



29th September, 2009

Dear ISHCMC Parents

First of all, welcome back to the International School for the 2008 -2009 academic year. We trust your children have now settled into their new classes and routines, and are happy to be back with friends and enjoying school life.

This year has begun as a challenging one, given the construction at our current campus. The Advisory Council believes that the Administration is doing its best to manage the situation in order to provide a safe environment where students have their best opportunity to excel. The good news is after construction is completed, we will have newer and better facilities next year.

The purpose of our letter is threefold:

- (1) to explain a bit more about the Advisory Council itself – who we are, what sort of issues we deal with, how we work, and how we, parents and Council, can communicate more effectively on issues of concern;
- (2) to provide an update on school facilities
- (3) to report in some detail on the results of both the Parent Survey conducted last spring, and the key findings of the CIS, NEASC and IB accreditation teams which visited ISHCMC last year. Briefly, both were generally **very positive**. Areas for improvement, however, were identified in each, and not surprisingly, there was considerable crossover between the survey and the accreditation reports in terms of where we need work.

Advisory Council

As noted on the school's website, the Advisory Council is an advisory body to the school's Board of Management. The Board of Management is the Vietnam equivalent of a Board of Directors, and consists of members representing the school's ownership (one Vietnamese company and two foreign companies). The Board of Management looks to the Council for recommendations and guidance related to school policy and development matters.

Pursuant to the school's by-laws, there are three elected parent representatives to the Council: this year, Mrs. Jakki Lydall, Mrs. Lee Baker and Mr. Canh Do. The other

members of the Council include the Headmaster, Mr. Doug Willard (a faculty member), Mr. Andy Ho and Mr. Tony Shadwell (Board Representatives), Mr. Do Thiep Lap (Vietnamese Staff Representative) and Ms. Christine Byrne (Board of Management appointee). Canh Do is the current Chairman of the Council. Six of the nine Council members are parents with children in the school, covering junior, elementary, middle and high schools. Profiles of all Council members are posted on the school's website. The Council meets every 5-6 weeks. Minutes of recent Council meetings are also posted on the school's website.

The Council wishes to make itself more accessible to respond to parent concerns. To this end, we have put in place a new rotation system whereby one of the three parent members of the Council will be present at every PTO meeting. In addition, for matters arising outside the PTO, any of the three parent members of the Council may be contacted. All matters concerning policy or development of the school raised by parents will be relayed by the parent members to the Administration and if appropriate, to the full Council. If for some reason the parent members can not be reached, any Council member may be contacted. Email addresses of all Council members are on the school's website.

We also plan to hold open meetings 2-3 times a year, which parents are encouraged to attend and ask questions on any matters regarding policy and/or development of the school. Questions may be submitted beforehand or raised on the day/evening of these meetings. The first of these meetings is scheduled for Tuesday, 6th October at 7.00pm in the Meeting Room, Administration Building.

We trust that these initiatives will pave the way for a more open and transparent dialogue between the Advisory Council and the parent community in the future.

Site Works/Construction

The main An Phu Campus of the school was completed in July 1998, over 10 years ago. Significant maintenance is required annually to keep the existing condition intact. Additionally, projects to refurbish and upgrade the facilities were completed over the summer holiday break, with some still underway.

- Installation of new air-conditioners throughout the entire 3rd floor
- Replacement of ceilings on 3rd floor.
- Provision of new lockers for middle/high school students.
- Renovation of elementary Art room
- Provision of new Design/Technology Laboratory and equipment.
- Provision of new Middle/High School Art rooms and IB Art Studio.
- Construction of a new fixed shade structure for the additional outdoor play spaces adjacent to the Administration building.
- Expansion of the school clinic with the addition of an isolation/lying-in room.

Some projects were undertaken to ensure facilities for play and physical education during construction;

- Relocation of the adventure playground for junior and elementary school.
- Provision of a new basketball court.

The construction of new Extension Wing is underway which will provide further additional facilities for existing students, including a second air conditioned Multi-

Purpose Room, new science laboratories and a solar heated swimming pool. The expected completion date is March 2010.

The Board of Management has identified a site for a new campus, has finalized a concept design, and is preparing to sign contracts for a new school that is planned to open by 2012. We look forward to sharing some exciting news in this regard in the very near future.

Parent Survey

A parent survey was conducted in May -June 2009, and covered a wide range of areas in an effort to obtain honest feedback as to current parent sentiment. Although there were some technical issue with the survey initially the Council believes the survey, as conducted, is valid and that it provides data from which we may draw conclusions.

There were 173 responses to the survey representing approximately 20% of the student body. The results were generally very positive in the sense of parents having their expectations met by the school. The major area of negative replies occurred, not surprisingly, to questions touching on the physical facilities. Language options and learning support were also identified as areas for improvement. A summary of the survey results is attached to this letter and also is posted on website.

Despite the high percentages of the responses that were in the “meets expectations” or above categories, the Council regards any responses of 10% or more in the “below expectations” or below as matters for concern, and we are reviewing these together with the Administration.

Moreover, as a school with the reputation as the best international school in Ho Chi Minh City, we should not be satisfied with the high percentage answers coming in the relatively “average” “meets expectations” category.

To fairly assess the results of the Parent Survey, the write-in comments must also, of course, be factored in. Speaking candidly, most of the comments received were critical with the following major themes surfacing:

- (a) Survey method flawed – therefore not reliable
- (b) Facilities – currently tired and outdated; delays and disruption re construction on current site; lack of information and unexplained delays regarding new site
- (c) School ownership and conflict of interest between profit-making and providing proper education for children; apparent lack of commitment of owners to a future
- (d) School fees – too high and no value for money
- (e) Meaningful communication on key issues – not there

Whether these comments were made by a “vocal minority” or are more widespread, the fact that even a few parents may feel dissatisfied indicates possible problems. The School needs to address these issues, and many of them have already been recognized and action is underway to address them. The Council and the Administration understands that more effective communication is required for all important issues (good and bad); and we will be trying to provide regular updates during the course of the year.

Accreditation and Reports

To give a bit of background to parents who may not be aware, ISHCMC is an IB World School and is accredited by both the Council of International School (CIS) and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). During the 2008-2009 school year the school prepared study reports and underwent school visits from these agencies.

The reports of the IB, NEASC, and CIS were decidedly positive. A direct result was the re-accreditation of the school by CIS and the award of accreditation by NEASC for the first time. Additionally, the IBMYP and IBDP programmes were re-authorized. This year the school is preparing for the authorization visit for IBPYP.

The accreditation and authorization reports provided commendations and recommendations and highlighted general areas for improvement and action by the school. Please see attached. The school is currently considering the recommendations and, in line with the requirements of the agencies, is working on actions plans for improvement.

These feedbacks are valuable to the school. The Council takes these feedbacks seriously and plans to work with the Administration to address areas highlighted in the parent survey and accreditation reports. There has been one review workshop to date and another is planned for early October.

In conclusion, the Advisory Council is committed to ISHCMC and its future as the best international school in Vietnam, and we stand ready to work toward making this happen.

We look forward to seeing and hearing from parents at the meeting on 6th October, and on an ongoing basis thereafter.

Sincerely.

Canh Do
On behalf of Advisory Committee