



InCAS has now
evolved into
**Cambridge
Primary
Insight**

New Cairo British International School

Sue Holt is Vice Principal of the New Cairo British International School and has extensive experience in international education.

Having spent most of her career at the British School of Brussels where she first introduced CEM assessments, she has held various posts including Deputy Head (Curriculum), Head of Secondary and Vice Principal, and her work has taken her to China, Peru, Brazil, Chile and Argentina, Spain, Qatar and Jordan.

'Working in eight very different international schools has, of course, been very exciting, but not without its challenges. Cultural differences, varying educational backgrounds, language learning issues, meeting individual needs and measuring impact are challenges faced by all international schools.

'However, the single thread running through my entire experience has been CEM assessments. I have introduced CEM assessments in all of my schools and it has been a vital tool with so many benefits, from setting standards and raising expectations, to helping me support the students, staff and measure school performance.

I. Setting standards and managing expectations

'In international education, it's important to have an objective measure that tells you how well students at your school do compared to students at other schools. But it can be difficult to find a meaningful comparison, for example, you might be an independent school but is it relevant to compare yourselves to UK independent schools?

'What's useful about the CEM feedback is that it is based on data gathered from literally thousands of pupils who have all taken the same assessment: students from UK state-maintained schools, UK independent schools and international schools in over 70 countries.

'This means that you can see what level of performance is typical for a student of a given age and therefore you have a relevant and meaningful comparison.

2. School improvement and measuring impact

'In some schools there might be a real reluctance to look at that data to see how their learners are performing and what impact they and their teachers have had.

'I first introduced CEM assessments because I wanted a measure of how good we were. It's easy to stand in front of parents and talk about how brilliant your IGCSE exam results are if you get a good sprinkling of A* and As, but how can you really measure how effective you are?

'Of course schools will still publish their percentage of A* – C grades, or their average IB points, but that is really a marketing tool more than anything else. In terms of looking at how well the school is doing then, the best measure is the longitudinal tracking of the average IGCSE results because that gives you the largest number of students and so it becomes more statistically valid.

It's really the only measure you've got. Every international school will claim to be unique because of its location, its population of students, and the average turnover of staff and students etc, so the best measure is your value-added.

The CEM data means you can look at the trends in value-added over the years and see if you have positive value-added and how far you are staying in the positive.

3. Supporting students with English as a second language

'I have used CEM's baseline assessments in the primary and secondary phase as part of a screening process with students on a very wide spectrum of ability. The data helps to identify individual student strengths and weaknesses, as well as confirming resourcing or support needs.

'It can take between 5 and 7 years for ESL students to be academically proficient in English, however confident they might be in social situations. Therefore, understanding the individual abilities with a baseline assessment, as soon as students enter the schools, means that we can make changes to the curriculum to meet individual needs.

'I have used the InCAS assessment, for primary children, because you can use the data diagnostically, especially with ESL learners, and it can give you ideas for changing the curriculum to meet the needs of the population, as well as establishing what you would do with teaching and learning in the classroom for individual student needs.

4. Maintaining student motivation

'It can sometimes be very difficult to keep students on the right track, even in highly selective international schools.

'The CEM data from assessments such as MidYIS, Yellis or Alis make it a bit easier to monitor progress by using the baseline measure and getting an idea of each student's ability to set targets and challenges for later exams.

'Importantly, ESL learners can also be re-assessed at subsequent points to reassess exam predictions as they go on to develop their English language proficiency.

'CEM's predictive data and chances graphs give a whole overview of the needs of each individual, class and cohort and we can set our expectations and targets accordingly.

5. A transient population

'In international schools you can have students coming to you at any time of the school year, sometimes transitioning at very difficult times for them, from a range of different educational backgrounds. This means you need a baseline test that is as culturally-free as possible, and one that does not rely on what students have previously been taught.

'Using CEM assessments as part of the whole-school approach to assessment means that you can get a snapshot, a measure of all students' ability, whenever they arrive, and ensure you can provide a curriculum that is fitted to their needs.



Beginning, middle and end

'The main strength of CEM assessments for me is that it's with you for the whole journey. You get a snapshot of where students are so you can decide if the curriculum meets their needs. You use it in the class for teaching and learning and then at the end you can use the data to evaluate your success.'