

Letter to the Editor

What's in a name?

I once heard someone say that ECIS moved at the pace of a glacier. But that is obviously not true because, as we can all now see, ECIS has moved forward and changed its name!

Finally ECIS has decided to drop European and it's about time; many might even say long overdue! However sad many of us might feel to lose that familiar and therefore safe identity which made Europe such a key element and place for international education, we cannot fail to recognise that the name ECIS did exactly the opposite for those international schools operating outside of Europe.

So, hearty congratulations to CIS for sending out an important message to international schools far and wide. The dictionary definition of the word international tells us that it means 'concerning two or more nations' but in common usage international means of many different nationalities, and this is indeed the significance when used in international education. However, it was perhaps the original meaning of this word that led so many international schools to choose to call themselves international but qualify this by linking it to their safe haven, ie nationality.

Many who share a commitment to internationalism feel that if a school has international in its name then it does not need an American or British or any other national identity preceding it. What exactly does it mean to be the British International School of ... or The International School of ... that follows an American curriculum?

International educators have to ask themselves why they choose to hang onto national identities. Is it solely a marketing ploy; something to make them different from the next international school? If the answer is that there are many children who are living abroad and will need to return to national education, and what the school offers is a national curriculum, then I believe those schools should call themselves the British or American school and drop the international in their name.

I would suggest, however, that those international schools that offer an international curriculum the whole way through, ie PYP, MYP, IB, prepare children with an openness and respect for cultural diversity that no curriculum steeped in national traditions is able to match.

This is not to say that there are not issues to be dealt with within these three curricular areas. All of those involved in the IB are well aware that there are still problems to be ironed out, but there is one very important thing to be said about schools that choose an international curriculum over a national one and that is that they now have a well established forum in which they can discuss their international needs.

International schools clinging to national identities may well be a thing of the past in 20 years and CIS will have helped pave the way.

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