Thanathip & Partners

Accreditation for International Schools in Thailand



Chawaluck Sivayathorn Araneta
Managing Partner
E: chawaluck@thanathippartners.com
V-Card



Pattariya Sinthawachiwa
Senior Associate
E: pattariya@thanathippartners.com
V-Card



Nutnicha Eagjariyakorn
Associate
E: nutnicha@thanathippartners.com
V-Card

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Introduction

In addition to the licensing and operational requirements under the Private School Act B.E. 2550 (2007), as amended, international schools in Thailand are subject to general quality assurance requirements alongside additional accreditation requirements specific to their operations, which differ from those applicable to other categories of private schools. This article reviews the applicable framework, focusing on the requirements administered by the Office of the Private Education Commission (OPEC). The external quality assessments conducted by the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA), which operates under a separate framework, are not discussed in detail here.

This article first examines the general quality assurance framework under Thai law before considering the specific rules applicable to international schools, the scope and application of which may vary depending on the relevant supervisory authority.

Quality Assurance Framework under the National Education Act

The general quality assurance framework is set out under the National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999) and its sub-regulations. In particular, under the Ministerial Regulation on Educational Quality Assurance B.E. 2561 (2018) issued pursuant to the National Education Act, every educational institution must establish an internal quality assurance system to ensure that educational provisions meet the prescribed education standards.

The regulation requires schools to:

1. establish an internal quality assurance system by setting the institution's education standards in line with the education standards applicable to the relevant level and type of education;
2. prepare and implement an educational development plan to ensure that the provision of education meets such standards;

3. conduct internal evaluation and monitoring of educational quality;
4. implement measures for the continuous improvement of educational quality; and
5. submit an annual self-assessment report to the relevant supervising authority.

Internal Quality Assurance and SAR reporting

Schools must implement an internal quality assurance system and submit an annual Self-Assessment Report (SAR) to OPEC through the information system called E-SAR. The report typically includes:

1. basic school information including details of curricula approved by the Ministry of Education;
2. an executive summary providing an overview of school operations and academic performance in the previous academic year;
3. personnel and student statistics;
4. school accreditation status; and
5. the school's self-assessment results against its education standards, including strengths, areas for improvement and development plans.

Education Standards for International Schools

For international schools, additional requirements are set out in the Ministerial Notification on Guidelines for Determining Educational Standards for Formal Schools, International Category, which provides that international schools must align their institutional standards with both the national education standards and the standards of the relevant authority or organisation, as applicable. The Ministerial Notification distinguishes between two main scenarios:

Schools using a national curriculum

If the school follows the national curriculum of a particular country, its education standards must align with the standards prescribed by the relevant government authority of that country.

Schools using other international curricula

If the school adopts an international curriculum (other than a national curriculum of a particular country), its education standards must be benchmarked against international standards established by organisations recognised by the Thai Ministry of Education.

Except for international schools offering only pre-primary education, international schools adopting such international curricula (e.g. the Cambridge curriculum) must become a member of an accrediting organisation recognised by OPEC, a government agency under the Ministry of Education, within one year of obtaining the licence to establish the school and commencing operation. Within five years of becoming a member of that organisation, the schools must undergo a full evaluation and quality assessment conducted by that organisation.

OPEC recognises multiple international accreditation bodies, including:

- the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC);
- the Council of International Schools (CIS);
- the Education Development Trust (EDT);
- the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC);
- Cognia;
- Accreditation International (AI);
- the National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA);
- the Council of British International Schools (COBIS);
- the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI); and
- the Middle States Association Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools (MSACESS).

Accreditation by one of these international bodies is also relevant to ONESQA's external quality assessment. Accredited schools are assessed under the Joint Accreditation track, which is designed to avoid duplicating the overseas evaluation, while schools not yet accredited are assessed under the Non-Joint Accreditation track. As part of due diligence, investors may wish to confirm the target's current accreditation status and the timing of its next accreditation cycle.

Conclusion

Accreditation is an important legal obligation for international schools in Thailand. Operators must ensure that the school maintains an internal quality assurance system, submits annual Self-Assessment Reports, and sets institutional education standards in accordance with the applicable legal requirements.

For international schools, accreditation planning should also be considered as part of the school's broader compliance framework, particularly where the school is required to obtain membership with, and undergo evaluation by, a recognised accreditation organisation within the prescribed timelines. Operators should therefore assess these requirements at an early stage when establishing or operating an international school in Thailand.

This update is intended solely to provide general information on accreditation for international schools in Thailand and does not constitute legal advice or a legal opinion. Specific legal advice should be sought in relation to individual circumstances.