Selecting a School?

IF YOU ARE CONSIDERING ENROLLING YOUR CHILD IN AN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL, HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK.

COMPARING APPLES TO APPLES

In the search for the right school for your child there are many issues to consider.

At CAISL, we understand this is not an easy decision.

In an effort to contribute towards informed choice, we have laid out a few "Frequently Asked Questions" and CAISL's answers.

Is the school accredited?

BACKGROUND: All schools which operate legally in Portugal must have a license from the **Ministry of Education**. This is fundamental and without it a school is operating illegally. However, a license from the Ministry of Education is not the same as accreditation.

Schools with an IB program must be authorized by the **International Baccalaureate Organization** (IBO). Such authorization requires a process of validation conducted by the IBO. The IBO sometimes conducts inspections in conjunction with an Accrediting agency but it is not the same as Accreditation.

Accreditation for International Schools is generally done by the **Council of International Schools** or CIS (NOT the European Council of International Schools—a different entity) and/or the **New England Association of Schools and Colleges** (NEASC, a subdivision of which is for international schools) from the USA. CIS and NEASC work together to hold joint inspection visits. Getting and keeping Accreditation requires adherence to standards set forth by these organizations and involves full inspection visits every 10 years and a "check-up" visit half-way through the 10 years.

A school which is striving for excellence and opening itself to inspection and evaluation will seek Accreditation. Ask who accredits the school, when the most recent visit was, and for when is the next visit scheduled. Ask to see the major commendations and recommendations from the most recent accreditation report.

CAISL'S ANSWER:

CAISL has:

- A permanent license from the Ministry of Education to offer an American curriculum program to Early Childhood through High School. CAISL is authorized to offer both the American High School Diploma (which makes it valid for entry into Portuguese and other universities around the world) and the IB Diploma.
- Authorization from the IBO to offer the IB Diploma Program.
- Accreditation from CIS and NEASC. The most recent visit was in March 2012 after which we were accredited through 2022. The full accreditation report, including the summary of commendations and recommendations, is on the web site.
- Support from the Department of State of the United States of America.

CAISL

Carlucci American International School of Lisbon

www.caislisbon.org
admissions@caislisbon.org

219 239 800
Rua António dos Reis, 95, Linhó, 2710-301 Sintra

How will the school assess my child's progress?

BACKGROUND: Assessing a child's progress has two purposes:

1.To provide the teachers and the parents with information on what the child has learned, has mastered, or is struggling with. This is called *Formative Assessment* and its goal is to help the child.

2.To give the child a score which is then calculated as part of the child's "grade" at the end of the marking period. Sometimes this type of assessment is written by the teacher but sometimes it is an "external exam," written and scored by a government or company. This is called *Summative Assessment* because its goal is to "sum up" the child's achievement for the record.

CAISL'S ANSWER:

Formative Assessment:

CAISL teachers write and assess student work throughout the year and are the primary means by which student progress is assessed.

To help the teacher, CAISL also uses MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) for students from Grades 2 through 9. MAP is a test which measures student knowledge and skills in Language Arts and Math and provides teachers and parents with a detailed analysis of student strengths, growth, and areas for improvement. It is diagnostic—i.e. it diagnoses student progress. It is not evaluative—i.e. it does not label a child.

Summative Assessment:

CAISL teachers also do summative assessments with students and these are calculated in the "grades" which students receive on their reports at the end of quarters (Elementary) or semesters (Secondary).

CAISL 10th and 11th Graders also take the Preliminary Scholastic Achievement Test (PSAT) and 11th and 12th Graders may choose to take the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) and/or the SAT II (Subject) Tests and/or the American College Test (ACT). 11th and 12th Graders who choose to study for the IB Diploma take the IB Diploma exams, mainly at the end of their 12th Grade.

What support does the school offer if my child has a special educational need?

BACKGROUND: Schools which have a program of Special Educational Needs (often called SEN or Learning Support), frequently charge extra for this program.

CAISL'S ANSWER: CAISL's SEN program supports a range of diagnosed mild learning difficulties.

We have two Special Educational Needs Coordinators, one for Elementary and one for Secondary, who provide instruction and support to help the child be successful. (Note that CAISL does not have a program to address all special educational learning needs nor other types of disabilities including behavioral or physical.)

Can a student transfer from the school into the Portuguese public or private system?

BACKGROUND: This can be a difficult question to get an answer to.

Just because a school is licensed by the Ministry of Education to operate does not mean that a student can transfer <u>into</u> the Portuguese system at each grade level.

So the question is, "Can a child who has successfully completed 5th grade (for example) at the international school move into 6th grade in a Portuguese public or private school?"

When transferring from <u>any</u> International School offering equivalence in Grades 10 and up, students might need to "make up" certain classes to be placed in their desired area of study due to the specialization of the Portuguese system.

But, not all the International Schools offer equivalence at all Grades. Of particular significance is the question of transferring at the end of Grade 10 (Year 11 in some international schools).

With the recent legislation requiring all students to attend school through age 18, moving from an international school to a Portuguese school at the end of Grade 10 can be particularly difficult.

CAISL'S ANSWER: CAISL is licensed as an American School. Each grade level of the CAISL program is valid for entry into the next grade of the Portuguese system.

Pre-school (3, 4, and 5 year olds): Will my child receive individualized attention? What is the student:teacher ratio?

BACKGROUND: To provide each child with an individualized program so vital for children this age, each child needs to have time and attention from a qualified teacher.

Ask whether a teacher or a teacher's assistant will be providing this time and attention to your child.

A common pattern is to have a class with (for example) 20 students with a qualified teacher and a teaching assistant. Without diminishing the value of the assistant to the smooth running of the class, the reality is that the student: teacher ratio should not include the teaching assistant. Thus the ratio of the above class is 20:1

CAISL'S ANSWER: CAISL has chosen not to have teaching assistants in the classrooms but, instead, to have qualified teachers. A class of 20 students would have 2 teachers so the student:teacher ratio would be 10:1. This allows the children more individual time with teachers who have the training and experience to teach!

Pre-school (3, 4, and 5 year olds): Does the program offer a curriculum which prepares each student with the knowledge, skills, and personal attributes to succeed?

BACKGROUND: Pre-school children learn through exploration, instruction, and guided play in a variety of areas. Linguistic and Mathematical skills are fundamental to future learning but, increasingly, so is IT, Science, Social Studies, Arts, and Physical Education. To ensure that a child benefits from all of these experiences, he/she must attend school for the same amount of time as the other children in the class/grade. While part-time enrollment (for example, mornings only or only some days of the week) may sound like a good idea for a young child, in reality this does not allow a child to benefit from a coordinated curricular and instructional program.

CAISL'S ANSWER: CAISL's Early Childhood program is full-time with developmentally appropriate learning objectives (benchmarks).

IB Diploma Program: What is the historic "pass rate" for the past 5 years and what is the school's policy for enrolling in the IB program?

BACKGROUND: The "pass rate" is the percentage of the school's Diploma candidates who earned the IB Diploma compared to the percentage of students who earned the Diploma worldwide. An International School should have a pass rate at—and usually above—the world pass rate.

However, the "pass rate" tells only part of the story. The answer to the second part of this question, tells the rest of the story.

Because there is a great deal of competition among international schools, some schools will restrict enrollment in the IB Diploma Program to those students who are predicted to "make the school look good." Some schools restrict admission to the Diploma Program only to those students who are likely to score well OR they un-enroll students from the program part-way through if the student's predicted scores are not likely to add value to the school's "pass rate."

Schools with this practice aim to ensure that their "pass rates" are high enough to be good for marketing.

CAISL'S ANSWER: CAISL's average pass rate for the past 5 years is 89%; the world pass rate is 78%.

CAISL has an open admissions policy for the IB Diploma Program. We encourage students to try and will not refuse to enroll a student in the IBDP and will not un-enroll a student except for conduct completely within the student's control. Any student who is (as CAISL's mission says) "doing their best" will be supported to continue with the challenge.

University entrance: How and where can students who complete the final grade of Secondary enter university?

BACKGROUND: Most international schools have only one course of study for Secondary students, usually leading to an external exam system such as the IB Diploma.

CAISL'S ANSWER: Historically, about 30% of CAISL Graduates enter university in the USA, 30% in Portugal, and 30% in the UK. The remaining 10% go to other countries or take a "gap" year.

Because CAISL is licensed by the Portuguese Ministry of Education as an American school, all of our High School students take a course of study which leads to the American High School Diploma. With this American High School Diploma (plus, at times, the American SAT subject exams), CAISL graduates enter university in Portugal, UK, USA, and universities around the world.

CAISL also offers the IB Diploma Program which permits entry into universities around the world.

A CAISL student may, if he/she chooses, study for and achieve two internationally valid Diplomas.

Is an American Education right for my child even if it is unlikely that he/she will ever attend school in the USA?

BACKGROUND: The most common pattern is a "Ministry of Education" centralized body dictating what each child learns and when. Also common is the focus only on the acquisition of knowledge in specific (and often narrow) content areas. In many systems, students who wish to engage in athletic or artistic activities must go outside of the school to do these, as school is focused solely on the acquisition of content knowledge. Sometimes, this focus even downplays the acquisition of skills in favor of being able to recite large bodies of text. Such intense focus on the acquisition of data requires the student to be a passive receptacle for the teacher (or textbook) to "pour knowledge into."

CAISL'S ANSWER:

Decentralized Education: Education in the United States is decentralized, meaning that each state and each American school overseas is encouraged to adapt its curriculum to the needs of its student population. There is no "US Ministry of Education" dictating what students learn in each grade. In the US educational philosophy, the goal is to challenge each student at the highest level possible. American education has benchmarks for achievement that guide educators in determining when students are ready for the next grade or academic level, but these are adaptable to local conditions and the needs of the students.

Educational Breadth: Students in American schools study a broad range of subjects which develop a student's knowledge, skills, and personal attributes in many areas. Americans believe that education is more than the traditional academic subjects. Americans want students who not only can work a calculus problem, speak French, or analyze Shakespeare but also can sing and play handbells and paint and sculpt and serve a volleyball or kick a soccer ball with skill.

Active Learning: American education requires the student to be an active partner in his / her own education. Increasingly skills of analysis, communication, and cooperation are as important as detailed content knowledge. In fact, with the wealth of content information available at the touch of a button today, analyzing this data, communicating this analysis, and cooperating with others in the analysis are vital skills if students are not to be overwhelmed with the volume of information available. Each individual to be successful and to be able to make his/her own judgments, must be able to understand, synthesize, and analyze this often overwhelming and contradictory mass of unfiltered data. American education has always highlighted individual participation but increasingly such participation—asking questions, thinking, working with others, forming opinions backed up by valid evidence—are essential aspects of a child's education and vital to his/her future success.

Americans do not believe that an excellent education can be achieved only through studying a book and taking an exam. While content knowledge can be gained that way and having a knowledge base is important, true education requires one to apply the knowledge to life's problems and to work with other people to find solutions.

Americans also believe that much learning takes place in extracurricular activities. Students who attend classes but do nothing else in the life of the school are cheating themselves of a great deal of what American education has to offer. Athletic teams teach a lot more than basketball skills. They teach teamwork and commitment and cooperation for the good of the group. Recycling and community service programs foster unselfishness and a commitment to make life better. Student Council teaches the processes of representative democracy and the methods to make positive change by analyzing a problem, working within a structure, and agreeing on solutions. Model United Nations teaches thinking skills, debate skills, research skills, and analysis of world issues.

Any students willing to pursue an activity are encouraged to do so, regardless of their level of ability.

The students who truly succeed, not only at school but in life, are those who overcome their initial reluctance and become part of all that the life of an American school has to offer.

This is really what "international" education is—an education which provides the student the opportunity to develop in all areas which are needed.

What is included in the fees?

BACKGROUND: Published tuition fees do not tell the whole story of the cost for attending a school. Be sure to ask what services, programs, or activities are included in the fees and for which the family will be billed extra.

CAISL'S ANSWER: The following are part of the CAISL program and no extra fees are charged:

- Textbooks and other books required for class are loaned to students for the year.
- Laptops can be checked out by students in Grades 7-12 for their use at school and at home throughout the year.
- ESL (English for Speakers of other Languages) instruction and support is given to all students who need it.
- SEN (Special Educational Needs) instruction and support is given to those with diagnosed mild learning difficulties.
- CAISL's two counselors, one for Elementary and one for Secondary, provide support and guidance for students, helping them individually and in groups to meet the challenges and stresses of growing up.
- The Academic, College, and Career Counseling Service in the Secondary school provides a program of career guidance, support for students in their selection of courses and assistance in applying for universities in the USA, the UK, and Portugal, as well as other countries.
- For Early Childhood and Elementary Students, there is a daily snack provided.
- CAISL-sponsored after-school activities include a range of academics, arts, and athletics choices. (For a full list of current offerings, please check the page online www.caislisbon.org, last item on the left bar).