



Calgary French & International School (CFIS) May 2017 CAIS Accreditation Results

Canadian Accredited Independent Schools (CAIS) accreditation is widely considered by the Canadian independent school community to set the standard for both pedagogical and operational best practices. CAIS develops and promotes educational excellence and improvement at the individual school level through a rigorous accreditation process. CAIS's standards and procedures are congruent with internationally accepted criteria, and model core standards adopted by the International Commission on Accreditation of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS). After first applying for membership in 2013, CFIS began the CAIS accreditation process, which involves an intensive, independent evaluation of the applicant school.

CFIS has completed the first two steps of the process. The first step, an extensive internal evaluation and subsequent report, took place in the 2015-16 school year, and the first half of 2016-17. Each CFIS administrator, teacher, and staff member participated in an in-depth examination of all aspects of the school's programs and operations, to determine our strengths and any areas of weaknesses. This process resulted in a

nearly 200-page report and thousands of pages of documentation—evidence of our mission, vision and values in action.

The next step in the process took place in May 2017, when the Visiting Committee, comprised of educational leaders from across Canada, spent three days at our school observing all aspects of our programming and interacting with representatives of each stakeholder group (students, parents, staff, faculty, Board members, and alumni). Their resulting 85-page report, detailing the visiting team's observations, was provided to CFIS in late August. This report contained commendations and recommendations as well as a number of suggestions to contribute to the improvement of our school. In short, it provided an independent, expert opinion on what we at CFIS are doing well, and where we can improve.

Key findings of the Visiting Committee's report are included on the following pages.

CFIS would like to thank the CAIS Visiting Committee for their time and expertise. These professionals from across Canada, specializing in education, volunteered their time in support of the success of our school and the advancement of best practices in education.

Visiting Committee Chair
Tam Matthews, Head of School
West Point Grey Academy

Taya Cicchetti
Vice Principal, Grade 11 & 12
Hillfield Strathallan College

Jewell Kennedy
Chief Financial Officer
Appleby College

Michel Lafrance
Head of School
West Island College, Montréal

Wendy Milne
Assistant Head: Academics
Shawingan Lake School

Michael O'Connor
Chief Marketing &
Enrolment Officer
Appleby College

Jennifer Paziuk
Dean of Academic and Student Support
Trinity College School

Maria Trolese
Deputy Head
Collingwood School

Sean Shore
Board Chair
Gray Academy of Jewish Education

Paul Kitchen
On-site Coordinator
CAIS

"Perhaps one of the most consistent themes during the Visiting Committee's stay at CFIS was the universal message from teachers, administrators, parents and students about the close-knit nature of the school community. The care and effort put into relationships at every level of the school's environment goes above and beyond what one would expect in a school of this size."

-Excerpt from the CAIS Accreditation Report

Standard 1: Vision, Mission, Values & Strategy

CFIS is in the last year of its five-year strategic plan. The plan was finalized in May 2013, with the assistance of a strategic planning consultant, working closely with the Head of School and the CFIS Society's Board of Directors. The process to develop the plan included engagement sessions with faculty, staff, parents and students.

CFIS was commended by the Visiting Committee for its "exemplary" strategic planning process, and for the visibility and evidence of the school's mission and vision in action. CAIS's recommendation for this standard was that CFIS review and update its strategic plan and tie that into a long-term financial plan.

Standard 2: Co-curricular and the Learning Environment

The CFIS mission to "develop each student's individual and academic potential through full French immersion, an international focus, and the development of the whole student in a rich and dynamic learning environment" embodies this standard. Strong academics are a foundation of CFIS's approach to education, but a CFIS education is about much more than academics. It is about developing an international mindset, encouraging participation in music, athletics and the fine arts, and modeling active citizenship.

There were no recommendations in this standard. Specific commendations focused on our school's commitment to UNESCO, honoring and celebrating diversity, our strong music and arts programs, the annual musical and the variety of co-curricular opportunities for students. The CAIS Visiting Committee also commented positively on the way that CFIS encourages the development of student voice and leadership opportunities, and on the constructive, respectful relationships and the culture of trust between CFIS teachers and parents.

"CFIS's academic program is dynamic in delivery and has the capacity to respond to the needs of individual students. Its content is culturally rich, diverse and directly related to the rapidly changing globalized world."

-Excerpt from the CAIS Accreditation Report

Standard 3: Academic Program

CFIS received a significant number of commendations in the area of academic programming for the effective adoption of UNESCO's ideals as a guide for its elementary academic program, the quality of the Elementary Division's grade-wide unit plans, the timely, detailed feedback that is provided to parents through each student's Learner Profile, and for CFIS's Early Childhood Education program work in developing students' foundational language, learning, social and emotional skills.

An additional commendation was received for the use of literacy coaches and focused literacy clinics to differentiate learning for students at different levels. This commendation was paired with a recommendation for the Elementary Division, that a focus on numeracy support be a priority for the school moving forward. The visiting team commended the Elementary Division scope and sequence documentation and recommended that the Secondary Division's scope and sequence documentation be updated to adopt a uniform, cohesive format, with assessment continuity.

The committee's other recommendations in this area were to specifically allocate resources toward the school's technological infrastructure, and to more purposefully connect the work of the Marcel Tremblay Learning Resource Centre's librarian-educators to the Secondary Division's curricular program.

Standard 4: School Leadership

Beginning in August 2012, a strong focus was placed on ensuring that our school has the robust organizational structure necessary to respond to the goals and strategies of the strategic plan as well as to the changing needs of the school. This was recognized by the Visiting Committee, as was our strong focus on the importance of ongoing, robust professional development.

The Visiting Committee recommended that the senior leadership team work together on the next iteration of a common, shared vision for the future of the school. This will be done in conjunction with the strategic planning work that will be taking place in 2018. The committee also commended the work that has occurred on an ongoing basis at various levels, to bring together all levels of leadership, to unify the staff and ensure a clear understanding of the strategic direction of the school.

Standard 5: Human Resources

CFIS strives to be an employer of choice within Calgary's educational landscape. The faculty and staff choose to work at our school every day, and are a priceless asset. The school was commended for strategically aligning all employees' professional growth to the mission, vision and goals of the school.

Recommendations under this standard included the development and implementation of a succession plan, and a strategy and policies for the retention of employees, which would include a compensation philosophy and program. The Visiting Committee also recommended providing teachers more time for planning and preparation, and reducing the number of direct reports to the Head of School.

Standard 6: School & Community

CFIS is fortunate to have a strong, engaged and supportive community of stakeholders, in its parents, students, and extended community.

We were commended by CAIS on the quality of the Annual Education Results Report and Three-Year Education Plan that we produce each year for Alberta Education.

CFIS received recommendations to develop a comprehensive alumni engagement strategy (including an alumni communications plan and the allocation of appropriate resources), review the appropriateness and effectiveness of the resources that are currently allocated to support fundraising initiatives, and develop a strategic direction focused on growing the culture of philanthropy and fundraising. It was also recommended that CFIS develop a strategic marketing plan and ensure that the Marketing Department's resources are adequate to effectively implement the identified initiatives.

"CFIS does an exceptional job of engaging parents within the day-to-day fabric of the school, providing parents with a multitude of opportunities to volunteer within the school in order to strengthen their bond to the CFIS community."

-Excerpt from the CAIS Accreditation Report

Standard 7: Enrolment Management

CFIS has invested time and attention into all aspects of enrolment management, including developing a common understanding of a mission-appropriate student at CFIS – to the point where we were commended by CAIS for the work we have done to develop admissions assessment tests and procedures. Admissions forms, procedures and processes have also been reviewed and updated in the past three years.

Recommendations in this area include developing a formal and comprehensive enrolment management strategy aligned to the whole school's strategic and financial goals and objectives; defining and clearly articulating CFIS's unique value propositions and differentiators in our marketing materials; and investigating the opportunity to establish a comprehensive needs-based financial assistance program.



"[In the Early Childhood Division at CFIS], students are exposed to a variety of learning environments that encourage creativity, collaboration, verbal expression and personal growth."

~Excerpt from the CAIS Accreditation Report

Standard 8: Governance

CFIS is fortunate to have Board members who are collectively committed to supporting the school's leadership as well as ensuring the long-term viability of the school. The Society Board was commended for its proactive recruitment of committed new Board members with valuable experience and skills. Specific commendation was also made with regard to the Society Board's work in the area of risk management.

Recommendations in regard to governance are that the Board further develop its orientation and annual Board evaluation processes, establish a Head of School Support Committee to formalize clear communication and support, ensure that Board meetings are strategic and generative, and develop a documented Head of School annual evaluation process. It was also recommended that the Society Board work to strengthen the school's culture of philanthropy, with a view to improving long-term financial sustainability.

The Society Board was also tasked with undertaking a governance review of the then-

three non-profit organizations associated with CFIS, to clarify roles, authority, and decision-making, to ensure that best practice is being followed in this regard, to ensure compliance with the CAIS Governance Standard, and to assist the school in advancing the strategic plan. (The three non-profits associated with the school are the CFIS Society, the Calgary International Language Foundation, and the CFIS Endowment Society. At a special meeting on November 22, 2017, the members present voted to dissolve the Endowment Society. Of the remaining two organizations, the CFIS Society oversees the programming and operations of the school, and the Foundation owns the land and building, which it leases to the Society.)

"There is a commitment at the school to foster an overall environment that is peaceful, respectful and safe."

~Excerpt from the CAIS Accreditation Report

Standard 9: Finance

The aim of the Finance standard is to review the school's financial resources and financial planning, with a view to determining whether they are adequate to support the school's mission and to sustain the school's long-term permanence and strength. At CFIS, the presence of clear processes and procedures has resulted in impeccable audits, accurate monthly student account statements for parents, and strong professional relationships with contractors, creditors, and suppliers. The Visiting Committee commended the school for its annual report, which includes excellent reporting on the school's finances and strategic initiatives.

The Visiting Committee recommended that the school finish developing its long-term strategic plan, develop clear policies around the building and management of financial reserves, and investigate alternative sources of revenue. It was also recommended that annual budgeting and long-term financial planning models directly incorporate the debt service coverage ratio, and consider this as a key metric for achievement and measurement of overall financial health.



"The Visiting Committee noted a strong culture of health and safety at the school. It was clear in discussions with staff that safety issues, when identified, were swiftly resolved."

~Excerpt from the CAIS Accreditation Report

Standard 10: Physical Plant, Health, & Safety

Goal 2 of CFIS's strategic plan focuses on the provision of a safe, secure and enduring school community for all stakeholders – faculty, staff, students, parents, and other visitors. It is therefore not surprising that CFIS received commendations on a number of aspects in this area – the flexibility of classroom facilities, the number of relatively inexpensive pilots underway, the proactive facility maintenance, including the development of a condition assessment report, and the strong emergency response protocols that are in place.

The visiting committee recommended that CFIS's educator liability, Directors and Officers, and abuse insurance policies be reviewed to ensure that they are adequate. They also recommended that a campus master plan should be developed, with high-level cost estimates, that considers all major projects and facility initiatives under discussion.

Standard 11: Commitment to School Improvement

A strong focus on ongoing improvement in all aspects of school life is elemental to providing a rich and dynamic learning environment for students and a professionally rewarding workplace for faculty and staff. At CFIS, continuous improvement is woven into the very fabric of our school. We were pleased that in alignment with this, CFIS did not receive any recommendations under this standard. We were commended for our commitment to implementing new approaches to education.



The CAIS Standards

Standard 1 - Vision, Mission, Values & Strategy: The school has a clear mission, vision, values and strategy. These statements are understood and accepted by all constituencies: Board, faculty, staff, parents, alumni, and students. The statements give direction to the Strategic Plan (including curricular, co-curricular, financial, organizational) to ensure that all facets of school life are in alignment.

Standard 2 - Co-curricular Learning and the Environment: The school promotes and acts upon the academic, emotional, physical and social potentials of all its members within an ethical community.

Standard 3 - Academic Program: The school's program is congruent with its mission and strategy; it is based upon an articulated philosophy and research about the ways in which students learn and effective ways to teach them.

Standard 4 - School Leadership: The school has an overall administrative organization which communicates, carries out and supports the school's mission and strategic plan.

Standard 5 - Human Resources: The school's Human Resources strategy is in place to ensure that the people practices and policies support the educational purpose of the school and are aligned with the vision, mission, values and strategies.

Standard 6 - School & Community: The constituent relations, communications, and fundraising programs of the school are well planned and effective, both serving the community and engaging them in achieving the school's mission. As well, the school has established systems and procedures to maintain harmonious relationships with the community in which it exists.

Standard 7 - Enrolment Management: The school has defined those qualities that constitute a "mission appropriate" student and has established policies and procedures for enrolment management that ensure that the school is enrolling mission appropriate students.

Standard 8 - Governance: The Board's membership, structure and processes advance the school's mission, vision and long-term viability; and the Board operates in fiduciary, strategic and generative modes.

Standard 9 - Finance: The school's financial resources and financial planning are adequate to support the school's mission and to sustain the school's long-term permanence and strength.

Standard 10 - Physical Plant, Health & Safety: The physical plant, grounds and operations of the school support the vision, mission and programs of the school. The school has established and effectively implemented guidelines and procedures that promote a safe and healthy school environment.

Standard 11 - Commitment to School Improvement: The school demonstrates a commitment to continuous whole-school improvement.