

## **STANDARD 5: ETHICAL PRACTICE**

### **1. How does the school ensure its members are treated fairly, equitably, and ethically?**

The consideration of fair, equitable and ethical treatment is applied to all members of the community, including children, all staff and parents. In fact, one of the fundamental pillars of the school's philosophy is the emphasis on respect and emotional intelligence. The road to achieving this goal goes through training and periodical coaching. The staff must do an intensive or one-year course in active listening, respectful teaching practices and conflict management. Certain attitudes and behaviors, such as shouting and punishing do not exist in our school as they are considered inappropriate, disrespectful and counterproductive. We believe that for learning to reach its full potential, the learning environment must be calm and safe for students and teachers alike.

Given that in Gándara students have the opportunity to move around in class – no traditional sitting arrangement at individual desks – students have the chance to nurture rich and deep relationships with their peers. Sometimes disagreements and friction inevitably appear among the students and it is the job of the teachers to accompany and guide the students towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict, bearing in mind the needs of both parts, as well as the physical and mental integrity of all members of the school community. Conflict management is not blaming a culprit and establishing disciplinary measures. Rather, it is acknowledging the emotional state of each part and guiding them to a state where both parts can reconsider their behavior and agree to a solution. Thus, solutions are not imposed by an external authority, but co-generated by the participants in the conflict.

#### **Rules and limits**

Notwithstanding the aforementioned, there are instances when the teachers do impose a limit or rule. There are clear rules as to what is permitted at the school and what is not, and established guidelines that the children must follow to ensure a peaceful, safe and collaborative environment. The basic rules and limits are laid out in a document for the teaching staff (see Annex 5.1). It is a public document that is available to parents too. When arriving at Gándara for the first time, the new children are instructed in the basic rules.

By and large, the rules are laid out to ensure that everyone is treated fairly and respectfully, and to guarantee both physical and emotional safety. These rules are explained to families interested in the school during the first interviews.

The rules and limits document also provides for clear consequences when the rules are not respected. These consequences may range from being left under the constant supervision of an adult – in the case of physical or verbal aggression, or damage to materials or premises –, to doing actions that are a direct consequence of the behavior of the rule-breaker.

#### **Elementary School Assemblies**

Elementary school pupils are also encouraged to take an active part in the regulation of school life through their weekly assembly sessions. These sessions are used to plan projects, make suggestions, express ideas and wishes and also to deal with issues that affect all or most of the members of the Elementary school. Guided by the teachers, the pupils discuss the implications of the issues under discussion, and try to find the best possible way to redress them. The proposals are then voted and a pupil takes note of the decisions taken. These agreements are then to be respected and enforced by pupils and teachers alike.

We believe this is a very important mechanism for children to learn how to think and negotiate, and to express their opinions in public respectfully, and we cherish these moments as fundamental to the dynamics of the school.

### **A culture of respect**

The notion of respect is not just instilled in the students, but also exercised daily in the relationships among teachers and with the parents.

The teachers hold weekly sessions where they can raise any issues that came up during the week regarding students, other colleagues or parents. We very much stress the importance of empathy, clarity and respect when expressing our views to each other, and we are trained to speak out constructively when we think something is not right.

This culture of respect is also conveyed to the parents when they first come to Gándara. To help them acquire communication skills and develop respectful parenting practices, part of the end-of-term meeting is devoted to a discussion on these topics. Furthermore, the school offers qualified training in the shape of a conference, seminar or course during the academic year. This year there will be a one-year training course on respectful teaching and parenting practices by Tinus Wijnakker, one of our school mentors. Tinus has also trained our staff and comes regularly to our school for retraining, coaching and counseling sessions.

The basic principles of the school's ethical practice are laid out in our dossier which, though needing some updating, shows the main points of our philosophy. The principles are as follows:

1. **Rules and values:** The school has an established set of rules and values that facilitate relationships amongst all its members. In this respect, children are guided and encouraged to respect these rules and values so that they can become active citizens that respect human rights and the pluralism that characterizes democratic societies.
2. **The individual and the group:** Students are encouraged to value both individual and collective goals, and to collaborate and help one another to achieve them.
3. **Students as engaged citizens:** The school promotes universal values and human rights, and encourages students to acquire their own values and engage in society through democratic and peaceful participation.
4. **Emotional intelligence versus discrimination:** The school promotes the development of healthy psycho-emotional interpersonal skills, as well as the rejection of violence, any kind of prejudices, sexist stereotypes and discrimination on any grounds.
5. **Equal opportunities:** The school has a culture of equitable and fair treatment to all members of the school community in order to ensure equal opportunities for all.
6. **Critical thinking:** The school fosters the development of reflective and critical thinking through peaceful conflict resolution and philosophical dialogue, which helps students to take responsibility of their own actions and reflect on their consequences.
7. **Self-esteem and motivation:** The school works towards boosting students' self-esteem so that they can believe in themselves, identify and nurture their values and potential, and can help themselves and others achieve their goals. In Gándara, appreciation is shown through careful description of achievements, avoiding gratuitous praise and

reward mechanisms. Thus students can have their own sense of achievement, avoiding external judgment, which has a positive and long-lasting effect on motivation and self-esteem.

## **2. How does the school protect its members against discrimination?**

The school applies non-discrimination policies at all levels.

There are various mechanisms to avoid discriminatory practices and attitudes:

- Students are guided towards understanding the different cultures that inhabit the world, and are given basic notions of human rights, gender equality, and non-discrimination on any grounds, including disability.
- Activities to promote integration and foster positive group dynamics (teamwork, co-operative games, goodbye rounds, etc.)
- Valuing hygiene and health, accepting one's body and other people's physical differences, respecting differences and using physical education and sports as a means to promote personal development and social integration.
- Attention to diversity. Tutors give individual attention to all students, and more individual time is given to children with learning difficulties. Teachers are also trained to observe any special needs the children may experience and hold parent conferences when needed in order to elaborate reinforcement strategies.
- External specialized services are sought when needed. For instance, this will be the second year we host awareness sessions at the Elementary School to help pupils understand autism and acquire healthy strategies to interact with autistic peers. The effects these sessions had on the children last year were simply spectacular: co-operation and empathy improved considerably as a result.

## **3. What mechanisms exist through which the members of the school community may seek redress against perceived injustices or unfair treatment?**

These mechanisms exist although they have not been written on any document yet. Here follows an explanation of the current practice we follow in these cases:

### **Students and parents**

In the case of students and parents, the first step is to address the tutor. He/She will then refer their concern to the Principal. In some cases, parents wish to address the Principal directly.

After hearing the parent or child, the Principal will gather information from all people involved in the incident/conflict and then arrange for further meetings to discuss and seek a way to solve the situation.

In situations without a precedent or especially serious cases, the Principal will consult the Governing Board and they will jointly decide on a course of action to solve the situation.

Whenever there is no literature on that specific matter, the Governing Board will work on a protocol with a view to preventing similar situations in the future and establishing the guidelines to deal with specific situations if they were to happen again.

#### **Staff**

The procedure would be similar to that followed in the case of parents and teachers. In the eventuality that the conflict involved the Principal, then the members of the staff could refer directly to any members of the Governing Board.

We are confident that our meeting protocol and the current group dynamics of the school staff are an excellent way to prevent serious conflict and the deterioration of teamwork. At Gándara, personal improvement is an essential and ongoing process which allows us to develop constructive conflict-management skills and detect needs at an early stage.

#### **4. What avenues exist that foster open and transparent communication among school stakeholders?**

Face-to-face meetings are paramount to build a sense of community. Mandatory meetings are planned in September and any changes in the dates/times are notified by e-mail and/or in paper when necessary. For detailed information, please refer to our Meeting Protocol (Annex 5.2)

The school also fosters communication and sharing between all the school community agents. Some activities to increase the presence of parents in the school include:

- One or two school festivals during the school year, followed by a picnic lunch with all the families in the school garden.
- On some occasions, the school requests the co-operation of some parents in school trips.
- A family day trip in June, which usually involves hillwalking or trips to the riverside or to the beach.
- “Parent invitations”: The children can invite one of his parents as a guest to spend a morning or part of a morning at school. With the help of the tutor, the child has to prepare the visit and on the day of the visit, present his/her work to the parent.
- Other activities such as collaboration in the orchard, parent presentations of their jobs, etc.

With regard to the students, we have already mentioned school assemblies as a great way to improve communication within the group, amongst peers and with the teachers.

#### **5. How does the school assess its effectiveness in creating and maintaining a culture that values and practices fairness, openness, and ethical conduct?**

It is part of our mission to create a culture of fairness, openness and ethical behavior. Being a small community allows us to be alert to what is going on in the school at every level. Yet, conflict is inherent to human relationships and despite all our efforts, we are aware that there will always be room for improvement.

Evaluation of this point and all other issues going on at the school is carried out by the teachers, the tutors and the Principal during their regular weekly and monthly meetings. When

a procedure is found inefficient, there is a period of reflection and discussion in order to find a way to address any difficulties and shortcomings.

On many occasions this process of evaluation involves the Governing Board. The period of reflection may involve face-to-face meetings, or individual reflection followed by communication via e-mail of the position held by each member. This last option ensures that everyone has a chance to express carefully their views.

The final stage involves a meeting to decide on the course of action and who will execute and supervise the actions to be taken.

**6. How does the school ensure benefits and rewards are predictable, comprehensive, and consistent with legal, moral, and professional norms?**

The school is run according to the current European and Spanish laws regarding labor conditions, schedules and salaries which ensure a fair treatment of all employees. All members of the staff have signed and read their contracts and any doubts are diligently solved by our labor consultant, Margarita Valladares.

Labor regulations are strictly applied to maternity leave, sickness, and other workers' rights. Please find a copy of the applicable worker agreement for private schools providing compulsory education services (Annex 5.3).

Also, both the Management and the Governing Board are informed of all the current employment regulations applicable to the school staff.

SELF-ASSESSMENT:

Standard is partially met and implemented

**Attached documents:**

Annex 5.1 Rules and Limits Guidelines

Annex 5.2 Meeting Protocol

Annex 5.3 Workers' Agreement applicable to the school personnel