



ISF | INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF
FLORENCE

EARLY CHILDHOOD AT ISF



Our Values
RESILIENCE RESPECT
RELATIONSHIPS
RESPONSIBILITY



Early Childhood at ISF

A series of thin, wavy, yellow lines that flow across the page, starting from the left and ending on the right, creating a sense of movement and rhythm.

Early Childhood at the International School of Florence encompasses the first three years of schooling for our students. This includes two years of mixed-age Early Years (ages 3-5) and a third year of Foundation (ages 5-6). The program is led by a highly knowledgeable team of educators with extensive experience in teaching our youngest learners within a warm and supportive environment. Our educator-to-child ratio is 1:8, with a lead teacher and bilingual assistant in each class, ensuring a high level of support and interaction.

We follow the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (PYP), which continues through to Grade 5. The PYP in the Early Years adopts a child-centered, developmental approach, encouraging children to follow their curiosity and imagination through open-ended experiences. This approach nurtures caring and culturally aware children, empowering them to become active participants in their own learning. Additionally, we draw inspiration from the Reggio Emilia approach, an Italian educational philosophy renowned in Early Childhood education worldwide.

The school day offers a range of opportunities for exploration within the context of our units of inquiry, as well as in Physical Education, Music, Art, Italian, Technology, and Library time.

Why we value mixed ages in the Early Years

Mixed-age group settings in early childhood education offer numerous benefits for both younger and older children, contributing to their social, cognitive, and emotional development.

Long-Term Relationships and Stability

Mixed-age groupings allow children to stay with the same teacher and peer group for several years, which helps build strong, stable relationships and a sense of community within the classroom.

Enhanced Social Skills

Mixed-age settings promote social learning opportunities where older children can develop leadership skills and younger children can benefit from role modeling. This arrangement fosters empathy, cooperation, and mutual respect as children interact with peers of different ages and developmental stages

Increased Engagement and Motivation

When children are allowed to group based on their interests rather than strictly by age, their engagement and motivation levels tend to increase. This is because they can participate in activities that are more aligned with their interests and developmental readiness, leading to a more stimulating and enjoyable learning experience



Learner Profile

As the IB Mission in action, the LEARNER PROFILE remains central to all IB programmes. The whole learning community plays an important part in developing, valuing, appreciating, monitoring and demonstrating the learner profile in action.

The ten aspirational qualities of the learner profile inspire and motivate the work of teachers, students and schools, providing a statement of the aims and values of the IB and a definition of what we mean by “international-mindedness”.





Inquirers
Knowledgeable
Principled
Open-minded
Caring

Balanced
Reflective
Communicator
Thinker
Courageous

Students have a range of opportunities to develop and demonstrate attributes of the learner profile in the daily life of our learning community:

- as part of the school curriculum through the transdisciplinary units of inquiry and through subject-specific investigations;
- through interactions in a variety of learning spaces (in the library, music room, makerspace through social interactions, break and lunch, sport, after school activities, field trips, etc.);
- through school events such as assemblies and sports days;
- at home and in the wider community through interactions with family and friends.

central features of early years learning

Play

"Play is more than just fun.
When children play, they are
researchers.

They are developing theories, they
are investigating those theories and
making sense of their world"

Tania Lattanzio



Play-based learning provides benefits for cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, offering authentic opportunities for students to begin exploring and developing the IB learner profile.

Through play, children actively construct meaning from their interactions with the physical and social worlds. Play can be free, guided, directed, or games-based, bringing valid skills, preferences, and understandings of learning.

Children construct, test, confirm, and revise ideas by themselves or with their peers, constantly adapting their personal models of how the world works. Teachers support play by:

- Scheduling uninterrupted time for play in both indoor and outdoor spaces.
- Noticing students' emerging thinking processes, interests, and theories, and responding in ways that extend learning.
- Monitoring and documenting students' learning and development during play, and offering appropriately scaffolded learning experiences for individual students and small groups.

Approaches to Learning



Learning in the Primary Years Programme (PYP) is based on 'approaches to learning' skills (ATLs). These skills aim to support children of all ages to become learners who know how to ask good questions, set effective goals, and pursue their aspirations with the determination to achieve them. The infographic below, represents how ATLs can be developed through play



central features of early years learning

Relationships

Relationships in the early years are a fundamental part of establishing important skills and dispositions that center on trust, agency, and belonging. When the importance of relationships is reinforced, the foundations for an effective learning community are established.

Teachers support the development of relationships through:

- Encouraging and nurturing positive relationships between home, family and school
- Viewing each child as unique and respecting their individuality
- Acknowledging students' efforts and achievements in a multilingual environment
- Conversing, listening and observing interactions
- Recognizing opportunities for students to learn how to self-regulate during play and offer support and feedback when needed
- Planning purposeful play opportunities in engaging learning spaces
- Supporting the development of social skills such as taking turns, sharing, and listening as part of a group



central features of early years learning

The Learning Environment

Contemporary theories and research informed by the Reggio Emilia approach recognize and value the environment as a 'third teacher'. In addition to adults and children, physical spaces hold the potential to influence what and how children learn.

Materials are thoughtfully added to the environment to promote creativity, thinking and problem solving skills, questions, open-ended play and experimentation.



Early Years Programme of Inquiry

A transdisciplinary program of inquiry provides students with a comprehensive learning experience that is broad, balanced, conceptual, and interconnected. It aims to offer students a mix of subject-specific knowledge, conceptual understandings, skills, opportunities to develop the IB learner profile attributes, and to take action.

	Transdisciplinary themes					
	Who We Are	How We Express Ourselves	How The World Works	How We Organise Ourselves	Where We Are in Place and Time	Sharing the Planet
Early Years (cycle 1 - 24-25)	Understanding ourselves helps us to connect to others.	Through playful exploration we can come to new understandings.	By testing ideas and experimenting with materials we can solve construction problems.			Observing cycles in nature enable us to connect to its wonder and beauty
Early Years (cycle 2 - 25-26)	We are all unique individuals who share similarities that connect us.	We can explore celebrations through playful expression.	Playing with and exploring materials helps us to understand their properties and uses.			The living things we share our world with grow and change.
Foundation	Each person has a unique way of experiencing and connecting to the world.	People use their creativity to express ideas and share feelings	Through observation and experimentation we can gain knowledge of the world		We use a variety of tools to orientate in place, space and time	

The six transdisciplinary themes capture human commonalities that are significant and relevant regardless of where students are in the world and to which ethnic or cultural groups they belong.

Engaging with nature

At ISF, the youngest members of our school community spend extensive periods of time connecting with the natural world both on campus and with frequent trips to our Olive Grove. Learning opportunities outdoors are beneficial to well-being and engage young children's sense of touch, smell, taste, hearing and sound, helping them understand and find meaning in the natural world.

By recognising basic cause and effect relationships, students in the Early Years become aware of the importance of showing care and respect for living things as well as for themselves and each other.



Engaging with language

Students share personal experiences and understandings through talk, play, shared stories and collaborative exploration. Teachers plan and create learning experiences that extend students' language capabilities. When young students are involved in dramatic and cooperative play, language becomes more complex as it includes negotiating roles, taking turns, conveying desires and meeting the needs of others.

Teachers model language around these explorations through discussion, and use observations about students' expressed interests to ensure a responsive learning environment. Students' English language skills are reinforced daily through purposeful modelling and contextual interactions, with Italian language integrated for Early Years and as dedicated lessons in the Foundation classroom.



Engaging with numeracy

Throughout the Early Years, children learn mathematics by constructing meaning through ever-increasing levels of abstraction, starting with exploring their own personal experiences, understandings and knowledge. Purposeful teacher guided activities encourage children to discover and construct mathematical meanings through play where concepts such as sorting and organizing or building and designing are featured.

Experiences with numbers are built into the child's daily learning experiences based on their readiness. Number sense from counting, number identification, addition and subtraction, recognising patterns through comparing and sorting, identifying shapes, comparing sizes through lengths and weights and making simple estimations to form graphs are some of the mathematical concepts that the children learn in our Early Years.



Engaging with literacy

Stories provide particular opportunities to develop language comprehension and the foundations of literacy.

When young students assume the roles of characters and play with elements of a story, comprehension increases, as do concepts of print. Songs and rhymes accompanied by actions that support the development of concepts, sentence structure and vocabulary along with phonemic and graphemic awareness and memory.

As students progress through the Early Childhood, literacy instruction becomes more formal with the introduction of the reader's, writer's and phonics workshop.



A typical day in the Early Years

8.30 11.00	Morning Meeting Free Flow Play Exploration Morning Snack	
11.00 12.00	Specialist Integration or Stand alone lesson	
12.00 13.00	Younger Students	Older Students
	Lunch	Literacy/ phonemic Awareness/ Maths
13.00 14.00	Nap Time	Lunch
14.00 15.20	Garden Exploration	
15.20	Goodbyes and Home Time	

A typical day in Foundation

8.30	Morning Meeting and Classroom Learning
9.00	Phonics and Writer's Workshop
10.00	Snack and Outdoor Play
10.30	Maths / Reader's Workshop
11.50	Lunch and Outdoor Play
12.50	Unit of Inquiry
13.50	Italian/ Specialist Classes (PE, Music, ICT, Art, Library, Italian)
15.20	Goodbyes and Home Time

"Our task, regarding creativity, is to help children climb their own mountains, as high as possible. No one can do more."

Loris Malaguzzi







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