



The PYP Travel Guide for Leaders

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Welcome to the Journey

Welcome to the journey of becoming a PYP leader! Engaging deeply with the Primary Years Programme (PYP) is a serious commitment to thoughtful teaching and learning. The PYP combines some of the most engaging and relevant educational practices today, and, when implemented effectively, fosters classrooms where curiosity, understanding, and reflection thrive.

A Personal Note



My name is Christine Orkisz Lang. I co-authored the original Primary Years Programme. Over more than thirty years of working with the PYP, I have seen its remarkable potential to transform learning. I have also seen how challenging it can be to bring the framework to life in real schools.

The PYP is designed as a flexible framework rather than a prescribed curriculum. This allows schools to shape learning in ways that fit their communities, but it also means that much of the design work happens within schools themselves.

The Reality of Leading the PYP

During my years as a school principal and as a school visitor, I have seen leaders end school days feeling discouraged, not because they lacked understanding, skill, or commitment, but because the complexity of their work felt overwhelming. The PYP asks a great deal of leaders. Without supportive systems, clear priorities, and shared understanding, even the most dedicated professionals can feel that they are not doing enough.



Teachers implementing the PYP are required to integrate numerous important elements of learning simultaneously, including subject knowledge, conceptual understanding, transdisciplinary learning, the learner profile, approaches to teaching and learning skills, student agency, inquiry as a pedagogical approach, and meaningful assessment practices that reveal student thinking. Leaders, in turn, need to understand and support how these elements are prioritized and implemented, while

also considering curriculum coherence, change management, professional development, and programme evaluation.

While each of these elements contributes to rich learning experiences for students, together they can feel overwhelming, particularly for leaders new to the PYP.

Who this Guide is for

Even if you are familiar with the IB Primary Years Programme, many teachers in your school may be new to it, and you may be too. This guide is built on one central idea: effective PYP leadership develops in stages, and clarity at each stage reduces complexity. It is designed to work alongside *The PYP Travel Guide for Teachers*. This guide is designed for both new and experienced PYP leaders, with particular support for those in their first years of implementation. It supports schools at different stages of development: those where everyone is new and exploring whether the PYP is right for them, leaders stepping into new roles with staff who need guidance, and experienced educators looking for practical ways to break the PYP into manageable steps.

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- PYP Coordinators
 - Principals
 - Assistant Principals
 - Subject Leaders
 - Grade Leaders

In each of these situations, leaders are asked to make sense of a complex framework while building strong and sustainable foundations for growth.

These materials are written for all primary school leaders involved in the PYP, including coordinators, principals, assistant principals, and subject or grade-level leaders. While every school is structured differently, all share the same goal of improving student learning. Because roles vary across settings, the guidance is intentionally broad to support a wide range of contexts.

This guide acknowledges the programme's complexity and is designed to support leaders in understanding the philosophy, approaches, and components while setting priorities that enable implementation to grow steadily and sustainably.

Why Leadership Matters

In the PYP, teachers and leaders become curriculum designers, building Programmes of Inquiry, designing learning experiences, and creating systems that support assessment and collaboration. Yet most educators were not originally trained for this kind of work. Successful implementation therefore depends on thoughtful leadership, supportive structures, and a shared commitment to learning together.

One of the most important early steps is clarifying leadership roles and responsibilities. Clear structures help leaders understand their priorities and ensure that staff know where to go with questions, ideas, and support. The roadmap offers a practical starting point for those conversations and the collaborative work that follows.



Many schools find it challenging to manage the interconnected elements of the PYP without systems that support planning, documentation, and reflection. Increasingly, digital tools help schools organize curriculum planning, track conceptual understanding, monitor Approaches to Learning skills, and gather assessment evidence across units and grade levels. When used thoughtfully, these tools can reduce administrative burden and allow educators to focus more fully on student learning.

A Reassuring Truth

Many leaders share similar experiences during their first years of working with the PYP. As their understanding deepens, they become increasingly aware of how many elements must be brought together and how complex leading the programme can be. It is common to hear reflective educators asking themselves questions such as:

Thoughtful Leaders Wonder...

- How do we create time and structures for effective collaborative planning?
- How do we know the PYP is being implemented consistently across classrooms?

One of the most important lessons I have learned from my work with PYP educators is that understanding builds progressively. Familiarity with the PYP grows through experience: planning, teaching, observing student learning, and revisiting units over multiple cycles. What initially feels complex often becomes more natural over time as teachers and leaders become more familiar with the programme's ideas and structures.

**These questions are normal.
Understanding develops over time.**

This guide uses the same developmental stages outlined in *The PYP Travel Guide for Teachers* and translates them into a leadership perspective. It is grounded in a simple truth: you cannot do everything at once. The progression offered here helps you focus on what matters most at different points in your school's journey, while adapting to what is already in place.

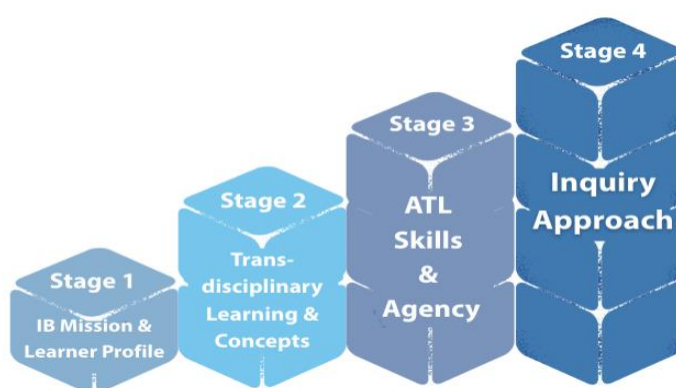


Effective development as a leader in the PYP is not about adding more expectations. It is about breaking down complexity so that everyone feels supported, students thrive, and learning reflects shared values. With patience, collaboration, and clear purpose, lasting impact becomes possible.

Understanding the Journey: Four Stages of Becoming a PYP Leader

Every leader's journey into the Primary Years Programme is unique, yet many experience a similar pattern as their understanding and confidence grow. Leading the PYP rarely becomes clear all at once. Instead, understanding deepens through experience as leaders make sense of the programme's elements and create the structures that support effective teaching and learning.

Through years of working with schools implementing the programme, I have found it helpful to think about leadership development in four broad stages. These stages are not a strict sequence, nor do they suggest that leaders "complete" one stage before moving to the next. In practice, different aspects of leadership overlap and continually influence one another. Viewing leadership growth in stages makes the process more manageable and helps leaders understand how their role evolves.



Putting these stages together as a model involved considering which aspects of PYP leadership naturally fit together and which priorities tend to emerge earlier or later in a school's development. Your experience may look different depending on your context. For example, schools with strong collaborative planning structures may move more quickly toward strengthening assessment practices or student agency. Likewise, while inquiry appears later in this progression, it may still serve as an entry point for leadership discussions.

The sequence presented here reflects a developmental logic rather than a prescribed path. Inquiry, agency, and student action grow more sustainably when strong foundations, coherent curriculum structures, and confident teachers are already in place. The stages below reflect the gradual growth in understanding and responsibility that many leaders experience as they support PYP implementation.

Stage 1: Mission and Learner Profile

Leadership at this stage focuses on establishing strong programme foundations and clear roles. Leaders work to understand the difference between PYP leadership and day-to-day management, establish clear job descriptions, define zones of

responsibility, and clarify decision-making processes. This stage builds shared purpose and ensures that staff clearly understand how leadership structures support the programme.

A central aspect of this work is developing a shared sense of purpose. As Simon Sinek (2009) argues, effective leadership begins with clarity about why an organization exists. In the PYP, this aligns closely with grounding decisions in the IB mission and learner profile, ensuring that structures and systems are driven by purpose rather than compliance.

Landmarks:

- Programme foundations
- Leadership role clarity
- Decision-making structures
- Shared purpose and values

Stage 2: Transdisciplinary Learning and Concepts

As foundations become clearer, leadership attention shifts toward strengthening curriculum coherence and collaborative planning. Leaders deepen their understanding of why effective planning matters, develop strong PYP teams, establish productive meeting protocols, and support professional collaboration at different levels. The focus moves from structural clarity to the quality of learning design across the school.

As curriculum structures strengthen, leaders also begin thinking about sustainability. Sustainable implementation relies on clear priorities, protected time for collaboration, and systems that make learning visible across classrooms and grade levels. This work is closely connected to the principles of professional learning communities described by Richard DuFour and colleagues (2016), who emphasize that collaboration must be purposeful, focused on student learning, and embedded in regular team practices.

Landmarks:

- Curriculum coherence
- Collaborative planning structures
- Effective team development
- Concept-driven learning design

Leaders support sustainable implementation by prioritizing key learning outcomes, protecting collaborative planning time, and establishing systems that help teachers document and reflect on learning. In many schools, digital platforms play an important role in this work, helping teachers connect curriculum, assessment, and learning documentation across units and year levels while reducing administrative complexity.

Stage 3: ATL Skills and Agency

With stronger curriculum structures in place, leadership increasingly focuses on developing teacher capacity. Leaders support teachers in strengthening assessment practices, implementing professional learning communities, and promoting data-informed instructional decisions. Attention turns toward how teachers grow professionally so they can better support student independence and the development of learning skills.

As teachers work with increasing amounts of learning evidence, leaders also begin considering how systems can reduce administrative complexity and make learning more visible. Many schools introduce digital planning and documentation tools that help teachers track conceptual learning, Approaches to Learning skills, and assessment evidence across units and grade levels. When thoughtfully implemented, these systems support professional reflection, strengthen programme coherence, and help teachers make more informed instructional decisions.

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- Landmarks:**
- Programme impact
 - Curriculum review and refinement
 - Sustainable inquiry systems
 - Exhibition and student action

This emphasis on evidence and impact is strongly reflected in Hattie's work (2016), which highlights the importance of making learning visible and using evidence to guide teaching and leadership decisions.

Stage 4: Inquiry, Action, and Exhibition

In the later stages, leadership focuses on programme impact and long-term sustainability. Leaders analyze learning data, implement curriculum review cycles, and support the PYP Exhibition as a demonstration of student understanding and agency. At this stage, the PYP becomes more coherent across the school, with systems in place to sustain inquiry-driven learning over time.



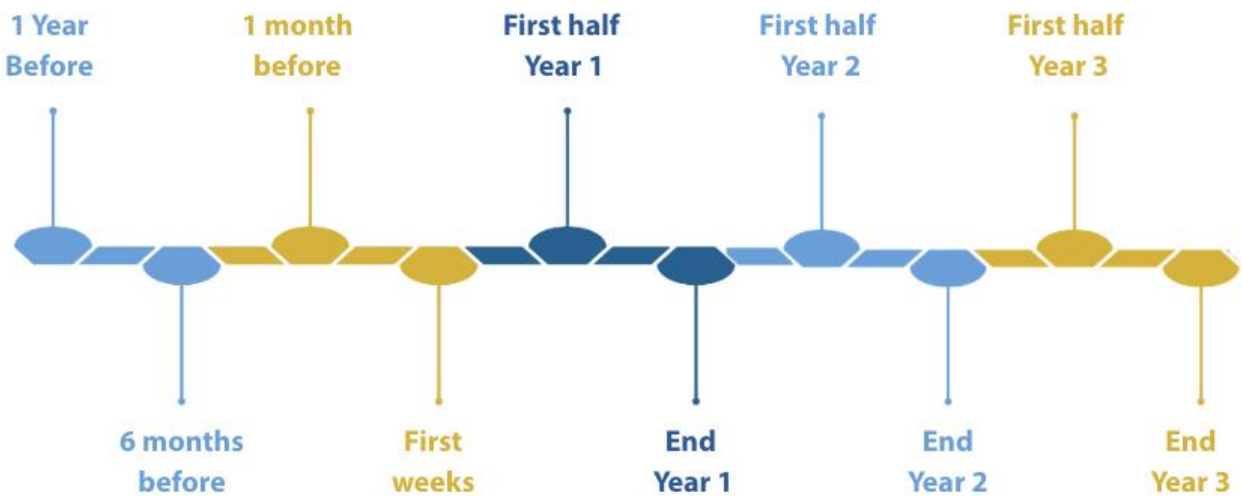
Landmarks:

- Teacher professional growth
- Assessment capability
- Professional learning communities
- Student agency and learning skills
- Effective use of digital systems to support learning documentation and analysis

Sustaining this level of implementation requires ongoing attention to change and improvement. As Michael Fullan (2016) explains, effective leaders build cultures that can continuously adapt, reflect, and improve. This aligns closely with the need to embed

inquiry, action, and reflection as enduring features of the programme rather than as isolated practices.

A Roadmap for Your First Four Years



Leading the implementation of the Primary Years Programme is a gradual journey of learning, reflection, and growth. While every leader's experiences vary, many notice similar patterns as they deepen their understanding. This roadmap is designed to guide and support you, helping you focus on what matters most at each stage rather than feeling overwhelmed by everything at once.

Each checkpoint begins with a guiding theme that highlights the main purpose of that stage. These checkpoints are explored through a set of eight practical "In Practice" lenses that connect leadership learning with schoolwide practice:



Leadership Learning



Anchor Moments



Key Resources



What This Might Look Like



Working with Teachers



What This Might Sound Like



Impact Evidence



Pause and Reflect

Your Leadership Learning

Each section highlights the professional understandings that typically develop at this stage of your leadership journey. It helps you focus on what matters at this point rather than trying to address everything at once.

Key Resources

Here you will find suggested support for your leadership learning. These may include IB documents and workshops, guidance from experienced practitioners, leadership research, and influential voices in the field. Think of this section as your leadership toolkit.

With Teachers

These sections translate leadership learning into everyday school practice, showing how your growing understanding supports teachers, strengthens collaboration, and improves learning experiences across the school.

Programme Evidence

This element highlights visible signs of programme development across the school. It helps you notice how systems, structures, teaching practices, and student experiences are becoming more aligned with PYP principles.

Anchor Moments

These brief reflective pauses highlight common surprises, tensions, and insights that school leaders often encounter during implementation. They are designed to normalize challenges and help you anticipate important mindset shifts.

What This Might Look and Sound Like

Short, school-based snapshots bring ideas to life by illustrating how PYP leadership may appear in real contexts. The “Look Like” examples show visible leadership actions and school practices. The “Sound Like” examples include two voices: a curriculum-focused leader, such as a PYP coordinator, and a broader school leader, such as a principal. Together, they illustrate how leadership conversations support implementation from different perspectives.

Pause and Reflect

Just as we expect teachers to build reflection into student learning, this roadmap encourages leaders to pause and reflect on their own professional growth. Throughout the guide, you will be invited to slow down, consider your leadership decisions, and think about the structures and support that will help your school grow sustainably.

Every leadership journey in the PYP is different, but using a guide like this can help you see where you are, where you might be heading next, and why each step matters.

Phase	Time Period	Your Learning	Key Resources	With Teachers	Programme Evidence	Anchor Moment	What This Might Look Like	What This Might Sound Like	Pause and Reflect
Phase 1 — Mission & Learner Profile	One Year Before Starting: Exploring IB Foundations & Leadership Mindset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding the philosophy of the PYP as a foundation for schoolwide decision-making Recognizing how mission and international-mindedness shape school culture and priorities Reflecting on leadership beliefs and readiness for change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From Principles into Practice Leading the Learning workshop IB mission statement and philosophy documents <p>IB Programme Standards & Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purpose 1 Mission aligned with IB philosophy (0101-01) Purpose 3 Learner profile & international-mindedness embedded (0101-03) Leadership 1.1 Governance & leadership structures articulated (0201-01-0100) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introducing the IB mission and its purpose Opening discussions about international-mindedness Exploring what kind of learners the school hopes to develop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early staff curiosity about IB philosophy Staff beginning to use shared language about learning and values Initial conversations connecting mission to classroom practice 	Realizing that the PYP is not a programme to install, but a philosophy to grow.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership retreats focused on beliefs about learning Whole-staff discussions comparing practice with IB philosophy Early volunteers forming exploratory working groups 	<p>Coordinator: “Let’s explore how the learner profile shapes the kind of thinkers we want students to become.”</p> <p>Principal: “This is more than a programme adoption. It’s a shift in how our whole school defines learning.”</p>	<p><i>Are we preparing for a cultural shift or a programme adoption?</i></p> <p><i>How aligned are our current school values, structures, and leadership practices with the philosophy of the PYP?</i></p>
	Six Months Before Starting: Clarifying Leadership Roles & Programme Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding the difference between leadership and management in a PYP context Recognizing the importance of role clarity and distributed leadership Understanding how the learner profile informs school culture, policies, and expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IB authorization guidelines IB leadership role documentation Case studies from authorized PYP schools <p>IB Programme Standards & Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership 2 IB-trained coordinator appointed & empowered (0201-02) Leadership 2.1 Coordinator job description & release time (0201-02-0100) Teacher Support 2 Leadership engages in IB professional learning (0203-02) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing shared understanding of international-mindedness Introducing learner profile attributes as shared language Exploring how values influence classroom culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff referencing learner profile attributes in meetings Teachers connecting values with student development Growing comfort discussing IB language 	Recognizing that unclear leadership structures create implementation confusion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership team mapping responsibilities across roles Staff workshops unpacking learner profile attributes Early classroom visuals referencing learner qualities 	<p>Coordinator: “I’ll support teams with planning, but we need clarity about who makes final curriculum decisions.”</p> <p>Principal: “Let’s define leadership responsibilities now so teachers aren’t confused later.”</p>	<p><i>Where might ambiguity in leadership roles slow implementation?</i></p> <p><i>Do staff clearly understand who to approach for guidance, decisions, and support?</i></p>
	One Month Before Starting: Preparing Systems & Staff for Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding how leadership structures enable successful implementation Recognizing how systems and routines support collaboration and coherence Understanding the role of leadership in building shared understanding among staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sample leadership structures from IB schools Programme of Inquiry planning guides School governance documentation <p>IB Programme Standards & Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership 1.2 Structures ensure IB compliance (0201-01-0200) Leadership 3.1 Scheduling meets programme requirements (0201-03-0100) Teacher Support 3 Time allocated for collaborative planning (0203-03) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarifying how decisions will be made Preparing teachers for collaborative culture Ensuring staff understand leadership support structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff confidence about who to approach for support Clear communication channels emerging Reduced uncertainty about programme direction 	Understanding that psychological safety grows when structures are clear.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizational charts shared Decision-making flowcharts introduced Grade leaders identified 	<p>Coordinator: “Grade teams will collaborate on unit design, and I’ll help align planners across year levels.”</p> <p>Principal: “We’ve adjusted schedules so collaborative planning time is protected every week.”</p>	<p><i>Do teachers know where to go for guidance and decisions?</i></p> <p><i>Are our systems clear enough to reduce uncertainty and build staff confidence?</i></p>
	First Weeks: Launching Implementation & Building Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding how leadership presence and communication influence staff confidence Recognizing the emotional and practical challenges of early implementation Understanding how culture is built through consistent leadership behaviors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IB implementation guidance materials Change management research Staff wellbeing frameworks <p>IB Programme Standards & Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Culture 6.2 IB policies communicated to school community (0301-06-0200) Teacher Support 1 Teachers use current IB resources (0203-01) Approaches to Teaching 1 Inquiry-based teaching begins (0403-01) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reinforcing learner profile language Supporting early attempts at inquiry Encouraging experimentation without fear of failure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learner profile language appearing in classrooms Teachers attempting inquiry practices Staff openly discussing challenges 	Realizing reassurance and presence matter more than perfection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leaders visiting classrooms informally Celebrating small successes Open Q&A forums for staff 	<p>Coordinator: “It’s okay if inquiry feels messy at first. Let’s reflect and refine together.”</p> <p>Principal: “You’re trying new practices. That takes courage. We’re focused on growth, not perfection.”</p>	<p><i>Are we reducing pressure while maintaining purpose?</i></p> <p><i>How visible and supportive is leadership during this early stage?</i></p>
	First Half Year 1: Embedding IB Culture & Leadership Routines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding transdisciplinary learning as a framework for curriculum coherence Recognizing the role of leadership in supporting consistent implementation across classrooms Understanding how structures support, but do not replace, strong teaching practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School self-study tools IB evaluation frameworks Leadership reflection protocols <p>IB Programme Standards & Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purpose 2 Pedagogical leadership promotes IB learning approaches (0101-02) Culture 6.7 Leadership uses IB policies in decision-making (0301-06-0700) Approaches to Teaching 4 Collaborative learning culture (0403-04) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deepening shared understanding of learner profile attributes Strengthening classroom culture aligned with IB values Helping teachers translate philosophy into sustained practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent learner profile language across grades Classrooms reflecting IB values Students demonstrating curiosity and responsibility 	Seeing shared language and values embedded in school culture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent learner profile displays schoolwide Teachers referencing IB values in planning Students using shared language to describe learning 	<p>Coordinator: “I’m noticing stronger learner profile connections in planning discussions.”</p> <p>Principal: “I’m seeing IB language becoming part of how teachers and students talk about learning.”</p>	<p><i>Is the PYP becoming part of daily school culture rather than a special initiative?</i></p> <p><i>Where do we still see gaps between IB philosophy and everyday practice?</i></p>
	End Year 1: Building Collaborative Planning Foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding why collaborative planning improves student learning Recognizing the difference between coordination and true collaboration Understanding how conceptual clarity strengthens teaching and learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lynn Erickson <i>Concept-Based Curriculum and Instruction</i> Grant Wiggins & Jay McTighe <i>Understanding by Design</i> <p>IB Programme Standards & Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coherent Curriculum 2.1 Teachers collaboratively plan units (0401-02-0100) PYP Planner Requirement Collaborative planning documentation (0401-02-0111) Teacher Support 3.1 Scheduled collaborative planning time (0203-03-0100) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting concept-based planning Helping teams identify strong central ideas Prioritizing understanding over activities Focusing on essential learning outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teams using common planning templates Meetings becoming more structured and focused Central ideas clearer and concept-driven Reduced emphasis on disconnected activities 	Recognizing collaboration must be intentionally structured to improve learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared planning protocols introduced Teams using central ideas to guide discussions Meetings shift from logistics to learning design 	<p>Coordinator: “How does this activity build conceptual understanding rather than just coverage?”</p> <p>Principal: “Strong planning takes time. Protecting collaboration is a priority for student learning.”</p>	<p><i>Are structures improving planning quality or simply organising meetings?</i></p> <p><i>How effectively are teams designing learning around student understanding?</i></p>

Phase 2 — Transdisciplinary Learning & Concepts

Phase 3 — ATL Skills & Agency	<p>First Half Year 2:</p> <p>Strengthening Curriculum & Assessment Coherence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding how conceptual coherence strengthens inquiry Recognizing alignment between goals, learning, and assessment Understanding ATL skills as drivers of independence and agency Recognizing leadership's role in promoting student agency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lynn Erickson: concept-driven curriculum design Wiggins & McTighe: alignment of goals and assessment <p>IB Programme Standards & Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coherent Curriculum 1.2 Horizontal & vertical curriculum articulation (0401-01-0200) Coherent Curriculum 1.5 Curriculum enables cross-disciplinary connections (0401-01-0500) Approaches to Teaching 2 Conceptual understanding emphasized (0403-02) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening transdisciplinary connections Aligning learning experiences with central ideas Refining unit coherence Prioritizing conceptual depth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong alignment between central ideas and learning Students making cross-subject connections Planning centered on conceptual understanding Units showing progression of understanding 	<p>Seeing planning shift from activities to understanding.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers revising engagements to align with central ideas Subjects connected through shared concepts 	<p>Coordinator: "I'm seeing much stronger alignment between central ideas and learning engagements."</p> <p>Principal: "Curriculum coherence is improving across grade levels. That consistency supports student progress."</p>	<p><i>Is the written curriculum more coherent than the taught curriculum?</i></p> <p><i>How clearly do assessment practices reflect intended learning goals?</i></p>
	<p>End Year 2:</p> <p>Cultivating Agency & Instructional Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding how assessment improves learning, not just measures it Recognizing the role of professional collaboration in improving instruction Understanding how systems and structures enable student agency Recognizing the importance of evidence-informed decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kath Murdoch <i>The Power of Inquiry</i> Richard DuFour <i>Learning by Doing</i> <p>IB Programme Standards & Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approaches to Assessment 1 Feedback Improves Learning (0404-01) Approaches to Assessment 2.1 Varied assessment methods (0404-02-0100) Teacher Support 2.1 IB-mandated professional development (0203-02-0100) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting analysis of student learning evidence Strengthening formative assessment practices Documenting learning processes Encouraging collaborative reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers discussing student learning evidence Visible documentation of learning Early student reflections Instruction adjusted based on insights 	<p>Realizing assessment conversations reveal student thinking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teams bring student work samples to meetings Leaders guide evidence interpretation 	<p>Coordinator: "What does this student work show us about their understanding?"</p> <p>Principal: "How are we using assessment evidence to improve teaching decisions?"</p>	<p><i>Are assessment conversations focused on improving learning rather than measuring performance?</i></p> <p><i>How effectively are teachers using evidence to refine their instruction?</i></p>
	<p>First Half Year 3:</p> <p>Strengthening Inquiry Systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding how inquiry develops through progression across grade levels Recognizing conceptual depth as a measure of programme quality Understanding how teacher agency supports student agency Recognizing the importance of balancing guidance and independence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kath Murdoch: inquiry and agency Richard DuFour: collaborative inquiry Viviane Robinson <i>Student-Centered Leadership</i> <p>IB Programme Standards & Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lifelong Learners 1 ATL skills developed (0402-01) Lifelong Learners 6 Student agency & ownership (0402-06) Leadership 4.3 Data used to improve programme quality (0201-04-0300) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting student agency through inquiry Increasing teacher instructional agency Encouraging pedagogical experimentation Supporting reflective practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students asking meaningful questions Students reflecting on learning Explicit ATL development Teachers adapting instruction confidently Professional dialogue focused on improvement 	<p>Shifting from programme management to instructional leadership.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coaching conversations focus on student thinking and inquiry depth 	<p>Coordinator: "Students are asking better questions because teachers are giving them more ownership."</p> <p>Principal: "I'm seeing classrooms where students are leading their learning with real confidence."</p>	<p><i>How often do leadership conversations focus on student thinking rather than teaching activities?</i></p> <p><i>Are structures encouraging both teacher and student agency?</i></p>
	<p>End Year 3:</p> <p>Demonstrating Sustainable Programme Impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding how learning evidence reveals programme coherence and impact Recognizing how curriculum review strengthens long-term quality Understanding how inquiry leads to student action and real-world application Seeing the PYP as an integrated, whole-school learning system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michael Fullan <i>Leading in a Culture of Change</i> IB curriculum review documentation IB inquiry progression guidance IB Exhibition guidelines IB evaluation and self-study frameworks <p>IB Programme Standards & Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coherent Curriculum 3 Curriculum reviewed & updated (0401-03) Approaches to Teaching 3 Learning connected to real contexts (0403-03) Leadership 4.2 Data informs sustainability (0201-04-0200) Lifelong Learners 5 Student action & service learning (0402-05) PYP Exhibition Requirement Students complete Exhibition (0402-06-0211) Leadership 5.1 Resources allocated for programme sustainability (0201-05-0100) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guiding meaningful student action Supporting Exhibition inquiry mentorship Strengthening community connections Embedding sustainable curriculum practices Supporting deeper inquiry Strengthening conceptual understanding across units Reviewing curriculum cycles Refining structures that support inquiry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Units showing stronger conceptual progression Students asking increasingly complex questions Inquiry skills developing across grade levels Curriculum documentation showing coherence Strong Exhibition outcomes Student-initiated real-world action Independent student inquiry Concept transfer to new contexts Schoolwide coherence in inquiry language 	<p>Seeing the PYP operate as an integrated learning system.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum review meetings analyze progression across grades Exhibition presentations show deep inquiry and authentic action 	<p>Coordinator: "We're seeing inquiry deepen as units connect across subjects and grade levels."</p> <p>Principal: "This is the impact we hoped for: Students demonstrating deep learning and real-world application."</p>	<p><i>Are structures helping inquiry deepen across years?</i></p> <p><i>What evidence shows PYP impacts thinking and action across the school?</i></p>

Looking for Learning in PYP Classrooms

Once leaders understand what to prioritize, the next step is knowing what to look for in classrooms. In addition to supporting the implementation of the Approaches to Teaching during classroom visits, leaders can use this time to have conversations with students. Leaders (and teachers supporting each other) speak with students about their learning and then share this feedback with teachers, allowing them to draw their own professional conclusions with supportive guidance from school leaders.



This approach to classroom visits focuses on understanding learning rather than evaluating teaching. Instead of observing lessons to judge performance, leaders look for evidence of how students are making sense of their learning experiences. In a PYP setting, this lens centers on three simple but powerful questions that students should increasingly be able to answer:

- What are you learning?
- Why are you learning it?
- What will you learn next?

These questions help leaders see whether learning is purposeful, connected, and understood by students. When students can explain their learning clearly, it often signals that teaching is concept-driven, inquiry-based, and aligned with the programme's goals.



This approach encourages short, frequent classroom visits that focus on patterns across the school rather than single lessons. Observations are descriptive rather than judgmental and are used to guide professional conversations, support teachers, and strengthen programme coherence.

“Looking for Learning” can work alongside existing teacher evaluation processes by offering a complementary lens focused on student experience and understanding. In some schools, it may even serve as a more collaborative and growth-oriented alternative to traditional evaluation systems.

By shifting attention from teaching performance to student learning, leaders gain clearer insight into how the PYP is experienced across classrooms and how best to support its continued development.

What to Look for Across the Stages

As schools grow in their implementation of the PYP, the nature of student learning gradually evolves. What leaders might notice in classrooms during the early stages will look different from what is visible once inquiry, agency, and conceptual understanding are more deeply embedded.



The stage-specific suggestions below are not intended as checklists or evaluation tools. Instead, they provide a helpful lens to guide classroom visits and professional conversations. They help you notice patterns in student learning, understand how the programme is developing across the school, and identify where teachers may benefit from additional support.

By focusing on how learning changes over time, leaders can better align their support with the school's stage of implementation and ensure that expectations remain realistic and developmentally appropriate.

Stage 1: Mission and Learner Profile

Leaders observe whether:

- Learner Profile language is visible and used naturally in classrooms
- Classroom culture reflects IB values such as respect, inclusion, and curiosity
- Students show openness to ideas and demonstrate care in their interactions

At this stage, leaders look for early signs that the PYP philosophy is shaping the learning environment.

Stage 2: Transdisciplinary Learning and Concepts

Leaders observe whether:

- Students are exploring concepts rather than only completing tasks
- Lessons connect learning across subject areas
- Students explain ideas in their own words rather than simply recalling facts

At this stage, leaders focus on whether learning experiences are becoming more connected and concept-driven.

Stage 3: ATL Skills and Agency

Leaders observe whether:

- Students ask meaningful and relevant questions
- Students reflect on their learning processes
- Learning skills such as collaboration, research, and self-management are explicitly taught and practiced

At this stage, leaders look for growing student independence and the visible development of learning skills.

Stage 4: Inquiry, Action, and Exhibition

Leaders observe whether:

- Students initiate questions and investigations
- Students apply concepts in new and unfamiliar contexts
- Inquiry drives learning experiences rather than isolated activities

At this stage, leaders focus on whether inquiry is authentic and whether students are taking ownership of their learning.

Building Strong Home-School Partnerships

As leaders develop clarity about learning in classrooms, the next step is ensuring that this learning is understood and supported by families. When families understand how and why students are learning, they are better able to support progress, celebrate growth, and reinforce learning at home.



Parent participation and strong home-school partnerships are powerful contributors to student success. When educators and families work together to develop shared understandings of curricular aims and learning approaches, students benefit from consistent support across home and school environments.

Schools can strengthen these partnerships by sharing learning with parents in two important ways. First, by communicating general information about programme aims and teaching approaches so families understand the purpose behind learning. Second, by providing regular, student-

specific feedback that helps parents understand their child's progress, strengths, and next steps.

Leaders play a key role in creating structures that make this communication meaningful, manageable, and sustainable for teachers. The guidance below outlines how these partnerships can be strengthened across each stage of PYP implementation.

Stage 1: Mission and Learner Profile

Leadership actions

- Communicate the IB mission and learner profile to families in accessible language
- Explain how international-mindedness and learner attributes shape school culture
- Provide examples of how values-based learning is reflected in classrooms
- Invite parents to information sessions that introduce the PYP philosophy
- Encourage teachers to share classroom routines that support learner profile development

Stage 2: Transdisciplinary Learning and Concepts

Leadership actions

- Help parents understand transdisciplinary learning and concept-driven teaching
- Share grade-level overviews that explain central ideas and key concepts
- Provide examples of how subjects connect within units of inquiry
- Offer parent workshops that explain inquiry-based learning approaches
- Encourage teachers to communicate the purpose behind learning experiences rather than only activities

Stage 3: ATL Skills and Agency

Leadership actions

- Communicate the importance of Approaches to Learning skills for lifelong learning

- Provide guidance for parents on supporting independence and reflection at home
- Share examples of student goal-setting and self-management strategies
- Encourage student-led conferences that involve families in learning discussions
- Support teachers in explaining how agency and skill development prepare students for future learning experiences

Stage 4: Inquiry, Action, and Exhibition

Leadership actions

- Engage families in understanding how inquiry leads to authentic action
- Provide opportunities for parents to attend and celebrate student exhibitions
- Communicate how conceptual understanding connects to real-world contexts
- Highlight examples of student action that impact the community
- Strengthen partnerships with families as collaborators in authentic learning experiences

Strong home-school partnerships do not happen automatically. They grow when communication is clear, learning is visible, and families feel genuinely included in their children's educational journeys. By intentionally supporting these connections, leaders help ensure that learning is reinforced beyond the classroom and that students experience a consistent message about the value of their growth.

Using the PYP Roadmap Leadership Checklist

Effective leadership in the PYP develops through experience and reflection. While every school context is different, many leaders notice similar patterns as confidence and clarity increase.



The PYP Roadmap Checklist for Leaders translates the roadmap into leadership practice. Organized around the same four phases, it highlights the key actions and indicators that support effective implementation across the school. While the roadmap focuses on building understanding, the checklist shows what this looks like in action.

It brings together both the broader view of leadership development and the practical steps needed along the way. Use it as a reflective and practical tool to:

- Recognize current strengths and progress
- Identify priorities for development
- Guide decision-making and next steps

PYP Roadmap Checklist for Leaders	
Phase 1 — Mission & Learner Profile	
Establishing Purpose and Shared Understanding	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lead whole-staff exploration of the IB mission and philosophy
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure the leadership team understands the learner profile and international mindedness
<input type="checkbox"/>	Facilitate discussion about the implications of inquiry-based learning
<input type="checkbox"/>	Create space for staff reflection on beliefs, values, and prior experiences
Clarifying Leadership and Direction	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clarify leadership roles, responsibilities, and decision-making structures
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure the coordinator role is clearly defined and supported
<input type="checkbox"/>	Communicate clear implementation priorities to staff
<input type="checkbox"/>	Align hiring priorities and responsibilities with programme needs
Building Structures for Implementation	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish leadership structures to support implementation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure collaborative planning time is protected
<input type="checkbox"/>	Set up communication systems that support collaboration
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure Programme of Inquiry development structures are in place
Aligning Systems and Reducing Complexity	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Begin aligning school mission, policies, and systems with IB philosophy
<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify required structural and cultural shifts for implementation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reduce competing initiatives to avoid overload
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitor staff workload and adjust expectations where needed
Building Capacity and Confidence	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure leadership participation in IB professional learning
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide opportunities for staff learning about the learner profile and international-mindedness
<input type="checkbox"/>	Support teachers in translating IB philosophy into classroom practice
<input type="checkbox"/>	Create time and structures for collaborative sense-making
Establishing Communication and Community Understanding	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Communicate the purpose of the PYP to staff, parents, and the wider community
<input type="checkbox"/>	Offer parent sessions introducing the PYP
<input type="checkbox"/>	Share early examples and intentions to build understanding and trust
Maintaining Momentum and Support	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Maintain a visible and supportive leadership presence
<input type="checkbox"/>	Encourage reflective dialogue about early implementation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide reassurance and clarity during early stages of change
<input type="checkbox"/>	Celebrate early steps and emerging alignment

Christine Orkisz Lang, 2026

As shown across the four phases, leadership development in the PYP is not linear or fixed, but rather unfolds through reflection, collaboration, and purposeful action.

This checklist is designed to support that ongoing journey, providing clarity and direction while allowing for flexibility based on your deepening understanding and your school's unique context.

PYP Roadmap Checklist for Leaders

Phase 1 — Mission & Learner Profile

Establishing Purpose and Shared Understanding

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Lead whole-staff exploration of the IB mission and philosophy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Ensure the leadership team understands the learner profile and international mindedness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Facilitate discussion about the implications of inquiry-based learning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Create space for staff reflection on beliefs, values, and prior experiences |

Clarifying Leadership and Direction

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Clarify leadership roles, responsibilities, and decision-making structures |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Ensure the coordinator role is clearly defined and supported |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Communicate clear implementation priorities to staff |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Align hiring priorities and responsibilities with programme needs |

Building Structures for Implementation

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Establish leadership structures to support implementation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Ensure collaborative planning time is protected |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Set up communication systems that support collaboration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Ensure Programme of Inquiry development structures are in place |

Aligning Systems and Reducing Complexity

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Begin aligning school mission, policies, and systems with IB philosophy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Identify required structural and cultural shifts for implementation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Reduce competing initiatives to avoid overload |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Monitor staff workload and adjust expectations where needed |

Building Capacity and Confidence

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Ensure leadership participation in IB professional learning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Provide opportunities for staff learning about the learner profile and international-mindedness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Support teachers in translating IB philosophy into classroom practice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Create time and structures for collaborative sense-making |

Establishing Communication and Community Understanding

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Communicate the purpose of the PYP to staff, parents, and the wider community |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Offer parent sessions introducing the PYP |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Share early examples and intentions to build understanding and trust |

Maintaining Momentum and Support

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Maintain a visible and supportive leadership presence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Encourage reflective dialogue about early implementation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Provide reassurance and clarity during early stages of change |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Celebrate early steps and emerging alignment |

Phase 2 — Transdisciplinary Learning & Concepts

Strengthening Collaborative Planning

- Establish and sustain collaborative planning structures across teams
- Protect dedicated time for planning, reflection, and curriculum design
- Ensure collaborative planning focuses on improving conceptual understanding and student learning
- Participate in planning discussions to guide quality and consistency

Developing the Programme of Inquiry

- Support the development and ongoing refinement of a coherent Programme of Inquiry
- Ensure the Programme of Inquiry is actively used to inform planning
- Monitor progression of concepts and understanding across units and grade levels

Ensuring Conceptual and Transdisciplinary Coherence

- Ensure central ideas drive unit design and planning discussions
- Monitor the quality of central ideas and conceptual understanding within units
- Ensure subject areas are meaningfully integrated within and across units
- Provide clear expectations for concept-based and transdisciplinary planning

Building Teacher Capacity

- Align professional learning with planning quality and concept-based teaching
- Support teachers in designing concept-driven, inquiry-based units
- Provide guidance and feedback through planning reviews and discussions
- Support the coordinator's role in leading pedagogical development

Aligning Systems and Maintaining Focus

- Ensure alignment between written curriculum and classroom implementation
- Ensure consistency of IB practices across grade levels
- Reduce competing initiatives to maintain focus on core PYP practices
- Allocate resources to support concept-based and transdisciplinary teaching

Monitoring and Communication

- Use planning reviews and classroom visits to inform support and next steps
- Encourage reflective dialogue focused on improving planning and instruction
- Communicate progress in developing concept-based and transdisciplinary learning
- Explain transdisciplinary and concept-based learning to parents
- Share curriculum overviews that highlight central ideas, concepts, and integration

Phase 3 — ATL Skills & Agency

Aligning Assessment with IB Philosophy

<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure assessment practices align with IB philosophy and approaches to learning
<input type="checkbox"/>	Support the moderation of student work to build shared expectations
<input type="checkbox"/>	Use curriculum and assessment reviews to strengthen planning quality
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure assessment practices inform ongoing planning and unit refinement

Using Evidence to Improve Learning

<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure systems support teachers in using assessment evidence to inform teaching
<input type="checkbox"/>	Use learning evidence to inform leadership decisions and priorities
<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish systems for collecting and using evidence of student learning
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure collaborative structures include analysis of student learning evidence

Developing Approaches to Learning (ATL)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure structures and expectations support the development of ATL skills across grade levels
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide guidance and support for integrating ATL into teaching and assessment
<input type="checkbox"/>	Align professional learning with the development of ATL and independent learning

Strengthening Student Agency

<input type="checkbox"/>	Create conditions that support student agency and independence
<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish structures that enable student voice, choice, and goal-setting
<input type="checkbox"/>	Support the development of student-led conferences involving families
<input type="checkbox"/>	Building Professional Culture and Growth
<input type="checkbox"/>	Promote professional learning communities focused on instructional improvement

Establish structures for collaborative reflection based on student learning evidence

<input type="checkbox"/>	Strengthen collaboration focused on improving student learning
<input type="checkbox"/>	Create conditions that support teacher experimentation and professional growth

Aligning Systems and Communication

<input type="checkbox"/>	Align staffing, scheduling, and structures with curriculum and assessment needs
<input type="checkbox"/>	Communicate the value of ATL skills and independent learning to parents
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide guidance to parents on supporting independence and self-management

Phase 4 — Inquiry Approach

Sustaining Inquiry Across the Programme

<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure clear progression of inquiry across grade levels
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure curriculum documentation reflects coherent inquiry progression
<input type="checkbox"/>	Support deeper conceptual and inquiry-based learning across subjects
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure systems sustain inquiry-based learning over time

Leading Review and Data-Informed Improvement

<input type="checkbox"/>	Lead ongoing curriculum review and refinement cycles
<input type="checkbox"/>	Use learning evidence to evaluate programme coherence and inform improvement priorities
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitor programme impact through evidence of student learning
<input type="checkbox"/>	Use review processes to strengthen programme sustainability

Strengthening Instructional Leadership

<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure leadership conversations focus on student thinking, inquiry depth, and learning outcomes
<input type="checkbox"/>	Support teachers in refining inquiry and conceptual learning over time
<input type="checkbox"/>	Support teachers in balancing guidance and student independence in inquiry
<input type="checkbox"/>	Create conditions that support teacher experimentation and instructional agency

Strengthening Collaboration and Coherence

<input type="checkbox"/>	Encourage cross-grade collaboration to strengthen progression and consistency
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure alignment across units, grade levels, and the Programme of Inquiry
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lead professional inquiry across teams

Supporting Inquiry, Action, and the Exhibition

<input type="checkbox"/>	Support teachers in guiding student inquiry and meaningful action
<input type="checkbox"/>	Allocate resources to support effective Exhibition implementation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Promote student action as an outcome of learning
<input type="checkbox"/>	Engage the wider community in the Exhibition and student learning

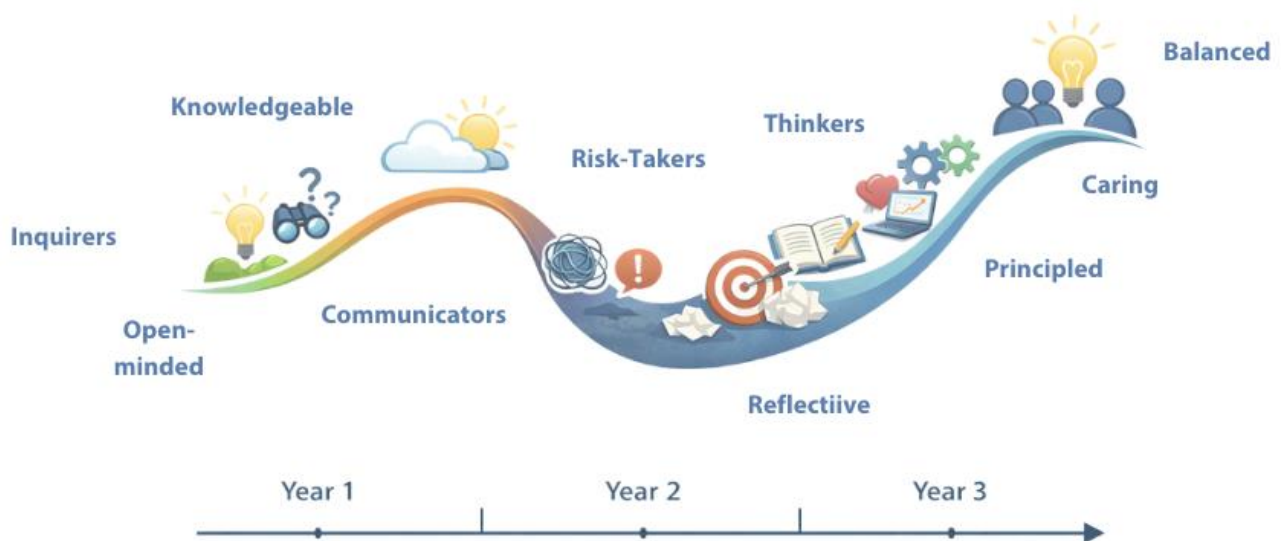
Building Community Understanding and Engagement

<input type="checkbox"/>	Communicate how inquiry leads to student understanding and action
<input type="checkbox"/>	Highlight examples of student action connected to real-world contexts
<input type="checkbox"/>	Share examples of conceptual understanding with parents and the community

Ensuring Long-Term Sustainability

<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure leadership structures support ongoing programme development
<input type="checkbox"/>	Align systems and resources to sustain high-quality inquiry over time
<input type="checkbox"/>	Maintain focus on continuous improvement and programme impact

Understanding the Implementation Dip



When leaders first begin working with the PYP, there is often a real sense of excitement and possibility. The programme offers a compelling vision for learning, and it is natural to imagine how it could strengthen teaching and student experiences across the school.

As your understanding deepens, you may notice just how many pieces need to come together at once. Curriculum design, collaborative planning, inquiry, learning skills, assessment practices, student agency, staffing structures, and communication with families all require attention. What initially felt inspiring can start to feel demanding.

At this point, it is completely normal for confidence to dip. As described by Michael Fullan (2007), this “implementation dip” is a natural part of professional growth whenever we take on meaningful change. Leaders are not only learning a new framework themselves but are also supporting teachers who may be experiencing similar uncertainty.

This experience reflects many of the Learner Profile attributes shown in the diagram. Leaders often begin as Inquirers and Open-minded, curious about what new possibilities the PYP might bring. As understanding deepens, leaders become more Knowledgeable, developing a clearer picture of how the programme fits together. Being strong Communicators becomes essential, as leaders work closely with teachers and leadership teams to build shared understanding. When challenges arise, leaders show what it means to be Risk-takers, making thoughtful decisions even when the path forward is not perfectly clear.

A dip in confidence does not mean something is going wrong. Often, it simply means you are seeing the programme more clearly and recognizing the complexity of coherent change.

Collaboration, reflection, and time can help leaders make sense of this complexity and better support teachers as they move through their own stages of growth. The roadmap is designed to provide structure and perspective during these moments, supporting you as you navigate the complexities of leading PYP implementation.

Next Steps



Leading the PYP can sometimes feel bigger and more complicated than it really is. At its heart, the framework brings together practices that many schools already value and helps to organize them more coherently.

Much of this work will feel familiar. Supporting collaboration, strengthening curriculum, encouraging reflection, and keeping learning at the center of decisions are not new ideas. The PYP simply connects them through a shared language and a clearer structure.

Your role is not to carry the programme alone or to constantly introduce new initiatives. It is to create the conditions in which good teaching can flourish. When priorities are clear, time is protected, and people feel supported, progress becomes steady and sustainable.

You do not need to solve everything at once. Strong leadership in the PYP is often about simplifying rather than adding, focusing on what matters most, and building systems that sustainably support teachers.

If there are two ideas to keep in mind, they are these:



Clarity builds confidence: When people understand the purpose behind their work and how the pieces fit together, complexity becomes manageable.



Coherence builds sustainability: When curriculum, assessment, professional learning, and school structures align, improvement becomes part of how the school works, not just the effort of individuals.

Take it step by step. Notice the progress taking place across classrooms. Small shifts often signal meaningful change. Remember, leadership is never a solo endeavor. The collective experience of your staff and the professional community around you are powerful sources of support. Sustainable improvement develops through shared effort.

*Wishing you clarity in your priorities, steadiness in your decisions,
and the satisfaction of seeing learning strengthen across your school.
The work you lead today helps shape the experiences of staff, students, and parents
that they will carry with them for years to come.*



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