look forward to another fruitful year ahead.
Yours sincerely,

Mr Russell Gunnell

