

January 2017

community report

International School Utrecht

// COMMUNITY REPORT // NEWS FROM
THE IB // PARENT SUPPORT GROUP //



Update

Music is now a firm fixture on the curriculum of the International School Utrecht. Since music teachers David de Geus and Amber Vincent started teaching last August, musical instruments and singing can be heard all around the school. To give you a good overview of the plans for the music programme we interviewed David De Geus. Don't forget to mark Thursday 23 February on your calendar, as it will be the first school concert in which the primary choir, secondary vocal group, guitar club and keyboard students will be on stage together.

In this fourth issue of the Community Report you will also hear from a group of grade 7 students who help tend the gardens at the

school's neighbours the "Boogh foundation". Diploma Programme history Teacher Mirte Postma enlightens you on the way Theory of Knowledge is taught at the ISUtrecht and the students and teachers of grades 2-5 show you what the new "genius hour" is all about.

Last but not least a very warm welcome to all the new families and staff members who joined the school in January and especially to the students of the new Kindergarten White class, who started school for the very first time.

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Cover photo: Secondary boys during a PHE lesson. Picture by Tycho's Eye Photography

The value of an IB continuum school



By Rynette de Villiers, head of school

The International School Utrecht is one of three international schools in the Netherlands, which made a very deliberate choice to be an International Baccalaureate continuum school. This means that the school offers the International Baccalaureate Primary Years (PYP), Middle Years (MYP) and Diploma Programme (DP). The ISUtrecht, together with the international schools of Amsterdam and Hilversum, has made the rather brave choice to teach the PYP, instead of the International Primary Curriculum (IPC).

What makes the PYP different from other primary programmes? A PYP student is a curious, independent thinker who learns through inquiry. PYP educators are trained to facilitate the path of inquiry for a student group in such a way that students drive their own learning. The teacher provides both a framework and a direction for the students' inquiry process. This way a student develops an authentic pattern of investigation, a valuable skill, which will be put to excellent use in IB MYP.

The accreditation process for the PYP is more challenging than any other primary school curriculum and requires staff who are willing to step out of their comfort zone. PYP educators do not work as islands. The curriculum is planned, taught and assessed collaboratively. Teachers do not use existing teaching schemes, but consider the student, environment and strength of the educator in planning their lesson activities. Above all, learning is interactive!

There are a number of elements common to all three programmes. Students recognise them throughout the programmes and deepen their understanding of these concepts as they progress from one programme to the other. The IB learner profile and "Approaches to Teaching and Learning" (ATL) are two elements which make the continuum exceptionally cohesive.

The middle years (age 11-16) is a time when students become more sophisticated in their thought processes. A typical MYP student is an idealist who is secure in the knowledge that he/she can make a difference. It is our job to hold on to this conviction and try to transfer it into the diploma years. The middle years' conceptual learning model is very powerful. Like their PYP colleagues, MYP educators do not need a traditional textbook to anchor education. Teachers are willing to embrace the uncomfortable world of developing their own lesson material and take ownership in developing a curriculum in close collaboration with other professionals.

The Diploma Programme (age 17-18) student is required to take part in a balanced academic programme, which always includes a minimum of two languages. The DP concludes with an international, external examination, taken in May (for the northern hemisphere) of the final school year. DP students are accomplished researchers who can investigate, process and present their findings using accurate subject specific language, presented in high-quality research products.

The International School Utrecht staff is privileged to facilitate the learning of our students and proud to play a part in the creation of successful, independent lifelong learners!

Following your interests

By Ingrid Schmoutziguer

New this year is genius hour, a regular slot every Friday afternoon in which the students from grades 2-5 can pursue their own passions. For Nora (grade 4) that means dancing: 'It is so much fun. I love dancing. I dance all the time at home and now I can do it in school too. Genius hour is the best part of the week'.

Together with 8 other boys and girls from different primary grades, Nora spends her Friday afternoons dancing with grade 1 teacher Anne Brandwagt, who happens to be a passionate dancer herself. To kick off the project, the group had to research different styles of dancing, to figure out what type of dancing they would like to learn. Anne showed them different dance videos and the students also did their own online research. 'They then decided they wanted to learn "rock star dance"', says Anne. 'And they showed me the dance video from Cold Water', and so the Major Lazor song is what the children are dancing to this afternoon.

'What do I do after this step?', asks Vihaan (grade 3), as he is keen to get it absolutely right this time. 'Your hand goes out to the right, but you move your head to the left'. Anne shows the children the step once more in slow motion. 'Ah, that is where I went wrong', says Vihaan, whose moves next run-through are spot on. At the end of the process the students want to perform the dance to the whole school and their parents.

Genius hour is based on the "20 per cent rule", created in 2004 by Google's co-founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin. This rule allows Google employees to spend 20 per cent of their time to work on new ideas, or master new skills, as long as the company benefits from their pursuits. A scheme that, amongst other projects, resulted in the creation of Gmail, Google News and Google Transit.

The idea really caught on in education and for the last ten years in various schools across the globe, students have been participating in genius hour. 'Although students are encouraged to follow their passions, to learn about something that really interests them, there are some rules', explains Eryn Wiseman, leader of primary years. 'Each genius hour project must be lead by an inquiry: a research question. The students then should be involved in real research to deepen



their understanding of their topic. The process should be a combination of first hand experiences and secondary research.'

In a classroom on the second floor, nine students go over the results of today's chemistry test. Using scientific research and applying the method they created earlier, they went out onto the playground to figure out how they could make a bigger "explosion" than 4th grade teacher Nicole Lamers.

To illustrate their objectives the students tell me about the original explosion, involving a bottle of Coca Cola and three Mentos sweets. 'The cola came about this high'. Sofie (grade 2) holds her hand about fifteen centimetres above a bottle. 'So we need to get higher than that'. The group came up with the idea to compare different drinks (Fanta and Sprite) to Coca Cola and to see whether using special flavoured Mentos as opposed to regular Mentos would make a difference.

Today the students found out that in order to get a good result, you can only change one of the factors of the experiment, either the drink, or the type of sweets. 'And we discovered that since we brought in different sized bottles, we could not do some of the experiments', says Dani (grade 3) and he points



at his 0,5 litre Sprite bottle. 'You can't compare that to an explosion made with a 1,5 litre Sprite bottle, as it is just not fair.' The group was, however, able to discard Fanta, as the drink of choice for this experiment. Vera (grade 3): 'It really only made a tiny explosion. Hopefully we get a bigger one next week'.

Before the students could embark on their adventure, the teachers made an inventory of the interests in the school. 'We found out that students were interested in just about everything you could think of. You name it and chances were someone wanted to inquire into it', says Eryn Wiseman. 'So we needed to make some choices. We came up with the ten most popular categories to get genius hour started, namely: singing, dance, visual arts, cooking, gardening, sports, books, instrumental music, science, and drama.' Students all made a

top three, then groups were formed and teachers assigned to facilitate the process.

According to Eryn genius hour is a steep learning curve, for both the students and the teachers involved. 'Everyone seems to really be enjoying the sessions', she says. 'But the students sometimes come up with unrealistic ideas of what they can do. That is all part of the learning process though.' The students will get three twelve-week sessions of genius hour this year, so they all have the opportunity to swap topics.

At the end of each project students need to figure out a way of sharing what they learned. That's why when I enter the classroom where the cooking group are working I find them all engrossed in making recipe books. Vinesh (grade 4), who has teamed up with TJ (grade 5), Leah (grade 2) and Adam (grade 3), wants to create a book of food the students can prepare at home. Each of the students will have some of their favourite food – 'pizza' (Adam), 'pumpkin pie' (Leah), 'vegetarian food' (Vinesh) and 'edible slime' (TJ) – represented in the book. And of course it will also have all the recipes of the food the group prepared in the school kitchen.

'We made fruit salad, Jamaican coconut bread, bliss balls and pancakes' explains grade 2 teacher Lindsey Dudgeon. 'The students wanted to see if they could come up with ways to make healthier alternatives of classic recipes. That's why we made "bliss balls", a healthy treat'. Something TJ thoroughly enjoyed, as he 'can now make something at home that smells as good as my mum's cooking does'.

Service As Action

Every student in the IB Middle Years Programme has to spend some time providing a service, or take action within the school, or wider community. Lucy, Molly, Megan and Emma (grade 7) decided to venture outside of the school community to tend the gardens at our school's neighbours the "Boogh foundation", a day facility for people with brain damage, a physical disability, or a chronic illness.

By Ingrid Schmoutziguer



'From the science room in our building, we always see the people next door sitting outside when the weather is nice', says Lucy. 'It is so lovely to finally meet them'. The girls give up their lunch breaks and study hall time to help Jeroen Oord prepare the garden for spring.

'There always used to be a vegetable garden at the Boogh foundation', explains Jeroen, who works with people who suffer from brain damage after an accident, or illness. 'Over the years this garden has been a bit neglected, which is a real shame. I am hoping to be able to make a fresh start in the spring.'

Today that means that Lucy and Megan are set to work harvesting the last aubergines from the green house, while Emma and Molly dig over one of the vegetable beds outside. To keep them from ruining their nice shoes, Jeroen provides each of the girls with a pair of waterproof boots.

'There is no set amount of hours the students need to spend on their Service As Action (SAA)' says SAA coordinator Liam Moody, 'but it has to be meaningful'. 'The students should do it not because they have to, but because they want to'. This year students chose various activities to shape their SAA. A group of boys hold regular bake sales to help support fun activities for the secondary students, while another group is organising a football tournament for the primary students. Liam: 'Being in the student council, providing mother tongue support for primary students, or offering to tutor students who struggle with Maths or Spanish are all

different ways in which students this year show their commitment to the ISUtrecht community'.

'Stand up straight when you are hoeing.' Jeroen is showing Emma and Megan how to get rid of the weeds in his vegetable beds. Besides these vegetable beds and a green house, Boogh also has a herb garden and a couple of bee hives. The girls' offer to come and garden once a week means a great deal to him: 'I cannot get this garden ready for spring all by myself', he says. 'But even more importantly, I hope that the clients, when seeing the students and me working outside, get curious and will come and see for themselves what gardening is all about.'



Besides doing the work, it is also important that the students reflect on their Service As Action. 'That doesn't necessarily have to be a written reflection; it could very well be a drawing, some pictures, or a poem', says Liam. 'As long as they show me that they thought about their project and what it means to them and the community.'

Megan, who knows 'a lot about gardening' and Lucy, who has 'never done much gardening, as she lived most of her life in a big city', are making really good progress with harvesting and clearing out the aubergine bed in the green house. So far both girls really enjoy their project. 'I like the fact that what we do is really important and a big help', says Megan. Immediately Lucy chimes in: 'It would be so cool if we get to garden together with the clients from Boogh in the spring.'

Theory of Knowledge in the Diploma Programme

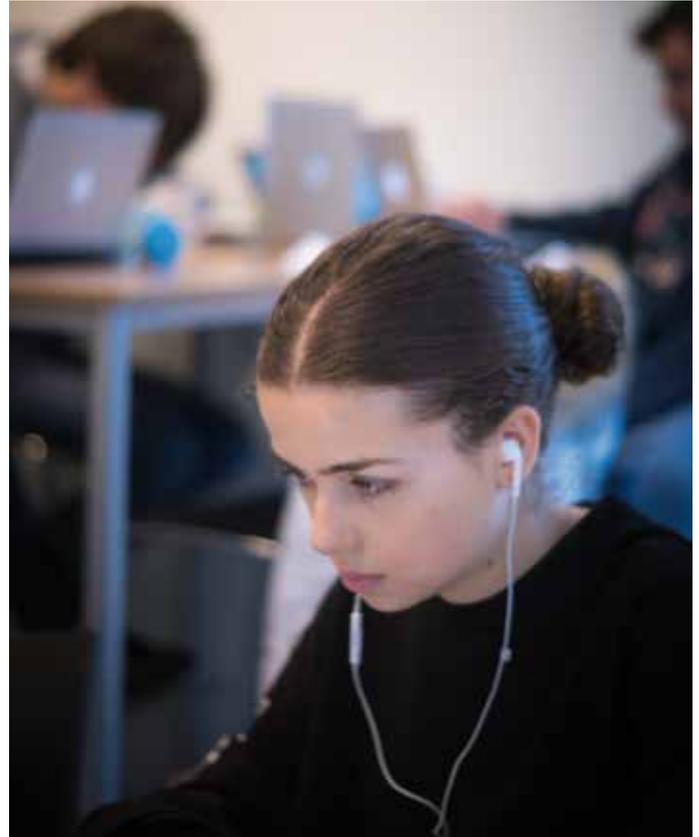
We live in a world where there is easier access to more information than ever before. But how to make sense of the bombardment of facts and knowledge that hits us every day? What to believe and what to reject? Theory of Knowledge (TOK) teaches the International Baccalaureate Diploma Students to be critical.

By Mirte Postma, DP History and TOK

Theory of Knowledge, part of the core of the IB Diploma Programme, is so much more than just another subject. The founders of the IB deemed critical thinking so important, that they decided that each and every DP student should have TOK lessons throughout the programme. Students should not passively accept what their textbooks and teachers tell them. Instead, they should question and contest the information they find online, see on the television, or read in the newspaper.

At first glance, TOK can be a frightening subject. It throws all of our comfortable securities overboard. Because when you pose that question that underlies all of TOK, "How do we know?", it turns out that we really are not sure about much at all. One of the first problems presented to students in TOK is that of the evil demon of Rene Descartes. The 17th century father of modern philosophy was the first to pose the question: what if everything I sense with my senses is an illusion made up by an evil demon? In other words: what if we actually live in the Matrix and everything we experience is not real but we are actually plugged into some kind of supercomputer? There really is no way to know whether that is untrue. If they then learn about Gödel's incompleteness theorem, which states that even knowledge gained in Mathematics is not really waterproof, they can start to despair: is there anything we can really know? What if everything I have ever learned is untrue or uncertain?

It is TOK that, together with the Extended Essay (EE) and Creativity, Activity, Service (CAS), makes up the core of the IB Diploma Programme. Every secondary school curriculum has subjects like Mathematics, History and Biology, but only the IB DP has this core, which ensures that we teach our students to be the critical, responsible world citizens we want them to be. But how do you teach something as elusive as critical thinking?



The aim of TOK obviously is not to make students despair and leave them paralysed with uncertainty. The goal is rather to get them to ask critical questions and to realise that the world is probably more complex than they think by presenting them with lots of examples of complexities. For teenagers the world is often reassuringly black and white. Scientists are always right, history is a compilation of facts and to know what is right and what is wrong you simply use your common sense. They are used to blindly accept what their parents, teachers and other authority figures tell them. On second glance however, authority figures are fallible, our senses often deceive us and our common sense often leads us to jump to conclusions. Realising this and discussing it at length with their peers, empowers students to know which information to trust and which not.

Since the American elections were on everyone's mind, we recently discussed the current trend of fact-free politics in a post-truth era. Donald Trump didn't really care about telling the truth during the election campaign and there are more and more websites and individuals actively spreading false news and rumours. Both Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg and president Obama have now spoken out about the dangers for democracy if voters are ill informed or even falsely informed. In TOK we spoke about fundamental related questions surrounding knowledge, such as: Does it matter whether what you believe is true? What are the dangers of believing things that are not true? Who is responsible for making sure news and social media messages are true?



Music for all

This year all the students up to grade 10 have weekly music lessons, or will participate in music projects as part of the curriculum. 'Students are playing and singing all the time and that is exactly how I envisaged music education at the ISUtrecht'.

By Ingrid Schmoutziguer

I am having a coffee with music teacher David de Geus, responsible for creating an extensive music programme for the ISUtrecht over the next couple of years. 'We made a good start', says De Geus. 'I designed units for all the MYP grades and I now teach each of the MYP classes two or three hours per week.'

It is the beginning of the "ISUtrecht Music Academy", a continuous programme throughout the MYP grades, aiming towards giving students the opportunity to choose music as an IB Diploma subject. 'This is something we will build on, ensuring our students have access to various instrumental specialists during and after school hours', De Geus explains. 'I want our DP music students to be able to directly go to a music conservatory and to that end I am looking to work closely together with the Utrecht music conservatory'.

To teach the primary classes, music teacher Amber Vincent joined the ISUtrecht team just before the summer holidays. Vincent has since designed music units for the Kindergarten and grade five students who she now teaches weekly. Later this year Vincent will also be teaching the grade 1 students, when their unit of inquiry revolves around music. Another full time music teacher will be hired, ensuring that next academic year all the PYP and MYP grades will have weekly music lessons.

Grades 2-4 are in for a special treat this spring: a unique project lead by Utrecht music centre and concert hall TivoliVredenburg. 'In this project called "Young Composers" the students will compose a piece of music which will be played by the Danel String Quartet', tells De Geus. 'First of all we are going to TivoliVredenburg to listen to a performance by this French string quartet. In the following weeks educators from Tivoli/Vredenburg will lead 10 to 12 workshops, teaching the students to write their own piece of music.'

In May the students will visit TivoliVredenburg again, this time to put on a performance - together with the Danel String Quartet - playing their own musical composition. Parents will of course all be invited to this concert. De Geus: 'this project is all about the students being risk-takers, and being creative, which is exactly what music education should be about. I can't wait for the students to get stuck in'.

Another project in which De Geus managed to persuade his students to step outside of their comfort zone, was a project named "Oldies for the oldies", which he undertook with grade 9. A project that kicked off with the students visiting care home De Bijniershoek, across the street from the secondary campus. There they talked to people about their favourite music from when they were young. This led to a list of five songs - by the Beatles, Elvis Presley and the Everly Brothers - which the students learned how to play. 'All the students were playing an instrument like guitar, bass guitar, keyboards, drums, forming complete bands. 'Early November we went back to the care home for a special performance, which was great', says De Geus. 'Everyone had a really good time and the students all got a sense of achievement, as for most of them it was the first time they performed music for an audience.'

The most important thing in music education according to De Geus is making sure the students enjoy music. 'First and foremost it is my job to make them want to make and listen to music', he says. 'Once they are engaged, you can create the need for more skills.' And that is exactly how it works with the newly formed primary chorus and secondary vocal group. De Geus: 'The secondary vocal group, an acapella ensemble, are learning to sing in four-part harmony, whereas with the primary chorus it is all about learning how to use your voice, learning how to sing. As the students are keen to learn to sing better, you have a great opportunity to teach them different techniques.' Both the secondary vocal group and the primary chorus will perform for the ISUtrecht community on Thursday 23 February. During this concert the guitar club and keyboards students will also show the community what they can do!

Besides playing instruments and singing, the students also learn how to use technology to create their own music, they get to grips with music theory and learn about the economics of music. The grade 10 students for instance have immersed themselves in the music industry, writing their own song, creating their own music video and pitching their ideas to a music producer from Hilversum who visited the school. Later on in their unit they will go and have a look around at national radio station 3FM.

The first part of De Geus' mission to introduce music to the ISUtrecht, is a success, judging by the popularity of the rehearsal

studio across from the music room. 'Students ask me to use the studio to practice and the guitar and keyboards teachers use the space for lessons.' He smiles. 'Students are playing and singing all the time and that is exactly how I envisaged music education at the ISUtrecht.'

Ensuring music becomes a part of the curriculum for all students and offering students the opportunity to choose music as part of their Diploma Programme, is definitely the right course for the school, according to De Geus. 'Music is a universal language and makes for a wonderful bridge between different cultures', he says. 'And the city of Utrecht has such a strong music culture, that it makes perfect sense to make music the focus point of the school.'



MORE

This spring the vocal group will work closely together with the newly formed secondary drama troupe to stage ISUtrecht's first musical play, which will be performed in June in the black box (seating 50 people) on three consecutive nights. 'The students will write their own script, based on Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*', says drama teacher Erick Aufderheyde. 'We will also incorporate some songs from the vocal group.' It is going to be a small production that will be performed in an intimate setting at the secondary campus. Aufderheyde: 'It marks the start of a new tradition, an annual ISUtrecht production that eventually we will perform for a large audience.'

Promoting an exciting and healthy digital lifestyle

By Ana Yao, media resources coordinator, responsible for the social wellness campaign

We are living in a very exciting and rapidly changing world, where our work and personal life are increasingly driven by technology. A rise in the use of robots and computer interaction is leading us to an unknown future. As adults we are still shaping the moral and social codes of conduct online. So, how do we teach our children to have a healthy and empowered life in the digital world?

Sometimes it is easy to ignore, or be overly worried about how our children conduct their digital lives which we cannot see happening in front of our eyes. It can be confusing to try to understand all the new social media, syndromes such as FOMO (fear of missing out) and all the new communication platforms, which are appearing on the market at a speed, which is almost impossible for us to process.

Your conduct in the digital world should mirror your conduct in the real world

Many of us are familiar with social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and WhatsApp, but others are more obscure. How many of us use Houseparty, Hangouts, GroupMe, or WeChat? At ISUtrecht, we believe education is the answer. The school, in close collaboration with our parents, will have to teach and empower the students to deal with the technological future. We also believe that technology is wonderful, as it can help our students to strengthen their friendships using social media, offer a sense of belonging, help them express themselves, boost creativity and be a powerful source of knowledge.



Last November, ISUtrecht launched a digital wellness campaign at a parents evening with guest speaker Tim Gerrish. Tim is the founder of International Child Protection Advisors, and during the evening he shared his experiences of working and advising international schools on their child safeguarding procedures to ensure policies are in place. The intention of the evening was to create parental awareness of the importance of their involvement in their child's digital education. ISUtrecht believes for a successful social awareness campaign, the combined participation of the school, parents and students is required. The school provides a social policy and generates awareness, parents support the understanding of the social policies and the students are educated to understand good digital citizenship.

ISUtrecht will use digital citizenship lessons provided by "Common Sense", a leading independent nonprofit organisation, which helps to empower children in a technological world. Common Sense has developed an education programme with a diverse set of modules that describe what is required to be a good digital citizen such as; 'Self-Image & Identity', 'Relationships & Communication', 'Digital Footprint & Reputation', 'Cyberbullying & Digital Drama', 'Information Literacy', 'Internet Safety', 'Privacy & Security' and 'Creative Credit & Copyright'. The underlying premise of these lessons is the notion that your conduct in the digital world should mirror your conduct in the real world.

We are looking forward to implementing our digital wellness campaign throughout the whole International School Utrecht community and promoting an exciting and healthy digital lifestyle.

STUDENTS IN ACTION



3W exploring Park Transwijk on a beautiful autumn day



First day of school assembly in August for all the PYP students



1B are making snot to learn about germs



Some students of 2W reading together with a parent helper



5B had a great time visiting science museum Nemo in amsterdam



Local police officers visited the KG classes to talk to them about community helpers



Halloween celebrations at the primary campus



Secondary students could win a prize for best costume to mark Halloween

Parent Support Group

By Liesl Little



Now firmly established, the Parent Support Group (PSG) is branching out. Some of our new ideas include: working together with the Physical Health Education (PHE) team to try and have ISUtrecht students participating in local and national school competitions this year. We also want to establish sub-committees for each of our portfolios to give more parents the opportunity to be involved at school.

Our current members and their portfolios are:

- Judith van Abeelen (chair) - coffee mornings & afternoon teas
- Roosmarijn de Boer (liaison between Division Council and PSG) – coffee mornings & afternoon teas
- Hinde Smit (secretary) – class parents & sport events
- Anna Jackson (treasurer) – ISUtrecht yearbook
- Liesl Little (liaison between IPSSG and PSG) – communication
- Seema Tewari – school events
- Reenam Jakhar – school events
- Doremieke Kruithof – ISUtrecht yearbook & sport events



One of the needs identified was to produce our own newsletter to which parents can subscribe and it has proved to be a success. We now can include more topics relevant to parents with regard to school events as well as events taking place in and around Utrecht. Parents are invited to contribute in the form of articles or ideas on

what they would like to see in the newsletter. We are also working on a new Facebook page to complement the newsletter.

We wanted to include more parents in our coffee mornings. We therefore decided to alternate a coffee morning with an afternoon tea on the first Thursday of every month and to host these events at the Primary Campus. Not only are more parents joining in, it also gives them the opportunity to talk to a representative of the school leadership team in a less formal environment.

This year, many families and a few teachers joined the Avond4daagse; a 5km walk on four consecutive nights. This was a great example of how activities out of school add to our community-feel. For the annual ISUtrecht ArtBurst the PSG arranged the food trucks and sales, and during the PYP Konings spelen we organised the snack/lunch and classroom activities. The movie night in September was yet again a great success and parents had the opportunity to socialise and enjoy traditional Dutch food while their children watched a movie.

Other activities arranged by the PSG included a school picnic at Transwijk Park, horseback riding in Amersfoort, visiting a coffee bean roaster and Sinterklaas celebrations. We also hosted a 'borrel' for PYP parents while their children enjoyed the Christmas celebration dinner organised by the school.



Having class parent coordinators in the primary classes has proven invaluable and is currently being rolled out in secondary too. And with the help of some very dedicated parents the yearbook team was able to produce a book of high quality.

If you have a question, or suggestion for the PSG, please get in touch via psg@isutrecht.nl. You can keep up with all that is happening in school, as well as in and around Utrecht, by signing up for the PSG Newsletter using the link on the parent page on the ISUtrecht website (go to 'organisation' and then to 'parents')



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