



The Middle School Parent Handbook, 2010-11

The Middle School Philosophy of Education

A Middle School student experiences enormous challenges and changes while becoming an adolescent. Schools traditionally focus on the intellectual dimension of education, but ASP's Middle School is committed to a broader, integrated curriculum: promoting social, emotional, physical and artistic development as well as responsible citizenship.

The Team Approach

Each grade in our Middle School is led by a distinct teaching team. The teachers work together to create a program that will meet the specific developmental needs of that year group.

The team approach has two broad objectives.

- The team develops a coherent teaching strategy. It is responsible for teaching the basic research and study skills, developing age-appropriate curriculum, organizing regular field trips which will enhance the curriculum, and planning inter-disciplinary units which unite each of the subject teachers in achieving the broader objectives of the curriculum.
- The team strives to promote the individual development of each student. It plans activities, often carried out in the context of the Advisory groups, which address the social and emotional needs of the young adolescent.

To achieve these objectives, each team meets weekly to discuss the progress of individual students and to plan its overall strategy. Each team's leader also meets regularly with the Director and Counselor to coordinate the overall Middle School program.

The Advisory System

Advisory is the heart of ASP's Middle School. The advisor is the key person helping a Middle Schooler through the transition from childhood to adolescence.

Advisors are teachers who work with small groups of about 14 students throughout the year in a homeroom setting and who serve a variety of roles:

- to strive to know each of their students closely;
- to be ready to be the first person to whom a student turns in case of difficulty;
- to help new students become fully integrated into school life;
- to foster self-esteem and positive social relationships, especially within the advisory group;
- to follow each advisee's progress by keeping in contact with the subject teachers;
- to take the lead in coordinating the teaching team's efforts in cases where an advisee is having academic or social problems;
- to be the key link between school and parents, both during conferences and throughout the year;
- to develop appropriate social skills, such as making friends, dealing with frustration, and resolving interpersonal conflicts;

- to promote healthy personal development, including dealing with emotions and problems of maturing, formulating values, and making decisions;
- to create a better understanding of one's place in society by discussing current problems such as intolerance, discrimination, and world issues that affect students' lives;
- to guide Middle Schoolers in becoming better students, developing good study habits, preparing for tests, and organizing their time;
- to inspire students to develop a sense of responsibility for the school community and for the global community, and to engage students in community service activities.

The extended *Outward Bound* trip in early September builds a solid social foundation for the year. The purpose is to engage in an intensive series of team-building exercises with their advisors and classmates. The sixth graders spend five days in the Savoie region of the French Alps while the seventh and eighth graders spend eight days in the Lake District of northern England. Both programs emphasize a safe but daunting level of physical challenge in a supportive atmosphere, aiming to develop cooperative social relationships and a stronger sense of self-confidence. By the end of the week, no student is "new" to the Middle School.

The School Day

The school day can be divided into two parts:

- *the curricular day* runs from 8:50 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and it is then that all the classes and other curricular activities take place, and
- *the extra-curricular day* runs from 3:45 p.m. to either 5:00 or 6:00 p.m. and it is then that a variety of sports and other activities occur.

School officially opens at 8:45 a.m.. All students start the day with their *Advisory Groups* that meet in the homeroom. It is here that attendance is taken, messages are delivered, and matters of the day are discussed.

On Tuesdays, there is also an *Assembly* of all Middle School students and teachers in the Performing Arts Center where planning for the week is discussed and where students and teachers make their announcements to the community.

The curricular program begins right after Advisory. Students have five core academic classes: English, French, Social Studies, Science, and Mathematics. These meet four times per week: three periods of roughly 45 minutes, plus one double block of 90 minutes. In addition, there are nine 50-minute periods during which students will have, depending upon the day and upon their personal preferences: Band, Choir, Debate, Ensemble Theater, Guitar, Health, a range of Technology electives, Piano Keyboarding, Physical Education, Ceramics and other arts classes. Students are dismissed at 3:30 and the first run of school buses leaves at 3:40.

The weekly Alpha Period is the forum for the small-group discussions and activities that take place around the themes of the Advisory Program (see the *Curriculum Guide* for details). They are also be used by each team for grade-based meetings.

The IT Lab is generally open both before and after school for student use.

The Extra-Curricular Program

Rich and diverse extra-curricular activities take place both at lunchtime and after school. The lunchtime activities meet from 11:30 to 12:10 and students generally bring their lunch with them from home on these days.

Three *late buses* are available for students who participate in extra-curricular activities, as long as they are regular riders of the ASP buses. This is only a 'skeleton' service, however, with limited stops. They leave at 5:15 and 6:15.

Lunchtime and after-school activities

The Student Council plays a central role in the life of the Middle School. It coordinates numerous activities throughout the year that serve the school community as well as the wider world. Its major annual fundraising event, the Walkathon, is held each spring and benefits a school for handicapped children and a medical dispensary in Rishikesh, India. In addition, it organizes three dances a year and is also the main link between the student body and the administration of the school. Traditionally, the Council also presents a gift to the Middle School each year. It meets once a week.

Homework Club meets twice weekly after school and is designed for students who seek extra guidance in completing their major assignments. Under teacher supervision, Upper School student volunteers are available in the classroom to guide these middle schoolers in doing their research and writing.

Knowledge Bowl is a challenging but fun academic competition. It is run like a television game show, and tests students' general knowledge in areas such as current events, history, grammar, art, science, math, and literature. It meets once a week, and includes international on-line competitions as well as one hosted in Paris and possibly elsewhere in Europe.

Math Counts is in inter-school competitive mathematics program. Students meet once or twice a week through the first half of the year in order to prepare. They practice solving challenging problems both individually and as team members. This leads to an international meeting in January where they compete with Middle Schoolers from other European international schools.

Model United Nations introduces students to the world of international politics. Students research current global issues and investigate the positions of specific countries on these issues. They then prepare to hold mock debates as these countries would do in actual United Nations meetings. The club may lead to participation in an international student MUN meeting.

The Middle School Musical is a major event in our community each spring. It not only includes acting parts, but also stage management and technical management roles. It is open to all interested students regardless of whether they have been in the Ensemble Theater classes.

The String Ensemble meets weekly after school. Students who have reached a moderate level of proficiency with a string instrument are able to join this group, which performs during both the school's Winter and Spring Concerts.

Athletics Program

Middle School Intramural Sports vary during each of the three trimesters. Included are badminton, basketball, soccer, cross-country running, track and field, softball and volleyball. They meet after school either one or two days per week. Time is divided between practicing skills and playing in teams. Friendly competitions are sometimes organized with area schools. The program is coordinated by the Athletic Director, Han Hoegen (hhoegen@asparis.fr or 01.41.12.82.94).

Junior Varsity sports teams, are open to Upper Schoolers as well as certain eligible Middle Schoolers. These teams require several afternoons of training each week, often until 6:00 p.m., along with weekend matches against other schools. The seasons end with participation in the International Schools Sports Tournaments (ISST's).

Because of this considerable time commitment, Middle Schoolers can participate only if they get permission from their team of teachers before the start of each season. In making their decisions, teachers will consider the academic standing of the students, the possible stress that the students may be facing, and the appropriateness of the social pressures that the students may be under. At any point in a season, students may be required to withdraw from these programs if they are not able to keep up with their academic responsibilities.

Sixth and seventh graders may be authorized to join in limited training sessions for Cross-country (Fall Term) and for Track and Field (Spring Term). They are not eligible to participate in competitions that require absence from school or that require overnight stays. Beginning in seventh grade, students may be authorized both to participate fully in training and to join these two teams, as well as Swimming (Winter Term). However, they are not permitted to participate in competitions that require absence from school. With teacher approval they may be able to join the teams that compete at the ISST tournaments at the end of each season. From the eighth grade, students in good academic standing may be authorized to participate fully in all Upper School athletics.

ASP's parents run a Saturday basketball and soccer programs here on our campus. It's open to all of our students during the school year.

Private music lessons

Several English-speaking music teachers come to ASP to offer private music lessons after school. This includes instruction in guitar, strings, flute, piano, and other instruments. Neal Yocom, our instrumental music director, can assist families in contacting these teachers (nyocom@asparis.fr).

Communication between Parents and School

For a successful program, parents and teachers need to be working in harmony. Good communication is especially important in our Middle School, as we are committed to the child's development in the broadest sense. Here are the principal ways we aim to bring that about.

- *An Agenda* is given to all Middle Schoolers at the beginning of the year. In it, they record their homework assignments, and advisors often verify these at the end of the day (though less so as students grow older). As a result, parents have a ready means of following the work being required.
- *The Middle School Open House* evening early in September is where the three teaching teams introduce all aspects of the program to the parents.
- *Progress Reports* are written from individual teachers to parents when they feel it might be helpful. They definitely do so if a student's grade in a course has slumped to C- or below, but they may also send a report if there is any matter that they wish to bring to a family's attention, whether it be a concern or a commendation.
- *Parent-Teacher Conference Day* takes place in October. At these meetings, parents meet with the child's advisor to discuss how they see the student progressing, both intellectually and in the broader developmental sense.
- *E-mail* is surely the easiest way to contact any teacher if you have questions, minor concerns of you would like the teacher to give you a call. Teachers' e-mail addresses are posted on the *Faculty Directory* page of the school's website (asparis.org). Parents should also feel free to request a personal conference or, exceptionally, even a conference with all the student's teachers. In addition, parents may contact Mrs. Powers, the Guidance Counselor (kpowers@asparis.fr), or Dr. Miner (kminer@asparis.fr), the Middle School Director, the same way.
- *Report Cards* are issued for each of our three terms: in early December for the Fall Term, in mid/late March for the Winter Term, and late June for the Spring Term.

- *The Middle School Newsletter*, sent to parents by e-mail almost every week, and the school's monthly *Aspect* keep parents informed about recent and upcoming events.

The Values Upheld at ASP

We are a community bound together by the shared values of *respect*, *responsibility* and *honesty*. We believe that living by these values is essential to create an environment in which all are encouraged to reach their potential.

Our Middle School is based on *respect* for each person's feelings, individuality, cultural identity and property.

- We treat everyone in the community with courtesy, kindness and appreciation.
- We don't tolerate bullying: pushing others around, threatening them, or picking on them in order to upset them. Bullying can be either physical or through words; it can be done in person, in writing or even by cyberbullying.
- We seek to understand and appreciate the different religious traditions within our community.
- We show pride in our community whenever there is an opportunity to do so.
- We refrain from offensive language or name-calling.
- We refrain from physical contact that could be, or be seen as, threatening or harmful.
- We refrain from using or possessing alcohol, drugs or tobacco.
- We leave the belongings of others alone, whether they are computer files or property. We also respect their privacy.

Our Middle School is based on *responsibility* for one's own actions and for the community.

- We seek to help each other.
- As good citizens, we not only avoid being mean and doing harm, we need to do our best to discourage others from doing so. When we see more serious things happen, we don't let it go on – we report it.
- We keep our environment clean. We avoid eating and drinking in the halls and in the computer lab.
- We take good care of the school's physical facilities and equipment.
- We take responsibility for the environment: minimize the use of paper; refill our drinking bottles; avoid the waste of energy.
- We act with pride and dignity, not only in school, but also on trips, at performances, at sporting events, on the school bus, and at any time we are representing ASP.
- We never bring to school any item that might be seen as a weapon, even if it is appropriate for sporting purposes.
- When using a school laptop, we make sure that it's plugged in properly when we finish so that it's charged for the next user.
- When we are on the internet, we avoid sites that aim to show people in negative ways; we only access sites which teachers would approve.
- When using the school computers, we don't change the names of school's folders or the settings on the computer's desktop and control panel.

Our Middle School is based upon *honesty*.

- We speak openly and truthfully.
- We understand that dishonesty includes not only lying, but also hiding the truth.
- On tests, we work privately without looking at others' work.
- We recognize that copying from books or the internet without citing the source is plagiarism and is dishonest.
- We only copy computer software when we have the license that allows us to do so. This also means that we don't copy software onto school computers just because we have the right to

use it at home.

- When logging on to any site, we use our own passwords. Above all, we do not send messages which pretend to be from someone else.

Middle School Policies

Absence policy

Parents are asked to call the Middle School Office if a student will be absent from school. Please call (01.41.12.82.74), e-mail (cpapin@asparis.fr) or fax (01.41.12.86.50) any time before 8:30 and leave a message explaining the reason for the absence.

Whether it is due to family travel, visiting friends, sports trips, etc., absences disrupt the normal school program, both for the absentees and for their classmates. Due to the dynamic nature of our teaching program, missed classes and assessments simply cannot be made up independently, and teachers cannot recreate these lessons. As a result, the school does not excuse such absences. *Having more than five unexcused absences per term is considered excessive. More than this will lead to the student receiving no report card grades for that term.* (In exceptional cases, a written appeal may be made to the Director.)

The Director will excuse absences in the following circumstances.

- Absences of one or two days due to illness if the parents have notified the school at the time of the absence.
- If more than two days, a doctor's note is required upon returning to school.
- Absences due to extenuating family circumstances if they are excused in advance.
- Absences due to participation in school-sponsored trips.

Students are not permitted to participate in after-school activities or events on any day when they have been absent from school.

To avoid such unnecessary absences, parents are urged to make vacation travel plans at least three months in advance. When students are absent, it is their responsibility to call a friend, or a peer who has the same schedule, and find out what assignments are due. In the case of a planned absence, parents are asked to send in a note in advance to report the reason for the absence and its expected duration. This will give teachers notice, and may help them to alert students to what work they will be missing.

Late arrival or early departure

Students should report to their homerooms beginning at 8:45. When students arrive after 8:55, they should sign in at the Middle School Office.

For special medical or dental treatment, parents are urged to make such appointments for times after 4:00. If students must be picked up during the school day, parents are requested to sign them out at the Middle School Office.

Remaining at school after 3:40

Students may only remain at school after 3:40 for authorized reasons, e.g., if they are members of an organized activity. However, students who wish to remain on campus for other valid reasons, e.g., working with a teacher, doing research in one of the libraries or attending a sports competition, are permitted to do so if they have signed-in on Chantal's desk, indicating where they will be.

Disciplinary infractions

By working together cooperatively, members of the school community aim to uphold our code of values. However, in cases where a student acts in opposition to them, different steps may be taken.

Minor issues are dealt with by the appropriate teacher, who will discuss the matter with the student and possibly with the student's advisor. The teacher or advisor may wish to bring these to the attention of the parents. Repeated violations are brought to the attention of the Director.

Serious offenses may result in suspension from school and/or being placed on disciplinary probation for an extended period. While on disciplinary probation, a student's freedom to participate in the full range of school activities may be limited. This is a formal warning that a student's continued attendance at the school is in jeopardy. In case of extreme violations, such as threatening the safety of one's self or others, or when serious offenses are repeated, the Director may recommend to the Head of School that the student be expelled.

Guidelines for the school bus

Once they board the buses, students are expected to remain seated and keep their seatbelts fastened (if the bus is so equipped). Consuming food and bottled drinks is normally not permitted.

Older Upper Schooler students are selected as bus monitors and Middle Schoolers are expected to follow their directions. If they do not, the monitors will report inappropriate behavior to the Director. Repeated offenses may lead to a student being suspended from the bus.

The use of prescribed medication at school

Whenever a student is taking medication, whether prescription or over-the-counter, it must be presented to the school Nurse. A copy of the doctor's order must accompany any prescription medication.

Inviting guests to school

At times, students may wish to invite a friend to spend a day with them at ASP. In such cases, the sponsoring family should make this request in writing to the Director at least two days in advance. Permission will normally be granted when a student is in good academic standing, except where it might interfere with the smooth running of the school program. We regret that guests are not permitted to attend our off-campus trips.

E-mail communication

All students are issued an ASP e-mail address at the time they enter. They will use this for official interaction with their teachers, e.g., using Poodle. In conjunction with parents, we help students to understand how to use the internet safely and responsibly.

Middle School Support Services

The Middle School Counselor

The Counselor, Mrs. Powers, supports students and families in a variety of special roles. These include:

- meeting with individual students or small groups to discuss personal concerns or academic difficulties;
- supporting the advisors in carrying out their pastoral roles;
- advising the teaching team when student have special needs such as specific learning disabilities;
- providing guidance to families concerning their child's development, either intellectually, socially, or in any other way;
- referring families to potential professional tutors in cases where a child is in need of sustained instructional support; and
- referring families to specialized professional services in the Paris area for detailed educational testing of a diagnostic nature, for individual or family counseling, or for other potential psychological concerns (e.g., eating disorders or depression).

Parents may contact her directly at 01.41.12.82.68 or at kpowers@asparis.fr.

The Learning Support teachers

When students have a diagnosed special need that makes it difficult to reach their potential in their classes, they may get support, including special skills classes, from one of our

three Learning Support teachers.

The Middle School Secretary

Among her many roles, Chantal Papin is responsible for reporting on student absences, taking parent requests for conferences, recording late arrivals and early departures, and delivering urgent messages during the school day. Chantal can be reached at cpapin@asparis.fr, 01.41.12.82.74, or by fax at 01.41.12.86.50.

Messages during the school day

Parents may call Chantal and ask that a student be given a message. However, please keep in mind that delivering such messages will interrupt classes, so such requests should only be made when there is an urgent matter.

Students sometimes call their parents to ask them to make a special trip to school with forgotten lunch or with a homework assignment left behind. We discourage such help, however, as we expect Middle Schoolers to take responsibility for themselves. As for having forgotten lunch or lunch money – we all get by with a little help from our friends.

The School Nurse

Catherine de Gueltzl, the School Nurse (01.41.12.82.73 or cdegueltzl@asparis.fr), is in attendance until 5:00. In addition to caring for students who fall ill during the day, she has other responsibilities. These include: ensuring that students' inoculations are kept up to date, administering medication to those who must take it during the day, and assisting parents (especially those new in France) with medical terminology and with medical referrals.

Illness during the school day

If a student feels ill during the school day, the teacher responsible at the time will send the student to the Nurse's Office. There, students are cared for until they are ready to return to classes. In more serious cases, the Nurse will inform the parents. If necessary, she will arrange for a doctor to visit or even for the student to be taken to the hospital. Students who are ill are not sent home unaccompanied during the school day.

Practical Details

Lockers and personal belongings

Middle School students are expected to assume responsibility for their belongings. They are urged to have their names in or on their wallets, calculators, and other personal items. Obviously, it is unwise to bring large sums of money to school.

Students all have a locker, which is where their extra books, jackets, and P.E. gear should be stored during the day. Before students go to P.E. classes, they should store their valuables in their lockers rather than leaving them unattended in the changing rooms.

Some items are inappropriate to use during the school day. These include electronic games, cell phones, and personal music players. Items such as skateboards and rollerblades should not be used on the campus at any time. If such items are brought to school, they should be stored in the student's locker throughout the day.

Student ID Cards

Every student is given a photo ID card with a personal bar code. This serves as a bus card (if you use the ASP bus service), a library card for the Upper School Library, and as a Cafeteria card.

The Cafeteria

Middle Schoolers have lunch in the main cafeteria where they may bring their lunch from home, purchase lunch or do a bit of each. There is no set meal plan; students simply choose what

they want and pay for it using their ID card, which parents pre-charge with euros for however much they wish. (This is most easily done over the internet from the school's website.) The chefs offer diverse and nutritious choices, including a special *plat du jour*, a variety of sandwiches on sliced bread or baguettes, and a do-it-yourself salad bar. €5.50 per day is a typical expense.

After-school snacks

For the convenience of those students who stay after school to participate in sports or other activities, the cafeteria remains open until 4:00. They are not permitted to bring food and soft drinks onto the school buses, however.

The libraries

Middle School students use two different libraries: sixth and seventh graders use *La Bibliothèque* and eighth graders generally use the Upper School Library. Both libraries have a wide variety of suitable literature and non-fiction. Both also have fine reference facilities, including internet access. Daily newspapers and periodicals are on hand and librarians are available to assist students.

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