

What makes a green school?

Responding to the challenge of environmental impact at the International School of Brussels

“Being ‘green’ is the new black. It’s actually what some of us have been advocating for years now, but responding to the threat of global climate change has never been so in vogue.”

Our Mission

We know that the future holds much promise, if we are prepared to let go of the past. And in many ways, a more sustainable, more responsible, greener lifestyle is certainly an attractive proposition right now. After all, who doesn’t want to drive an electric car, live in a passive house, or enjoy the benefits of cleaner air. The only obstacle, perhaps, is that the roadmaps are still somewhat unclear and we don’t quite know how to reach this environmental utopia.

Schools, in particular, have some peculiar challenges in this respect – as we have been discovering over the past few years at the International School of Brussels (ISB), Belgium.

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At the heart of our mission is the desire to produce students that are both ‘independent learners’ and ‘international citizens’. In other words, they should not only be equipped to learn, but able to bring a range of attitudes – empathy, perspective, fairness, personal meaning, responsibility, etc. – to some of the most complex, pressing issues of life in the 21st Century, including climate change.

The Challenges

So one of the challenges we are facing right now is how to provide our students with an educational experience that will enable them to wrestle with these complex issues and develop specific skills, knowledge and a sense of personal engagement, sufficient to ensure that they will make positive choices in the future.

Another challenge, though, has been how we organize ourselves and literally *model* this learning in everything we do – from the way we manage waste and policies on recycling to our energy consumption and the way we plan new buildings.

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We still have a long, long way to go, but here are some of the things we are engaged in right now:

- **Developing a mobility plan that is not so much 'anti-car' but embracing the principles of personal choice and responsibility**
- **Designing a new Campus that both reflects that school's learning vision and achieves the highest possible levels of efficiency - ensuring that the buildings themselves symbolize a sustainable way of living for our students**
- **Setting clear targets. This is key, particularly when it comes to long-term changes in behaviour. We strongly believe that we can reduce our carbon emissions by 50% over the next ten years**

Today, it could be said that every school is green. No school is going to argue that they are anything else. The challenge, as far as we are concerned, however, is whether we really will live up to what we say and start living different kinds of lives.