

INCLUSION POLICY

MAHATMA GANDHI INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL, AHMEDABAD

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi International School is located in Ahmedabad, a city that exemplifies a blend of tradition with modernity, encouraging inclusivity and innovation while preserving its rich cultural heritage. Famous as an educational and entrepreneurial hub, Ahmedabad attracts students from all over India, fostering a rich tapestry of diversity within its student population. This diverse community encompasses a broad spectrum of identities—not only in nationality but also in gender, culture, ethnicity, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

As the first international school of Gujarat and the first school in India to offer the IB Career-related programme, we embrace and celebrate this diversity, creating an inclusive environment that values each individual's unique perspectives and experiences. Our uniqueness is a multicultural student body which adds depth to the learning experience, promoting mutual respect, understanding and collaboration among individuals from varied walks of life.

Our school has become a site of study for different boards, educators and students enrolled in B.Ed Colleges from India and abroad who come to study the school's innovative practices, nurturing a rich diversity of teaching faculty as well. By celebrating diversity, the school community nurtures empathy, global citizenship and a spirit of unity within its diverse fabric.

Mahatma Gandhi International School is committed to providing quality education that is accessible to all sections of society irrespective of caste, socioeconomic status, culture and nationality. Through its experiential pedagogy, it strives to encourage and develop the learner as a compassionate human being. The school seeks to promote intercultural understanding and mutual respect by encouraging all forms of diversity (cultural, intellectual, physical, linguistic and other) within and without the classroom in order to engender diverse learner interactions, which are a fundamental resource to its innovative pedagogy.

The school is committed to developing and implementing a pedagogy that allows for learning to be an enjoyable experience that is purposeful, logical and coherent. The school fosters the spiritual dimension in education through practices that develop both sides of the brain with intuition, imagination and mindfulness. The learning environment encourages students to be independent and creative thinkers. The school emphasizes holistic development, integrating physical and mental well-being and sustainability into daily practices. By fostering physical, mental, emotional health, along with environmental awareness, the school nurtures socially responsible and eco-conscious individuals, preparing students for both academic success and responsible citizenship.

Our school believes that to cultivate true global citizens, education must emphasize respect for diversity in all forms, including gender and cultural background. This approach not only equips students with essential life skills but also instills a deep appreciation for inclusivity, helping them to engage thoughtfully and respectfully within diverse communities.

The pedagogy of Mahatma Gandhi International School is enriched by the diversity it encourages within the school and strongly believes in providing quality education to all children. With this in mind, it recognizes the need for a coherent and strong guiding policy for students facing special learning needs, so that they have the opportunity to access learning and be integrated into mainstream classrooms without fear of discrimination or distress.

School Pedagogy for Teaching and Learning:

Experiential learning at MGIS promotes commitment to inclusion and diversity and creates an empowering environment that values all learners and their unique perspectives. This approach emphasizes hands-on, real-world experiences that engage students actively allowing them to apply knowledge, develop critical skills and reflect on their learning within a supportive and inclusive community.

Experiential Learning at MGIS: Enhancing Inclusion and Diversity:

1. **Personalized Learning:** Experiential learning recognizes that students have varied learning styles and strengths. By providing opportunities for hands-on, project-based learning using VAKOG, it enables students from diverse backgrounds and abilities to engage meaningfully and connect learning to their personal experiences, interests and identities.
2. **Cultural Relevance and Awareness:** Through real-world projects and group activities students explore different perspectives and gain insights into various cultural backgrounds, values and beliefs. This fosters mutual respect and empathy, acceptance, helping students understand and appreciate the diversity within their own classroom and community.
3. **Social and Collaborative Skills:** Experiential learning often involves teamwork encouraging students to work collaboratively with peers from different backgrounds. This not only develops social skills but also helps students learn to value diverse perspectives and point of views, creating a more inclusive and accepting community.
4. **Accessible and Equitable Opportunities:** By offering learning experiences that go beyond traditional, lecture-based teaching, experiential learning accommodates students with different learning needs including those with disabilities. It promotes equity by ensuring that all students actively participate and succeed in the learning process.
5. **Empathy and Global Citizenship:** Experiential learning projects tackle real-world challenges encouraging students to think globally and act locally. Through activities focused on social issues, environmental challenges and cultural exchange, students develop a broader

worldview and the qualities of a global citizen—respect for diversity, an appreciation for cultural differences and a sense of shared responsibility.

The Impact of a Diverse Learning Environment

At MGIS experiential learning embraced within an inclusive and diverse setting, cultivates an environment where every student feels valued, supported and empowered. This approach not only enhances academic learning but also builds a compassionate and socially aware community. Students gain practical skills, ethical awareness and an understanding of diversity, preparing them to contribute positively to an interconnected and inclusive world.

Our approach to skill development emphasizes a global perspective by offering foreign language education and exposing students to diverse world cultures. This not only enriches their learning experience but also broadens their horizons and deepens their understanding of cultural diversity. Through this global approach, students gain valuable insights into different ways of life, fostering openness, empathy and the skills needed to navigate an interconnected world with confidence and respect.

We recognize that many of our students have English as a secondary language and we remain mindful of the varying comfort levels they may have with it. Factors such as prior exposure and linguistic backgrounds play a role in each student's proficiency. In response, we are committed to creating an inclusive environment where language differences do not cause any form of disadvantage or discrimination. Our aim is to support all students equitably ensuring they have the resources and encouragement needed to succeed academically and socially.

To support this vision, at MGIS we embrace an individualized approach to learning that addresses each student's unique needs ensuring they have a meaningful and engaging educational experience. Our goal is to fulfill both the educational, social and emotional needs of our students within a supportive, nurturing and sustainable environment. By doing so, we foster personal growth, cultural sensitivity, well-being and a strong sense of belonging, equipping students with the skills and confidence required to thrive in an interconnected world.

Principles of Inclusion in Education

Inclusion in education emphasizes creating an environment where all students, regardless of their abilities, can access, participate in, and benefit meaningfully from educational programs. When children learn and grow together in a supportive and diverse environment, it enhances their developmental outcomes and nurtures positive social attitudes.

The Inclusion Policy serves as a foundational guide for the school community to deliver effective learning support that considers each student's unique needs, particularly those facing learning barriers or difficulties or those in need of further enrichment and challenge. By fostering an inclusive environment, the mission is to create a more welcoming educational community, offering the benefits of an IB education to all students, encouraging diversity, equity, and acceptance.

The IB states, “Inclusion is an ongoing process that aims to increase access and engagement in learning for all students by identifying and removing barriers. This is to ensure that all students are provided equal access to a rigorous academic program. So we need to acknowledge the learner variability of all the learners while developing a curriculum that is differentiated to support all students in reaching their unique potential. To achieve this aim we need to design the assessments that are meeting the goals of the learners and in turn develop the learner profile attitudes. This can only be successfully achieved in a culture of collaboration, mutual respect, support and problem solving. Inclusion is the learner profile in action, an outcome of dynamic learning communities.”

(‘The IB guide to inclusive education: a resource for whole school development’, 2019).

Policy Statement

The school mission statement about making quality education accessible to all children, outlines the core principles of inclusion, emphasizing the school’s commitment to individualized support, and reflecting the goal of providing all students with a fair opportunity to succeed in a supportive environment.

Aims of the Inclusion Policy:

- The school values all students irrespective of ethnic or economic backgrounds, caste, sex, and culture.
- The school will identify the special needs of students and will ensure to meet their needs by providing support to overcome barriers and challenges.
- The school will respond to individual needs of the students by providing them additional resources and ensure their participation in school programmes and activities.
- The school promotes confidence, self-esteem and a holistic learning environment for all students.

This policy addresses the diverse special needs of students across all four IB programmes and provides support where required in case of:

- a. Students facing learning challenges such as language processing or comprehension difficulties.
- b. Students facing emotional and behavioral challenges that may be related to mental health or neurodevelopmental.
- c. Students facing difficulties due to long-standing medical issues.
- d. Students facing challenges due to barriers in language and economic background.
- e. Students who are gifted and talented and require academic enrichment.

The policy provides varied learning and access support tailored to students' individual needs, ensuring that these accommodations are aligned with the assessment process for students who require special assistance to fully engage and be fully challenged within the school’s activities..

The school counselor carries out classroom observation and discusses any further details if necessary, with teachers and parents.

Integrating children with special needs into the mainstream classroom serves a two-way purpose. It allows the child to form meaningful social peer relations, and equally importantly, enriches the other class children in that they understand and appreciate the differences and internalize and emulate compassion, empathy towards differently abled children. We are convinced that this is to the benefit of each member of the community and develops them into compassionate human beings.

The class teachers conduct home visits every academic year in order to collect data, and observe the child's natural environment and family dynamics with a view to understand its impact on the child. If required, the school counselor also makes the home visit with the class teacher.

At our school we strongly assert that a child does not have learning or behavioral difficulty, and disagree with such nomenclature which tends to internalize the problem as something inherent within the child. We believe that the child is merely facing learning or behavioral challenges and in order to counter it, the difficulty must be externalized. To this extent, we vehemently assert that a properly built and coherent experiential pedagogy has a therapeutic effect, as in the case of Generated Resource Pedagogy developed and practiced at the school. We provide an opportunity for the child to be removed from the situation, which is a cause for the challenge, and focus on the child rather than the difficulty.

Addressing the needs of gifted and talented students

The MGIS pedagogy is designed to accommodate the diverse educational needs of all students. For gifted learners, we provide differentiated instruction that tailors lessons to challenge their abilities and promote deeper learning. This approach includes offering advanced materials, varying tasks, and posing complex questions that encourage students to exceed standard expectations. Gifted students are given opportunities to explore advanced content and develop their skills in ways that align with their potential and interests. By providing these enriching opportunities, we ensure that gifted students remain continually challenged and intellectually stimulated.

In addition to academic challenges, gifted students often encounter unique social and emotional issues, such as feelings of isolation, perfectionism, and difficulty relating to peers. To address these challenges, we encourage open dialogue and create a supportive environment where students can express their feelings. This space helps them build resilience and learn to manage the pressures that may accompany their exceptional abilities.

Procedure for identification and diagnosis of special needs

If a special educational need for a student has been previously unidentified, or undisclosed by the parents, and the first instance is noticed by the teacher during their interaction with the child in the classroom, the teacher consults with the school counselor. The teacher submits the initial

identification and referral form to the counselor who then sets up an observation schedule with the class teacher where she is able to observe the child within the classroom.

If a special need is identified, the counselor along with the team (Class teacher, Coordinator, Senior faculty) consults with the parents of the child to finalize a schedule and a differentiation program if required. In severe or differential cases, where the counselor is not authorized to perform a medical diagnosis, the child is referred to external support services (Therapist-Speech, Occupational, Educational Psychologist, Special Educator, Developmental Pediatrician) for further consultation.

The school counselor also works with the class to create awareness and sensitize the teachers and students towards the needs of the child facing challenges. The class teacher and counselor are in constant touch to ensure that the child is integrated smoothly and without prejudice into the classroom, and work towards resolving issues which hinder this endeavor.

Guidance Committee:

The Guidance Committee for Special Needs consists of the Head of School, the School Director, Pedagogical Director, the Program Coordinators of the three programs and the school counselor. The roles of each of these members is defined clearly in this policy document.

Head of School and School Director: Make the overall decision on the differentiation plan for each child with an identified Special Need.

Pedagogical Director: Identifies needs to design, organize and implement pedagogical strategies within the school.

Program Coordinators: Responsible for ensuring that the SEN needs of the children in the program are being met.

School Counselors: Responsible for working with the class teachers in identifying the special educational needs of a child and formulating a strong integration programme based on the identified needs of the child.

Class teachers: They are aware of the possibility of the challenges that may be faced by their students and consult the school counselor when required to work towards identifying and providing special education needs for their students.

Differentiation Planning:

Students facing learning challenges

Once a special education need is identified, the HOS, pedagogical director along with the class teacher and school counselor formulate a plan of differentiated learning and engagement for the student. Teachers have the support of the school's unique pedagogy, which allows them to meet the needs of specially abled children within the mainstream classroom.

Our pedagogy involves the use of multi-sensorial tasks, which are meaningful and based on real life experiences. They encourage active corporeal involvement to facilitate understanding. The activities and the assessment tasks are ideally suited to differentiation in terms of expected criteria and generated resources, so that a student may choose the means best available to them to demonstrate their understanding of a concept. The individual educational plan (IEP) is devised for these learners with the inputs of these required shareholders. The plan is evaluated for progress at regular intervals with changes made as required according to the needs of the learners.

Students facing behavioral challenges

It is the school's experience that a lot of behavioral challenges children display are a result of incorrect pedagogy. Our unique pedagogy engages children with behavioral issues by involving them corporeally in the learning task. Each activity is meaningful and based on real-life experiences, allowing the child to identify with the task and be fully engaged in the class. Individual Development Plans are devised addressing the emotional and behavioral concerns of the students.

Use of Technology in Differential Pedagogy

The school uses various technological tools to assist children facing challenges, in an effort to integrate them into the mainstream classroom. The school has acquired a dedicated iPad for the use of the school counselor when working with children with special needs, and has purchased apps whose function is – software converting text to speech, image based scheduling features and apps, text-to-speech and speech-to-text accessibility features as well as a highly specialized app for autistic learners.

Counseling for SEN

Counseling is a way of working together in a unique and confidential way helping the relationship, developed between the counselor and the student. While building this relationship, the counselor acts as a facilitator who helps the student understand and interpret themselves and the world around them. The counselor and the student explore the student's feelings and behaviors, their relationship with others, and their choices and decisions.

What happens during counseling sessions?

Counseling sessions are planned and carried out in the counselor's office, a space that offers privacy and confidentiality. Discussions between the counselor and the student are based on the principle of mutual respect. All conversations are confidential and the student's right to privacy is respected in all cases except those where the counselor may suspect the occurrence of immediate harm. The students have the opportunity of discussing their fear, feelings, and emotions without the fear of being judged. During the counseling the students are able to speak openly and honestly about issues or concerns. Sometimes this is enough for people to resolve an issue. However, if there are ongoing concerns the counselor may seek to develop a therapy plan with external experts, in consultation with the student and parents.

Record Keeping

The counselor maintains records of current and past counseling cases that includes psychological /medical reports, IQ and Language Test Reports and other educational evidence in accordance with the standards of the profession in confidentiality.

Follow-up and Assessment of Clinical Cases

The guidance committee meets regularly to assess the progress and adjust the differentiation needs for each case identified within the school. All or part of the committee also meet outside of the scheduled meeting time in specific cases when the need arises.

Both formative and summative assessments are formulated according to the IB framework in accordance with the school's pedagogy.

In cases where the student needs additional access arrangements not directly complying with the eligibility criteria stated in IB policy, a special request is sent with supporting documents for approval and further follow up.

Parent Participation

Parent cooperation is essential to meeting the needs of the students in terms of special needs. The school works closely with parents in this regard, ensuring that parents are kept fully informed about their child's differentiation program. The school counselor routinely counsels the student within and without the school environment to ensure a uniform approach of handling the child's requirements.

Core Committee & Signing off on Policy

A Core Committee is defined, and roles and responsibilities of the members assigned with a view to periodically reviewing the SEN Philosophy and Policy of the school. This policy and all further amendments to the same should be approved and signed off by the Policy Steering Committee and School Management. A special faculty is appointed for SEN policy making - the resource has been involved while framing the policy for better implementation and dissemination.