International Schools' Assessment Program

Designed and developed by ACER, the International Schools' Assessment Program (ISA) is currently administered in 260 international schools worldwide with over 49 000 students participating, and allows these schools to benchmark themselves against other international schools in the core skill areas of mathematical literacy, reading and writing.

The ISA is a culturally inclusive test that provides meaningful and valuable information for education providers and the parents of students. It enables the identification of areas for improvement at the school, classroom and individual student level, while allowing for the comparison of schools against international standards. Using ISA, schools, teachers and students can set themselves targets for the improvement of learning outcomes, and measure this improvement over time.

The ISA program, which assesses students in grades 3 to 10, has been specially developed to suit the wide variety of cultural backgrounds usually found in international schools, which are located in Asia, Europe, Africa, Oceania, the Americas and the Middle East. Additionally, ISA test materials are based on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), allowing comparisons with PISA results for reading and mathematics to be made for grade 8, 9 and 10 students. ISA scores are scaled to enable schools to directly compare results from any ISA tests in order to track changes in student performance across grade levels and over time.

Like PISA, the ISA is not just a multiple choice test. Half the questions in the reading and mathematical literacy tests are open questions that require students to generate meaning, explain their reasoning, find evidence and justify their opinions. This allows the ISA to assess a broad range of English literacy and mathematical literacy skills, including reading skills such as retrieving, interpreting, reflecting and evaluating, and mathematical concepts such as uncertainty (related to data and probability) as well as change and relationships (related to algebra and functional relationships). The ISA also includes two writing tasks: a narrative task and an argument.

From the ISA data, ACER produces a detailed set of reports, and provides assistance with the interpretation of the reports. The ISA results can be used in a number of ways by parents, teachers and schools to evaluate and improve outcomes for students as described below:

The ISA Individual Reports show parents the level at which their child is performing overall in mathematical literacy and reading and writing, compared with other students at the same grade level in other international schools. The report also helps parents to identify the skills their child has mastered and those that they need to develop. Parents can also track their child's progress over time.

The ISA Class Reports allow schools to identify trends over time, check the reliability of their internal assessments and monitor individual student and grade level performance against other international school students who have participated in the ISA. The ISA Class Reports also give teachers detailed information about the kinds of skills their students have mastered and those they need to learn.

The ISA School Reports give school administrators summary statistics to allow them to compare their performance at each grade level with all the other schools that participated in the ISA and with other "like schools" – those with a similar percentage of students from non-English speaking backgrounds. Approximately 63 per cent of students taking part in ISA are from non-English speaking backgrounds. The School Report can be used to identify areas of strength or weakness in student performance, which allows for targeted school reform and ultimately improved learning outcomes.

The ISA Interactive Diagnostic Report helps school leaders and teachers to interpret and use the ISA data to inform improvements in teaching and learning by showing a school's current ISA results in a range of graphic displays. This makes it easier to identify trends and patterns in comparison with all other ISA schools. Paul Morris from the International School of Stuttgart has found this to be the case, and notes that the ISA Interactive Diagnostic Report 'was very useful in identifying individual student needs following the question by question breakdown and helped us to identify gaps in our own internal assessments.'

The ISA Interactive Tracking Report, introduced in 2009, allows a school to monitor the performance over time of individual students and of different groups of students within a school. Data from all schools participating in the ISA program have been used to establish reliable benchmarks for student performance. With this report it is possible to monitor, over a number of calendar years, whether student performance has changed in relation to these benchmarks. This report is recommended for schools that have participated in ISA programs for at least three administrations.

Yuri Shamilov of the Moscow Economic School says, 'ISA became one of the most valuable indicators for the Board of the Moscow Economic School of our students' development.' Mark Jenkins of the Jakarta International School further adds that, 'the ISA has become an important external measure of our school's performance and is part of our strategic measurable objectives.'

Extensive support material is available to help schools to use their ISA data to inform and improve their teaching programs. These include the *Guide to Reports*, *Diagnostic Interpretations of the ISA Data for Classroom Teachers*, *Benchmark Interpretations of the ISA Data for Classroom Teachers and A Guide to Interpreting the ISA Data for School Leaders and Administrators*. ACER also responds quickly and in a detailed manner to emailed queries about data interpretation, so that schools can get the most from the ISA.