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NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION  
OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

# SPECIAL REPORTS AND SPECIAL VISITS

Not all Special Reports are necessarily followed by a Special Visit

School Improvement through Accreditation

**Note:**

The procedures described in this booklet should also be followed in certain cases where NEASC has specifically chosen to use the term "*Priority Issues*" instead of the term "*Special Issues*" in its official correspondence with schools.

8<sup>th</sup> Edition compatible  
September 2014

## FOREWORD

This booklet is one of a series designed to complement the 8<sup>th</sup> Edition of the *NEASC Guide to School Evaluation and Accreditation*. Its purpose is to provide more specific guidelines on the content and format of Special Reports and Special Visits.

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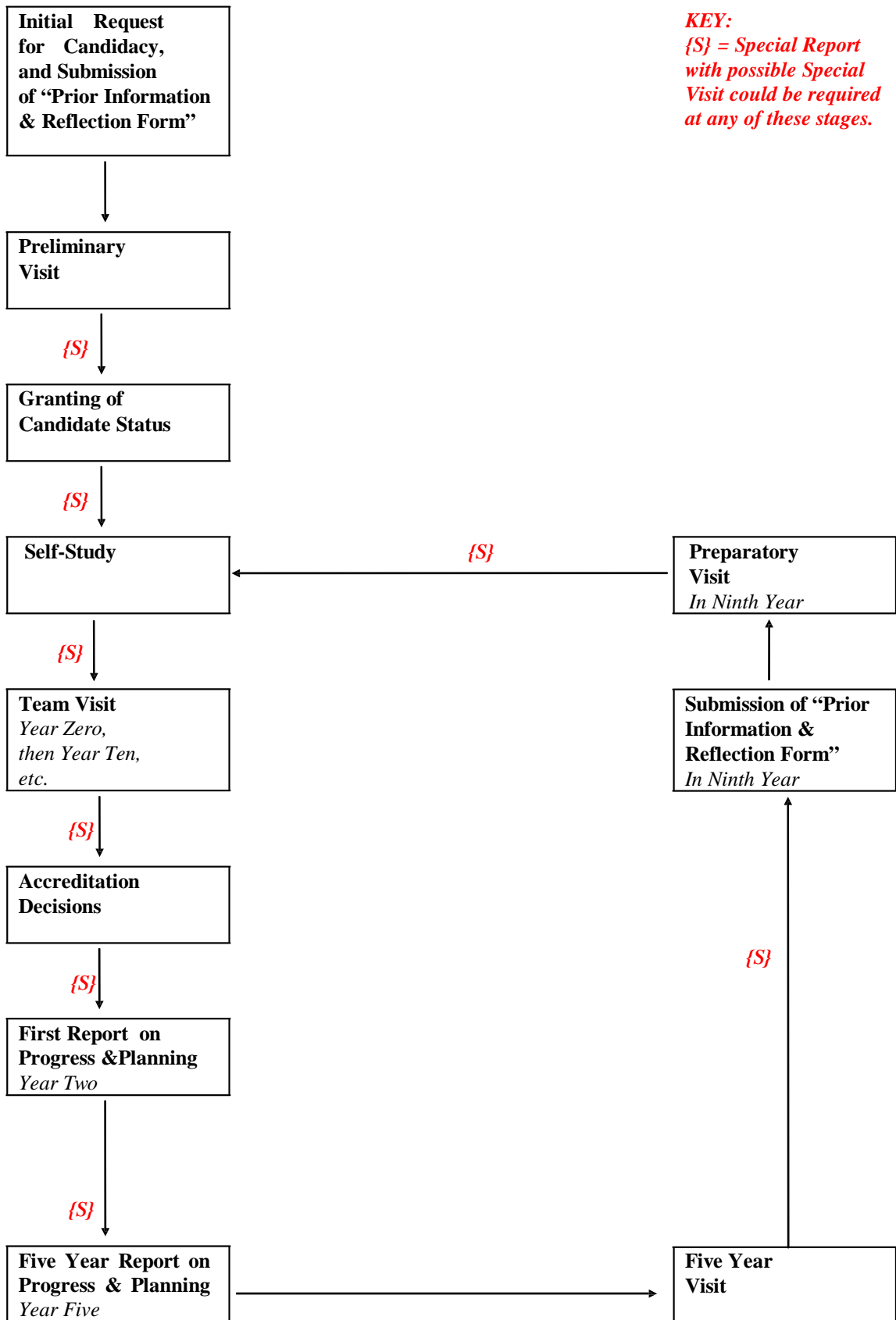
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**This booklet may only be used within a school in the NEASC Accreditation Process.**

**DIAGRAM OF THE NEASC EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION PROCESSES**

This page should be read in Print Layout View



## WHEN AND WHY DOES NEASC REQUIRE A SPECIAL REPORT, POSSIBLY WITH A SPECIAL VISIT?

A situation may arise where NEASC decides it does not wish to wait until the next routine stage of the accreditation cycle before hearing from a school what actions have been taken to address certain issues of very high importance. In such cases, NEASC will identify these as “Special Issues” and require the school to submit a Special Report showing how they have been addressed. In addition, NEASC may also decide that a Special Visit is required and will inform the school about this either when the Special Report is requested or after it has been received and analyzed by NEASC.

A Special Report with possible Special Visit could be required at almost any stage of the Evaluation and Accreditation Cycle (see diagram on the previous page), including:

- Between receipt of the Preliminary Visitors’ Report and the granting of Candidate Status if the former raised doubts or questions.
- Between the submission of the Visiting Team Report and the granting of accredited status if the initial decision on accredited status is in category “c” or possibly category “b” . (See page 8 in the Accreditation Main Guide for an explanation of “b” and “c” decision categories)
- Between the First and Five Year Reports if the former was considered unsatisfactory or incomplete.
- After submission of the Five Year Visitors’ Report if progress at the school was considered unsatisfactory.
- At any other stage if *prima facie* evidence of non-alignment with the Standards for Accreditation arises.

The present booklet offers guidelines to schools and visitors about Special Report and Special Visit requirements.

## THE SCHOOL’S SPECIAL REPORT

### Preparing for a Special Report

A decision letter from NEASC requesting a Special Report will make clear to the school which are the “Special Issues” which need to be addressed and reported upon. A reasonable time-scale for action and reporting will also be laid down. It is then the school’s responsibility to:

- Address the Special Issues, taking the actions necessary to bring the school into alignment with the NEASC Standards for Accreditation and/or the school’s own Guiding Statements in the areas concerned.
- Create small working groups to write the school’s response to each of the Special Issues. Each group does not necessarily need to contain representatives of all sections of the school community, but members should be knowledgeable about the issue in question.
- Ensure that the Special Report is submitted electronically to NEASC by the stipulated date.

## Structure of the Special Report

Essentially the Special Report must demonstrate clearly the actions the school has taken in order to address the identified Special Issues. The required report structure now follows:

| <b>SPECIAL REPORT STRUCTURE</b><br>A template is provided by<br>NEASC  |
|--|
| <i>A sample report can be found at the end of this booklet</i>   |
| <b>INTRODUCTION</b><br><br>A brief introduction outlining the place of this particular report in the accreditation history of the school.  |
| <b>THE SPECIAL ISSUES</b><br><br><i>Then for each Special Issue in turn .....</i>  |
| <b>Step (i)</b> - The Special Issue must be re-stated in exactly the words used in the letter from NEASC.  |
| <b>Step (ii)</b> - The school should then make its own evaluation of the present situation by choosing one of these two possible ratings with respect to the issue in question:<br><i>“completed” or “in progress”</i>   |
| <b>Step (iii)</b> - The school should then give a detailed description of the action taken on this issue to fully justify the rating it has given. If the rating is <i>“in progress”</i> , the school should give its specific plans to ensure completion of the task. |
| <b>Step (iv)</b> - The school should then attach any relevant documentation, digital photographs, etc. as evidence to support the ratings and explanations given in previous paragraphs.   |
| <b>Step (v)</b> - The names and posts of those responsible for writing the response to the particular Special Issue should then be given.  |
| <i>(Note: The report template also provides spaces for responses from any Special Visitor(s) who will be appointed <u>if</u> a visit is required, The school should leave these spaces free on the template.)</i>  |
| <b>CONCLUSION</b><br>Brief concluding remarks such as any matters that arose during creation of the Special Report or any further developments which may impact the school with respect to the Special Issues.   |

## **THE SPECIAL VISIT**

### **Introduction**

NEASC may require a school to host a Special Visit as part of the follow-up to the writing of a Special Report. The requirement to host a Special Visit may be communicated to the school at the same time as the notification that a Special Report is required, or the decision may be left until after NEASC has had an opportunity to read and analyze the Special Report.

Typically, a Special Visit will be carried out by one or two Visitors on-site for one or two days' duration.

A Special Visit may possibly coincide with a "routine" visit such as a Five Year Visit, in which case the whole exercise will be particularly efficient in terms of time, travel costs, etc. However, this cannot always be the case and a Special Visit may have to take place at a time when no routine accreditation visit is due.

### **Purposes of the Special Visit**

The main role of the Special Visitors is to evaluate the school's response to the Special Issues which gave rise to the Special Report and to offer the school any further advice which may be needed.

### **The Role of the School**

The school is responsible for:

1. Sending a copy of the school's Special Report to NEASC and to the nominated Visitors on the prescribed date which will allow for reading time before the Special Visit takes place. The Special Report should be created on the template provided by NEASC and sent as a definitive "pdf" document AND as a Word document so that the Visitor(s) can add input in the allotted spaces.
2. The payment of all basic expenses for transport, accommodation and meals for the Visitors. There is also a fee payable to NEASC for a Special Visit.
3. Providing each Visitor with basic guidelines with regard to practical arrangements for transport etc. (Normally the Visitors make their own arrangements to travel in the most economical manner and are reimbursed directly by the School.)
4. Making arrangements for accommodation, to include a room in the school for the Visitors to work undisturbed.
5. Scheduling any meetings with members of the school community which the Special Visitors may require.
6. Provision of all documentation and other evidence required by the Special Visitors when on-site.

### **The Role of NEASC**

NEASC will:

1. Appoint the Special Visitor(s).

2. Provide each Special Visitor with copies of:
  - All previous reports produced during the evaluation and accreditation process which are relevant to the Special Issues.
  - If the school has not already sent it directly to the Visitor(s), the school's Special Report on a template with spaces allotted for Visitor input.
  - A separate template document for the Visitors' Overall Recommendation on the school's status in the accreditation process.
  - This booklet on Special Reports and Special Visits.
3. Submit the school's Special Report, and the Special Visitors' Report (when complete) to analysis within the NEASC decision making structures.
4. Send the Special Visitors' Report to the school.
5. Send the school a formal NEASC Response to the school's Special Report and the Special Visitors' Report.

### **The Role of the Visitors**

The Visitors are responsible for:

1. Liaising with the school, for example concerning the scheduling of meetings with any members of the school community and the viewing of evidence they wish to examine.
2. Making travel arrangements and communicating them to the school (and to NEASC so that travel insurance can be organized).
3. Liaising with each other to ensure that all processes and procedures are clear. This includes deciding how the task of producing the Special Visitors' Report will be distributed between the Visitors themselves.
4. Arranging with the school for reimbursement of expenses.
5. Reading all relevant documentation provided by the school and NEASC, including the school's Special Report.
6. Writing the Special Visitors' input onto the template provided, following the guidelines provided in this booklet.
7. Submitting an electronic copy of their Report to NEASC (not the school) within two weeks of completion of the on-site visit.
8. Making a separate written recommendation to NEASC about the school's accreditation status, in particular with respect to the identified Special Issues.

## Conduct of the On-Site Visit

During the course of the Special Visit, the Visitors should:

1. Meet with those responsible for writing the Special Report and where necessary others from relevant sectors of the school community - which could include administration/management, staff, board, students, or/or parents - to ascertain whether the contents of the school's Special Report reflect reality. Also, examine all relative evidence. *(NB: It is not normally necessary to visit classrooms and observe lessons in the manner of a full Team Visit unless monitoring a Special Issue specifically related to delivery of the Program of Studies).*
2. Discuss with appropriate persons any of the responses to the Special Issues which the Visitors consider incomplete or unclear.
3. Discuss the factual elements and the likely major thrusts of the Special Visitors' input with the Head of School prior to departing. However, a copy of the Special Visitors' input (even if ready at this stage) must not be left at the school and nor must the Visitors reveal the contents of the separate recommendation they will be making to NEASC with respect to the school's accredited status.

## THE SPECIAL VISITORS' INPUT TO THE REPORT

### Introduction

The main role of the Special Visitors' input is to convey to NEASC and the school the Visitors' views on the way in which the school has responded to the identified Special Issues. The Visitors should also point out to the school any further action the Special Visitors feel is required in these areas.

### The Structure of the Special Visitors' Input

The Visitors' input should be added in the allotted spaces on the templated report already received from the school. For each Special Issue, spaces are available underneath the school's response to enable the Visitors to follow these steps:

Visitor Step (I) – Give a rating which could be “*completed*” or “*in progress*” or “*not satisfactorily addressed*”.

Visitor Step (II) – Comments to explain and justify the rating given. This step can be accomplished in relatively few words if the Visitors' rating coincides with the school's rating and if the Visitors consider the school's explanation to be accurate and complete. However, this component will need to be more detailed if the Visitors' input differs substantially from the school's input.

Visitor Step (III) Recommendation for further action (if any)

In addition, the Visitors' should add their Concluding Statement in the space allotted at the foot of the report. This Concluding Statement should include:

- Comments on the quality and veracity of the school's Special Report.
- Comments on the quality of organization of the Special Visit and how it was conducted.



- Emphasis on the most important further recommendations (if any) being made by the Visitors with respect to the Special Issues.
- Customary thanks to relevant members of the school community for the work done in addressing the issues, producing the report and hosting the Visit.

Additionally, on a separate document (template provided), the Special Visitors should make an overall recommendation to NEASC on the status of the school within the accreditation process. This should include a recommendation on whether the next step of the process should be of a routine nature in the cycle or whether another Special Report and/or Special Visit should be required.

**A SAMPLE SPECIAL REPORT  
WITH  
SAMPLE SPECIAL VISITORS' INPUT**

*Note  
Not all Special Reports are necessarily followed by a Special Visit.*

**Special Report  
from the  
International Community School  
of Middleburg (ICSM)**

|  |                                      |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| <b>Date of Report from the School</b>  | <b>16<sup>th</sup> November 2011</b> |
| <b>Date of Special Visitors' Input</b> | <b>20<sup>th</sup> December 2011</b> |

## INTRODUCTION BY THE SCHOOL

The International Community School of Middleburg (ICSM) was founded in 1979, and first accredited by NEASC in December 2010 following a November 2010 Team Visit. The school's accreditation was accompanied by a request for a Special Report on two identified issues. This current Special Report has been written in response to that request.

## THE SPECIAL ISSUES

### SPECIAL ISSUE ONE

#### School Step (i) Wording of the Special Issue

“To ensure the safety of students, staff and visitors, the school should provide more exits from the recently-built Laboratory Suite on the Third Floor of the Newton Building.”

#### School Step (ii) Rating

Completed

#### School Step (iii) Description of Actions Taken

Within three months of the Team Visit, two permanent metal staircases were built externally to provide alternative fire escapes from the Laboratories Suite. Access to these staircases is through new emergency doors fitted with “anti-panic push bars”. In addition, an extra connecting door from the Prep. Room into Lab. B was created near to one of the new exits so that the Laboratory Technician also has an easy secondary escape route. Anyone working or studying in the Laboratories Suite now has two possible exit routes: one through the original doors and down the main staircase and the other via the new installations described above. The school now feels that the learning environment in the laboratory areas is much safer for all concerned.

#### School Step (iv) Evidence of Actions Taken

Architects drawings, digital photos and the latest report from the local Fire Service (which is very favorable) are attached. Also enclosed are the relevant revised pages from the school's published evacuation procedures and copies of the escape route instructions posted in each room of the Laboratories Suite.

#### School Step (v) Personnel Responsible for Reporting on this Issue

|               |                     |
|---------------|---------------------|
| Carol Andrew  | Biology Teacher     |
| Jim Plesch    | School Site Manager |
| Peter Sithers | Head of Science     |

#### Visitor Step (I) Rating

Completed

#### Visitor Step (II) Comments

The Visitors carried out a thorough inspection of the Laboratories Suite, and required a

surprise evacuation practice to be carried out during class time for the entire building in which it is located. They also checked upon the validity of the Fire Department Certificate included in the school's report. In all respects the Visitors are satisfied that the area now aligns well with NEASC Standards for Accreditation and that the improvements have created a much safer learning environment for students.

### **Visitor Step (III) Recommendation for further action (if any)**

No further action required, apart from the periodic evacuation practices and checking of installations which would be expected for any other area of the school buildings and grounds.

## **SPECIAL ISSUE TWO**

### **School Step (i) Wording of the Special Issue**

“To better align with its own Guiding Statements, the school should establish and put into practice clear and appropriate policies for the assessment of student learning and performance in the approximate age range 14 to 16.”

### **School Step (ii) Rating**

School rating: *In Progress* for Social Sciences and *Completed* for all other curriculum areas.

### **School Step (iii) Description of Actions Taken**

This issue arose because at the time of the Team Visit ICSM had announced that it would no longer enter students for the Cambridge IGCSE examinations at the end of Grade 11. However, firm decisions had not yet been made on what forms of assessment were to be used instead. Since then, the school has decided fully to apply the IB Middle Years Program and its associated forms of assessment, including external moderation and certification by the IB. It is felt that this now better aligns the school's programs and practices with the educational objectives laid out in its own Guiding Statements.

All subject areas except the Social Sciences have created their own assessment practices consistent with the IBMYP approach, and these went into action from September 2011. The Social Sciences department will be finalizing its policy during an in-service weekend towards the end of November 2011, and will be putting it into practice from January 2012.

### **School Step (iv) Evidence of Actions Taken**

Attached are the Secondary School Assessment policies which are currently used by all departments except Social Sciences. The *draft* Social Sciences policy is also attached, along with the agenda for the up-coming meeting at which this policy will be finalized.

### **School Step (v) Personnel Responsible for Reporting on this Issue**

|                 |                         |
|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Terry Andrews   | Head of Mathematics     |
| Jerry Hodson    | Head of Social Sciences |
| Christine White | Secondary Principal     |

## Visitor Step (I) Rating

*Not satisfactorily addressed for Natural Sciences, in progress for Social Sciences, and completed for the remaining curriculum areas.*

## Visitor Step (II) Comments

The Visitors' findings do not fully coincide with the school's input (above) on this issue in two respects. Firstly, the planned in-service weekend which was to be used by the Social Sciences department to finalize its assessment policy for the student age range in question did not in fact take place. This was due to a factor beyond anyone's control, namely local civil unrest which caused the school to close from the Thursday evening until Monday noon. The work to finalize the Social Sciences policy is now planned to take place on the first weekend in January 2012 (within a few weeks of writing this report). From the Visitors' observations of the draft documents and their discussions with department members, there seems no reason to doubt that this matter will be satisfactorily resolved at that time.

Secondly, the Visitors are concerned that the Natural Sciences department has not in fact produced an appropriate assessment policy for students in the last two years of the MYP. The existing policy and practices lead solely to assessment through a school-based written examination sat at the end of Grade 11. The draft examination papers made available to the Visitors concentrated entirely on factual recall, making no attempt to assess the students' ability to interpret data or to propose methods by which scientific problems might be resolved. In addition, in the current science policy, there is no provision for the assessment of laboratory skills nor the ability to design and create experiments and equipment. In the Visitors' opinion, the Natural Sciences assessment policy is neither in line with IBMYP philosophy nor with the school's Guiding Statements – specifically the objective of sponsoring a “*student-oriented and investigative approach to learning*”.

## Visitor Step (III) Recommendation for further action (if any)

The Visitors recommend that:

- The Social Sciences department complete its work on the assessment policy as planned, and then ensure its implementation.
- The Natural Sciences department revise and broaden its assessment policy in time for improved practice from the start of the next school year in September 2012. In addition, all feasible measures should also be taken to broaden assessment practice for the cohort of students due to complete the MYP course in May 2012.

*..... and so on for all the identified Special Issues.*

## SCHOOL'S CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The school would like to thank NEASC for the impetus the request for a Special Report gave towards resolution of the identified safety and student assessment issues. ICSM is confident that meaningful improvements have been made in both these areas, with the resulting increase in in the school's alignment with its own Guiding Statements concerning student well-being and the learning program.

In addition, while addressing Special Issue Two, Middle School staff members have been stimulated to do further work to look for additional assessment procedures to complement the MYP pattern which is now firmly established in most subject areas. The outcome of this further work will be reported at the next routine stage of the school's accreditation cycle.

As Director of ICSM I would like to express my thanks to NEASC for the help and advice given to the school, particularly over the last year. I would welcome a Special Visit to ICSM should NEASC feel on reading this Special Report that further monitoring is required..

Joseph C. Bloggs  
Director, ICSM  
16<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2011

### **SPECIAL VISITORS' CONCLUDING STATEMENT**

The ICSM Special Report was produced by separate working parties for each of the NEASC Special Issues, with the School Director writing the introduction as well as endorsing the contents of the entire document. Membership of each working party of three or four people was appropriate in each case. The result was a very thorough report which the Visitors later found to be a generally accurate and honest reflection of the school's current position on the issues in question.

The organization of the Special Visit was excellent, and the Visitors were given every facility to ensure they could carry out their work effectively. All those involved were prompt to the scheduled meetings as well as informative and helpful in their comments. All aspects of the evidence behind each issue were readily available for examination.

ICSM has generally approached the Special Issues raised by NEASC in a serious and professional manner. This Visitors' input to this report shows that the only areas still needing attention are the Social Sciences and Natural Sciences assessment policies for 14 to 16 year old students. The Visitors recommend that the school be required to submit copies of finalized/revised policies for these departments to NEASC by 15<sup>th</sup> June 2012.

The Special Visitors again wish to thank everyone at ICSM, and particularly the Director Mr. Bloggs and the School Secretary Ms. Fernández, for the highly efficient way in which the visit was organized and for the spirit of collaboration which permeated the entire stay on-site.

Respectfully submitted to NEASC on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2011.

#### **SPECIAL VISITOR**

Andrew Black  
Head  
International School of Scunthorpe, UK

### **VISITORS' OVERALL RECOMMENDATION TO NEASC ON A SEPARATE DOCUMENT**

Assuming that the Social Sciences and Natural Sciences assessment policies are submitted to NEASC as recommended by 15<sup>th</sup> June 2012, and assuming that they are found to be satisfactory, the Special Visitors recommend that ICSM continue in NEASC accredited status until the next routine part of the cycle without the need for any further special procedures.