PARENT INFORMATION ABOUT ISAs

Background information

In December 2001, the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) launched the International Schools' Assessment (ISA). In consultation with international schools in the East Asian region, ACER learned about the need for an assessment instrument designed for their particular populations.

Although many schools were using existing external assessment for monitoring and self-evaluation, there was a general sense that, because these were primarily designed for national use, they did not cater for children from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In addition, international schools were looking for an assessment program that would provide them with quantitative and qualitative feedback, which could be used for improving learning, as well as for making comparisons with other relevant populations.

Purpose

The ISA is an achievement test for children in international schools. It is designed to serve a number of purposes for these schools, enabling them to:

• evaluate instructional programs against objective evidence of student performance, to identify gaps in student understanding, and to measure growth in learning, between grade levels and from year to year within one grade level;

• provide normative data in relation to selected populations;

• compare subgroup performance (for example, girls and boys; children from different language backgrounds) to see where there may be unexpected results and try to understand them;

• measure individual children's achievement in order to reflect on and address strengths and weaknesses; and

• monitor an individual's or a cohort's progress over time.

Construct

The ISA assessment has three components: Mathematical Literacy, Reading and Writing.

Mathematical Literacy

ISA defines that 'Mathematical Literacy is an individual's capacity to identify and understand the role that mathematics plays in the world, to make well-founded mathematical judgements and to engage in mathematics, in ways that meet the needs of that individual's current and future life as a constructive, concerned and reflective citizen.'

In practice, Mathematical Literacy in the ISA is somewhat different from conventional mathematics, in that the mathematical problems are always set in a meaningful context. Mathematical thinking or processes such as making connections and reflecting are required in addition to applying conventional facts and skills. Each task in the Mathematical Literacy assessment is defined according to its content and the type of competency needed to complete it successfully.

Reading

The Reading test was developed by an international panel of reading experts and is defined as 'understanding, using and reflecting on written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential and to participate in society.' The ISA construct of reading maintains the general thrust of a reading assessment that goes beyond the notion of decoding and literal comprehension (though at the lowest levels these are included), and recognises the full scope of situations in which reading plays a role for children from Y4 upwards.

Writing

The ISA includes two extended writing tasks: one narrative task and one expository/argumentative task. In an effort to simulate good writing pedagogy, time is allowed at the beginning of each writing session for a brief class discussion of the topic, and for individual planning. Time is also allowed at the end of each session for children to proofread their work.

Test Conditions

The ISA is administered to classes by classroom teachers. There are two Mathematical Literacy sessions, one Reading session and two Writing sessions. The ISA is administered on two mornings within a testing window of two weeks.

The test material is secure; all administrators and others who handle the booklets in a school are asked to sign a confidentiality agreement form, and are required to return all test booklets, used or unused, to ACER.

Marking and data entry

All marking is conducted at ACER's Melbourne office. Markers are required to have a background in the relevant domain. The markers receive initial training in the use of the ISA marking guides and then follow-up training throughout the marking operation. Check markers re-mark about 10% of all scripts for quality control. The markers' codes and the children's responses to the multiple-choice questions are then entered into an electronic database for cleaning and analysis.

Frequently asked questions

ISA is a product of ACER – the Australian Council of Educational Research. Does this mean that we are replacing an English system with an Australian one?

Although ACER is based in Australia, it has been designed specifically for international schools. Whereas National Curriculum assessments ('SATs') are designed for schools in England and then made available to international schools, the ISA assessments have no connection to the Australian system or Australian schools.

Why is Kennedy School taking the tests in October?

ISA can be taken in either October or February each year. All ESF Schools have been asked to take these tests in October. This will help with our ongoing assessments of the children and with target setting midyear.

What information will I receive as a parent?

We will pass on all information about your child to you in the form of an individual report. 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 children in the same class 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 track their child's progress over time because the ISA scores can be compared from year 4 to year 6. You will receive this report

in Term 2. If you wish to discuss the scores in more detail you can make an appointment to see Emma Navin, VP with responsibility for assessment data – enavin@kennedy.edu.hk

How will teachers use the results?

The ISA Class Report gives teachers detailed information about the kinds of skills their children have mastered and those they need to learn. It shows teachers how their children performed in each question on the test compared to all the other children in that grade level in international schools across the world. ISA scale scores allow teachers to directly compare their children's results at different levels and to track the performance of children over time.

How will Kennedy School use the results?

As a school, we will analyse all data about the general patterns of performance and use these as another of the ways in which we monitor and modify our educational programme. This data will help us to target set for the children and for the school as a whole.

How can I find out more about International Schools' Assessment?

By visiting the ACER website: http://www.acer.edu.au/tests/isa.