

## DEFINING A COMMUNITY'S PURPOSE

### A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS TO DEFINE MISSION, CORE VALUES AND VISION

International School of Beijing, Beijing  
2018-2019

NoTosh Team:  
Ewan McIntosh, Gerry Farrell

The community at the International School of Beijing is a special one, with a global reputation already for the performance of its teaching team and students. But the community wanted to sum up its purpose, steering values and create a vision that could provoke a fresh future direction.

The Board and Leadership Team at the International School of Beijing (ISB) wanted their mission to be so much more than a plaque on the wall. The rearticulation was to change its wording, make it more usable, but not necessarily to change the meaning that was there already.

The Board placed trust in NoTosh's Design Thinking process to test the assumptions behind the existing mission, by undertaking a massively collaborative community design process.

We created a dedicated Design Team, comprised of teachers, parents and students, to lead the work from the front. We up-skilled this team with interviewing and observational techniques, and got them organised around events, breakfasts and town halls throughout the community. The goal? To engage over 300 people in in-depth interviews, and solicit around 5000 stories, opinions and observations from the widest cross-section of the community.

**"[It was]...really made it clear from the start that this work would be challenging, that we'd experience moments of real frustration and pushback. It was all of those things and more but equally the most inspiring process to have been part of"**

Patrick Hurworth, Head of School, International School of Beijing.

The process was community-centred, community-informed, and brought together voices from every corner of the campus and beyond, including alumni. Data was gathered in many languages, and storytelling became the key vehicle to fill in the gaps of the usual school surveys of parents, staff and students.



The stories that were written on post-it notes, print-outs and told to the Design Team were extremely valuable. The Project Nest, a dedicated fishbowl room given over to gathering every scrap of data over two months, gave stakeholders the valuable space to off-load in a safe and supportive environment. The stories collectively told more than any numerical data was able to, identified the needs of the community and developed a clear picture of the school.

**“This has probably been the most collaborative process I’ve ever been involved in.”**

Patrick Hurworth, Head of School, International School of Beijing.

NoTosh’s key creative team, founder Ewan McIntosh and Creative Director, award winning copywriter Gerry Farrell, worked with the leadership team and Board to thrash out a fresh mission, a clear statement of intent that encompassed all that the school was, had been and would become in the future. Above all, we went further to define the core values and future vision for the school, based on the voices of both leadership team, Board and broad community.

**Upon the unveiling of the new mission, the entire school community were invited to have their say and vote on whether they approved or not of the re-articulated mission and vision. In an overwhelmingly positive reception, the community voted 94% in favour of the changes proposed.**

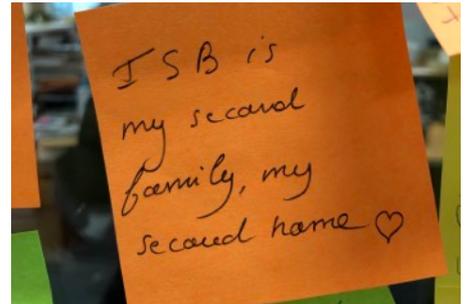
The impact of the work taken on by ISB is already visible and being seen across the school in several ways. The shared language of the school’s existing design cycle was reinforced by NoTosh’s Design Thinking approach across the school from playground to staff meetings.

The language is present outwith the school walls, infiltrating communication and marketing collateral on the school’s website and across their growing social media presence. And during the Learning at Home period in 2020, the Mission resonated in many of the online learning stories that were shared.

The process has been hugely emotional for the school community. Head Patrick Hurworth has described the project as being tremendously gratifying and has aptly captured the spirit of the school. The stories have contributed to a more inclusive, shared and impassioned understanding of all that ISB is, and created more focussed communications and an environment that thrives on change, innovation and a culture of sharing.

**The International School of Beijing, Beijing**  
2018-2019

**NoTosh Team:**  
Ewan McIntosh, Gerry Farrell



Let's start talking.  
[info@notosh.com](mailto:info@notosh.com)

**NOTOSH LTD  
(EMEA)**  
27 Lauriston Street,  
Edinburgh,  
EH3 9DD,  
UK

**NOTOSH LTD  
(AUSTRALIA)**  
PO Box 47,  
Collins Street West,  
Victoria, 8007,  
Australia

**NOTOSH INC  
(USA)**  
PO Box 1520,  
New York  
NY 10013  
USA

**NOTOSH INC  
(CANADA)**  
PO Box 646,  
Toronto P,  
Toronto ON M5S2Y4  
Canada