

SPOTLIGHT ON:

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF PARIS (ISP)

Paris as a Classroom: How One International School Turned a City into a Living Curriculum



International School of Paris
Educating for complexity

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EDUCATING FOR COMPLEXITY

For the International School of Paris (ISP), the city is much more than a backdrop; it is a living, breathing extension of the school's three campuses. For this June issue of Spotlight On, ECIS met with Natasha Hale (pictured), the school's recently appointed Director of Learning and Innovation, to discuss how ISP is redefining high-quality learning by stepping outside the traditional classroom.

For Natasha, the "innovation" in her title is as much about refinement as it is about revolution. Rather than a complete pedagogical overhaul, as Natasha puts it: "It's just about gradual tweaks and improvements on what we're already doing." Far from an understatement, this reflective approach ensures that change is sustainable, evidence-informed, and deeply impactful.

Natasha's new role affords her the agency to shape pedagogical development and professional learning, transforming the educational experience for ISP's 725 students and 120 teaching staff.



CAMPUS FACT FILE: THE 16TH ARRONDISSEMENT

ISP's three campuses are seamlessly woven into the historic fabric of Paris, all within a 15-minute walk of one another.

- 1. Primary School:** Nestled near the Bois de Boulogne (Early Years–Grade 5)
- 2. Middle School:** Situated on Rue Cortambert in a historical Neo-Gothic building (Grades 6–9)
- 3. High School:** Located on Rue Beethoven, offering views of the Eiffel Tower (Grades 10–12)



AN IB PIONEER

ISP holds a proud legacy as a long-standing International Baccalaureate (IB) World School. It was one of the earliest institutions in Europe to adopt and deliver the full IB continuum—seamlessly bridging the Primary Years, Middle Years, and Diploma Programmes for its learners.

DEFINING HIGH-QUALITY LEARNING

At ISP, learning is defined by a specific, research-based framework. Central to this is the school's High Quality Learning Definition (HQLD), [which consists of six key areas](#). It asserts that "learning is a social and experiential practice". This definition serves as the north star for a new Teaching and Learning Policy set to roll out in September 2026.

Research-Led Practice: The new policy is structured around IB approaches to teaching and learning, designed as a guide for research-based strategies rather than a rigid set of procedures.

Collaborative Design: The policy was developed with input from ISP's educational leadership team and middle leaders and will undergo an initial one-year review cycle, during which teachers' experience-based feedback will be collected to support a shared understanding across the PYP, MYP, and DP programmes.

A Holistic Vision: Natasha is also leading a broader curriculum review that examines the "who" (the students), the "why" (vision and mission), and the "how" (pedagogical practice) of the ISP experience.

PARIS AS A CLASSROOM FOR:

THE CHILDREN



At ISP, “learning is a social and experiential practice”. This philosophy is brought to life through a continuous stream of experiential learning engagements that take place throughout the year. From early learners to Grade 12, students use the 16th arrondissement and the wider city for authentic engagement.



Through the “Paris as a Classroom” initiative, students regularly step out into the city, visiting local museums, galleries, and parks such as the Bois de Boulogne to forge authentic connections between their curriculum and the real world. This commitment to social action includes a powerful intergenerational partnership with a local senior care home, where students play games, converse, and share meaningful moments with residents.

Furthermore, this experiential philosophy works both ways; during the annual, entirely student-led ISP Environmental Conference (ISPEC), the school opens its doors to invite the wider community inside. Here, students collaborate with local experts and organisations, such as Inspire Citizens and Surf Riders Paris, who visit to discuss river pollution, positioning the people of Paris as vital co-educators in environmental action.

THE VISIONARY BEHIND GROW

The model was pioneeringly adapted for the business and professional world in the late 1980s by Sir John Whitmore, a British performance coach and author. Whitmore famously argued that coaching is not about teaching someone, but rather “unlocking a person’s potential to maximise their own performance.”

Goal: What do you want to achieve?

Reality: Where are you now?

Options: What could you do?

Will: What will you do?



THE TEACHERS

The pedagogical benefits of the city are not reserved solely for students. Natasha has championed an approach to professional growth for teachers that mirrors the experiential learning of the children.

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“We actually met in a cafe... just to get outside of the school walls, to make it more informal. It’s a little bit of a treat.”

Natasha Hale

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Through the Coaching Café, staff engage in “walk and talk” sessions in local parks like Trocadéro, experiencing the same “Paris as a Classroom” philosophy ISP provides for students. The Women in Leadership group, led by a middle leader and a Vice Principal, also promotes peer coaching through guest speakers, a shared book study, and café meet-ups that support collaboration and leadership development.

THE ECIS CONNECTION: SCALING IMPACT

To support this culture of growth, ISP has partnered with ECIS for several years to develop a robust coaching framework. By implementing the GROW model, the school has replaced traditional appraisals with a **Professional Growth Model** that puts teacher agency at the centre. Natasha’s ultimate goal is for coaching conversations to become second nature: “getting everyone sharing the language... in the corridor, in the staff room”.

COACHING IN YOUR SETTING

ISP utilises the GROW model to anchor its Professional Growth Model and foster a peer-led coaching culture. If you would like to explore how to implement a sustainable coaching culture or explore professional growth structures tailored to your school’s unique context, please get in touch with Helen at helen@ecis.org.

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