

Department of PR/Communications

Zekeriya köy Mahallesi, Kilyos Caddesi No: 227/1,2 Sarıyer-İstanbul, 34450

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Dear Parents

We would like to answer some Frequently Asked Questions that you may have regarding our school.

Educational Matters

Are all the teachers qualified?

Yes, all our teachers are qualified. The teachers must hold either a Bachelor of Education Degree or have a subject degree and then a teaching qualification, for example a Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) or equivalent. In addition to these qualifications, many of our teachers have a Master's degree and we have four teachers with PhDs. Additionally, foreign hire teachers must have a minimum of two years experience of teaching their subject in a school outside of Turkey prior to joining BISI. We do not accept a Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) or Certificate of English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) certificates as teaching qualifications.

Where do we recruit the teachers from?

The school works hard to employ the best teachers through various professional organisations and international advertising. The candidates attending recruitment fairs, mainly but not exclusively in London, are qualified teachers with the relevant experience and necessary qualifications that we are looking for. This is a condition of the recruitment agencies who do check candidates' qualifications prior to allowing them to be included in their database. We follow up references for the candidates and check their police clearance prior to employment at BISI.

What accreditations does the school have?

BISI believes in continuous improvement. The school is registered with the Turkish Ministry of Education and is accredited by the Council of British International Schools (COBIS)¹, the Council of International Schools (CIS)² and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)³. Accreditation from these bodies is not a gift, neither is it guaranteed and it is not permanent. The school is an International Baccalaureate (IB)⁴ World School offering the Diploma Programme and a centre for Cambridge International Examinations (CIE)⁵. The school was inspected by the Independent School Inspectorate (ISI)⁶ in 2010. Their inspection ensures that we meet the British Schools Overseas (BSO)⁷ standards as set by the British Government. Passing this inspection conferred Accredited School status with COBIS. We will have another BSO inspection this April 2016. This will be undertaken by the Schools Inspection Service (SIS)⁸ and BISI will now be re-inspected on a three year cycle. We wanted to analyse our progress against international standards as well as British standards.

¹ COBIS: www.cobis.org.uk

² CIS: www.cois.org

³ NEASC: <https://www.neasc.org/>

⁴ IB: www.ibo.org

⁵ CIE: www.cie.org.uk/

⁶ ISI: www.isi.net

⁷ BSO: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/british-schools-overseas-standards-for-schools>

⁸ SIS: <http://www.schoolinspectionsservice.co.uk/>



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Our CIS and NEASC Accreditations were jointly granted in February 2013 following a visit by a team of Accreditation Evaluators representing the two bodies. At present these accreditations last for ten years but both are moving to a five year accreditation cycle shortly. The school has just completed the First Report on Progress and Planning, which was submitted to both organisations and was accepted by them. Our next visit from them will take place in 2018.

The IB require us to renew our registration with them every five years and we have recently completed this process successfully. Both the IB and CIE carry out unannounced visits on a regular basis to check our examination arrangements. One or both of these bodies visit us every year.

What curricula do we follow?

The Pre School and Primary School and the first three years of Secondary School follow the National Curriculum for England.⁹ We believe this is a clear, progressive curriculum, with children building on their skills and knowledge each year. In Years 10 and 11 we follow the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE)¹⁰. In Years 12 and 13 students follow the IB Diploma Programme¹¹.

How do the students' achievements compare to students at other schools?

At the end of Key Stage Two the expected level in Mathematics and Literacy is Level Four. At BISI, the majority of our students achieve Level Four, with many going on to achieve Level 5 and some even going on to achieve Level 6.

There are no external examinations in Key Stage 3, in line with Key Stage 3 in the United Kingdom. However, internal examinations at the end of each of the KS3 years ensure that student achievement and progress are maintained at the correct level to enable students to successfully enter the IGCSE Programme at the end of the Key Stage.

In Key Stage 4, our students study the IGCSE Programme which is a more rigorous programme than GCSE and is being taken up by an increasing number of schools in England. Over the last 5 years, the World Pass Rate for IGCSE¹² in the subjects which we offer at BISI has dropped from 81% to 79%. In the same period the pass rate for BISI students was 87% (2011), 88% (2012), 85% (2013), 87% (2014) and 96% (2015)

In Key Stage 5, our students study the IB Diploma Programme. Over the years the IBDP Full Diploma Programme pass rate¹³ has remained steady at approximately 79%. 5 years ago BISI had a pass rate which was well below the world average at just 68%, 4 years ago this had grown to 75% and three years ago our students gained a 100% pass rate. BISI students have maintained this rate ever since. The other main statistic for the IBDP is the mean points value. The world average for this statistic is steady at 30 points. Over the last 5 years BISI students have dipped below this figure just once with 29 points in 2012 and in the last two years our students have achieved a mean points value

⁹ National Curriculum for England: <https://www.gov.uk/national-curriculum/overview>

¹⁰ IGCSE: <http://www.cie.org.uk/programmes-and-qualifications/cambridge-secondary-2/cambridge-igcse/>

¹¹ IB Diploma Programme: <http://www.ibo.org/programmes/diploma-programme/>

¹² IGCSE Statistics: <http://www.cie.org.uk/programmes-and-qualifications/cambridge-secondary-2/cambridge-igcse/results-statistics/>

¹³ IBDP Statistics: <http://www.ibo.org/about-the-ib/facts-and-figures/statistical-bulletins/diploma-programme-statistical-bulletin/>



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of 33 points. This compares very favourably with schools around the world which are not selective in the earlier year groups and minimally selective at the IBDP level. It also compares very well with our closest competitor schools in Istanbul.

How do we know that our students are getting quality education?

Our accreditations are a guarantee of the quality of education we provide. We do not claim to be a perfect school but we do claim that we are constantly striving for improvement. The year on year improvement in results at both IGCSE and IBDP level over the last five years is evidence of this. Our students go to universities in many countries, though primarily the UK, Canada and the US. The majority of our students not only get their first choice university, they also get their first choice course. Last year we were extremely proud that one member of our Graduating Class went to Cambridge University and this year one member of the Class of 2016 has also been offered a place at Cambridge University.

Does the school have a University Counsellor?

Yes BISI has a full time University Counsellor who works individually with all students from Year 9 to 13, forming individual plans to assist them through each Key Stage towards choosing the best university course for them.

What extra-curricular clubs does the school offer?

The Pre School holds their clubs at lunchtime, the Primary School at lunchtime or after school. Sporting and creative clubs are offered. The Secondary School holds timetabled activities every Friday afternoon, and after school clubs which may be sporting, creative or academic three times a week. Additionally, the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) organise a range of activities on Sunday mornings throughout term time.

Calendar

How does the school organise the yearly calendar?

There are a number of considerations when organising the yearly calendar, including national holidays, religious holidays and also catering for the needs of the school community. The number of teaching days is 180, which is in line with most International schools. Although the school does not change the calendar once it is published, the school may be forced to make changes due to Ministry directives or by adverse weather conditions. Indeed, in the calendar for the 2016-2017 academic year, two extra teaching days have been built in to cover for possible days lost due to adverse weather or unexpected closure. Our holiday pattern follows the international holidays with Turkish national holidays. The teachers have seven additional training days added each year.

Why does the school close for snow days?

The school closes to ensure our students' safety. The City Campus is generally not affected by snow as much as the Zekeriyakoy Campus. The SLT carefully considers the welfare of our students and staff prior to any closure decision. Additionally both campuses will close upon direction from the Turkish Ministry of Education.

Why does BISI close on days when the Ministry of Education close all schools in Turkey?

All schools in Turkey are bound by the Ministry of Education directives unless the school is on Embassy grounds. Therefore, when an unexpected holiday is called, for example additional days for a



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Bayram holiday, then BISI has to follow the decision of the Ministry of Education.

Communication

How can I contact a member of staff if I need to?

All teachers in BISI have a school email address; firstinitial.surname@bisistanbul.org You can telephone the secretary and ask them to arrange a meeting with a teacher. In Pre/Primary there is a class parent representative who will always be ready to assist you with information regarding your child's class.

Secondary students have a Form Tutor who you may contact and of course you may contact subject teachers as necessary. The school operates an 'open door' policy. If you would like to come in to talk to a member of staff or one of the Senior Leadership Team about a concern, you can call the school or send an email to make an appointment.

Why do I not always receive information emails from School?

There may be various technical reasons why you may not be receiving emails from the school.

- We may have an invalid/incorrect email address for you, please check with the relevant school secretary to correct this issue.
- You may have been accidentally unsubscribed from the school mass mailing system. To correct this you will need to contact the Head of Communications on communications@bis.k12.tr . You will be sent a link to re-subscribe back to the BISI Vertical Response mass mailing system.
- Some email providers may bar emails from mass mailing systems. To correct this, please contact your email service provider to change the settings on your account to accept emails from the following email address:
British International School Ist@mail.vresp.com

How do you explain the recent negative publicity about the school?

There have been some negative comments about the school on social media. If you have a concern, we would like you to come and talk about it with us. We are all members of the BISI community and are here for the benefit of our children. In recent weeks a group purporting to represent BISI parents has been communicating via social media with some extremely damaging and untrue statements. It is believed that the aims of the group are to discredit and destroy BISI. We believe in honesty, integrity and respect: BISI reserves the right to take legal action against persons maliciously publishing false and harmful information about the school.

Facilities

What facilities has the school improved recently?

In the summer of 2015, the City Campus had a new playground floor laid at the Alkent Campus. We are waiting to move into the new City Campus in Etiler and hope to do this soon. Both libraries at the Zekeriyakoy campus were renovated; new changing rooms for the swimming pool were constructed; and the large gym was resurfaced. Additional teaching staff were employed in Secondary school with the appointment of a Teacher-Librarian and full-time University and Careers Counsellor.



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How is school nutrition organised?

The Zekeriyakoy Campus Manager arranges the menu alongside a member of the SLT. Our Campus Manager is qualified to calculate the nutrition value of the food and this is written on our menus. Fresh ingredients are purchased each week. We are sensitive to allergy requests and do our utmost to cater for every child's nutritional needs. If you have any queries about our menu, please contact the Head of PR/Communications. All parents are welcome to come to school to sample our food.

Security

In light of recent world events, what security does the school have?

The school subcontracts its security personnel to 'Adres Security', a private company. The head of the security company is well connected and communicates with the necessary security units in Istanbul. The school has links with security personnel from the American, British and Dutch Consulates and also from NATO.

BISI has a set of Crisis Action Plans to formalise procedures to deal with various different situations. These range from dealing with snow to dealing with a terrorist incident. Most of these are available on our website but those of a sensitive nature are kept confidential. Emergency drills are practised each term on each campus.

How does the school deal with bus safety issues?

The safety of our students is paramount. If there is a safety issue with the buses, it should be reported immediately to the school. The school will then meet with the AzAl management. They have their own internal procedures for dealing with different situations that may occur. If the school has definitive proof of dangerous driving we will request AzAl to reassign the driver.

Community

What is the role of the PTA in school?

The role of the PTA is a supportive one. They support school events for example the Careers Fair, Movie Nights and the summer Fun Day. The PTA help to raise funds for our chosen charities. The PTA started the Sunday Sports Clubs at the Zekeriyakoy Campus in 2011 and since then the sports offered have grown. From the outset it was decided that most of the funds raised would go to paying coaches with any extra monies donated to the Sports Department. This arrangement continues today.

Many parents give up their time to meet once a month to discuss upcoming events for our community. These meetings are attended by the Senior Leadership Team of the school. Feedback from these meetings is communicated to our community through open minutes and a monthly newsletter. The BISI PTA do not function in quite the same manner as PTAs in Turkish Schools: they are not a vehicle for complaints. Our Complaints Policy and Procedures¹⁴ can be found on the school website

Tuition Fees

Why do fees vary from school to school?

School fees vary around the world in much the same way as schools vary. Some schools have

¹⁴ BISI Policy Documents: <http://www.bis.k12.tr/SCHOOL/Communications-Policies--Newsletters.aspx>



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charitable status, such as the independent schools in the United Kingdom, some have foundation status and have been set up to be non-profit making. In these schools profits are either put directly back into the school or are put aside for future building programmes. Some are run by philanthropic individuals or families or societies. Some are supported by grants from governments. Some are schools which are run as a business by an individual and others are run as a business by a consortium who specialise in buying schools to run for profit. There are several such consortia in the world today.

There is no discussion between schools around the world on what level fees should be set. It is up to each individual school or school group to set the fees at the level, which they feel they need in order to be able to operate. The fees at BISI are broadly in line with those at comparable schools in Istanbul. There are many schools around the world, some less expensive than BISI and some more expensive. The real comparison must be with our competitors in Istanbul. There are many schools in Istanbul but BISI's only real competitor is IICS which is a non-profit school with similar tuition to BISI. MEFIS Istanbul is combined with a Turkish School system on the same campus and also has a similar fee structure to BISI. Despite the word British in its name, Tarabya British School is not affiliated with BISI and, though it is a member of COBIS, it has not been accredited. The official registered legal name is 'Ozel Tarabya Anadolu Lisesi', established in 2013 as a Turkish School by 'Ingiliz Okullari A.S', owned by Mr Gultekin. The name 'British' cannot be used by any educational entity as it is legally registered to the British International School Istanbul. The usage of the name 'British' by 'Ozel Tarabya Anadolu Lisesi' gives a misleading impression to parents that it is associated with our school. The British International School Istanbul High School Diploma is accredited by COBIS, CIS and NEASC and it is acceptable to universities in both the UK and the USA. The 'Ozel Tarabya Anadolu Lisesi' High School Diploma cannot, under Turkish regulations carry the name British, and neither is it accredited by any international accrediting agencies, and would therefore not be accepted by universities in the UK or the USA.

Parents do have a choice in where they have their children educated. If parents believe that they have more value for money at another school then we will not do anything to hinder the movement of a student from BISI to that school, rather we will always provide references to a new school either in Istanbul or further afield and we will always provide the facility to take entrance examinations should such a facility be needed.

Why has BISI changed currency from the Euro to the Great British Pound?

Whilst the fees were in Euros, the school lost approximately 20% to 25% of its revenues due to currency fluctuations. During the last 18 months, the USD:Euro exchange rate has dropped from 1:1.40 to 1:1.10. The devaluation of the Euro has been intense and fluctuations have adversely affected the school finances. The forecast for the USD:Euro exchange rate shows the Euro falling further in the coming months. The school's expenditure is mainly in US Dollars; foreign staff salaries, staff housing allowance, the rent for the City Campus and the mortgage for the new City Campus are all paid in USD. The currency fluctuation situation could not be allowed to continue as it made future planning all but impossible. Changing to GBP gives the school a more stable exchange rate against the US Dollar based on its past performance. The increase in fees combined with the change to GBP is designed to facilitate the continuing improvement of the school whilst ensuring it remains financially stable in the current economic climate. The Board of Governors has a duty to ensure the long- and short-term finances of the school are sufficient for it to fulfil its educational obligations for the foreseeable future.



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How and when does the school issue invoices?

Invoices are issued for all students once payment has been made. If you have not received an invoice, you should contact the Admissions Office.

Why is there a difference between the full payment plan and instalment plan?

A preferential rate is given to parents who pay in full by the deadline of 1 February. From a financial planning point of view it is preferable to have all fees collected in advance. BISI understands that some parents prefer to spread out their payments and so has an installment plan that allows parents to complete payments by 1 November.

Why was the cut-off date for full payment recently moved to February?

The cut-off date for full payment was changed to 1 February in November of 2014 for the 2015/2016 academic year. This change was brought in to better manage the school's cash flow and finances. Other schools do not offer an installment plan but require fees to be paid in full prior to the start of the academic year; it was felt that a move to this model would have been more difficult for our parents. Approximately one-third of our parents take advantage of the preferential rate given by paying their fees early.

Will the school continue to provide quality education?

The current political situation in Turkey is not helping any of the schools in Istanbul to recruit the best quality teachers, but we continue to strive to do so. The Secondary school has enjoyed a particularly low turn-over of staff this year, with just two teachers electing not to extend their contract. This means that we are able to continue offering the same high quality education to our students as we have in the past. We also have a strong core of long-standing teachers who are extremely knowledgeable in their subjects and are also very happy and settled at BISI. BISI does have plans for the future, which include improvements to our campuses, to the courses we offer and the quality of education our students receive. We have had a Strategic Plan in place for the last four years and will very soon start writing its successor. The accreditations we are very proud to have gained and the external examination results we are very proud for our students to have achieved have not come about by accident. They are the result of a lot of hard work by many members of our community: the teachers, the students, the parents and the PTA, the Board of Governors and the Chairman all working together for the good of our school. We hope this hard work and cooperation across the community will ensure that BISI will continue to provide a high quality education in the future.

We hope that we have answered some of your questions in our Frequently Asked Questions letter. Please note that the Board of Governors and Senior Leadership Team of the school are always available for you to ask any other questions you may have. Additionally you may send questions to the Chairs of the PTA.

Yours faithfully,

BISI Communications

