

Language policy



Engage – Explore - Enrich

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Contents based on:

Guidelines for developing a school language policy (2008), IBO

Language tenets in practice (2024), IBO

Vision statement

We want to see our students leave our school as critical thinkers who have a sustained interest in learning and inquiry. They will be responsible and morally ambitious young adults.

We will help our students to listen and acknowledge the views of others, especially when they oppose their own, and to communicate respectfully. We want our students to embrace each other's differences, recognise that there is a wider world outside of their familiar context and to live peacefully with their fellow human beings.

To achieve our vision, our school will align the best traditions of an Austrian Gymnasium with the global perspectives of an International Baccalaureate education.

Introduction

We are a state-funded secondary school with a Bilingual (English/German) Programme embedded into the school. About a quarter of the total number of students is enrolled in the Bilingual Programme. The Bilingual Programme was first introduced in September 2004 and the school has been authorised as an IB World School since 2010.

In our Lower School (ages 10-14), subject teaching in the Bilingual Programme takes place in both English and German. Ideally, pupils who have completed the first four years of the Bilingual Programme will feel confident in moving up to the Upper School (ages 14-18) with our pre-Diploma curriculum leading to the IB Diploma Programme. The IB Diploma Programme is taught and examined exclusively in English, with the exception of language subjects. In addition to our local students, we welcome international students of different nationalities and home languages to enhance the communication and language learning process through new linguistic repertoires leading to cultural exchange.

Philosophy

As language is the medium through which artistic expression, cultural heritage and the very identity of a community manifest itself, it is a central part of our mission to encourage and support language learning. In this respect we strive for and pay respect to our multilingual environment by offering a variety of foreign language classes: over the course of eight years, our students study a minimum of three foreign languages and a fourth, German, if that is not their language of education.

We aim to foster an appreciation of the richness and diversity of language. Language not only promotes cognitive growth but is also crucial for cherishing one's cultural identity and emotional welfare. The acquisition of a variety of languages and the maintenance of one's home language both enrich personal growth and help facilitate international understanding and chances in the job market. As language, by its very nature, is integrated into all areas of the curriculum, every teacher within the school is required to see language teaching as a central part of their vocation.

We, as a school community, embrace all diversity, cooperation and creativity stemming from multilingualism and multimodalism and acknowledge different forms of communicating in class and exams if the intended content is transmitted. Different accents and changes and variations in vocabulary, pronunciation and structures must be equally valued as those provide insights into different socio-cultural contexts.

Above that, we understand that communication is not limited to linguistic expression. By actively incorporating debating, acting and singing, we help students explore and acquire multimodal forms of communication and further develop their individual identities. Language (in all its variations) and communication are cherished as non-static, unlimited and diverse forms of expression, independent of social, academic or political restrictions.

Modern technologies are used in addition to aid meaning making and communicating. By travelling and participating in extracurricular activities, like Model European Parliament and on Erasmus exchange programmes, students are inspired to use language in different contexts.

Bilingual Programme

The Bilingual Programme is taught in both English and German and focuses on developing students' academic fluency with specialised subject vocabulary in both languages. We see language learning in general as an enormous opportunity in today's competitive and interconnected world. We believe that by offering a curriculum, which leaves students fluent in two languages and with great proficiency in one more language, our students will be well prepared for an international career.

Language is always taught meaningfully and in context. These contexts vary, but often involve the use of real-life scenarios, native speakers, the local area and a wide variety of text types. We advocate the learning of language through inquiry, allowing students to make connections with context, to explore and investigate.

Most of the students who join the Bilingual Programme in Year 1 are local students who have German as their home language. Whilst most students have had some English teaching at their primary school, the levels vary widely and so there is no minimum English level requirement to join the Bilingual Programme in year 1 and English teaching is built up incrementally throughout the Lower School:

Year 1: 50 % in Biology, Geography, Music

Year 2: 50 % - 60 % in Biology, Geography, History, Music, Maths

Year 3: 60 % - 70 % in Biology, Geography, History, Music, Maths, Physics

Year 4: 80 % - 90 (100) % in Biology, Geography, History, Music, Maths, Physics, Chemistry

In all the other subjects, the amount of English in the lessons varies.

In the Upper School, all lessons are taught in English with the exception of language lessons.

The Bilingual Programme is supported by our Native English Speaker Teachers (NEST) team. Whilst the majority of the teachers who teach on the Bilingual Programme are either an English as a Foreign Language teacher or have studied abroad and thus have a high standard of English, the NEST team provides the extra edge in our students' mastery of natural fluency and exploring different perspectives.

Our NEST team comprises of staff from a variety of countries, including the Republic of Ireland, India, the United Kingdom and the United States and the students are exposed to a diverse range of accents, dialects and use of language.

Foreign language teaching

Exploration and engagement in 3 foreign languages give our students a global perspective, appreciation of other cultures and diverse ways of communicating. Authentic communication in the foreign languages are encouraged through Erasmus exchange programmes, language competitions and language learning trips abroad.

Years 1 – 8: English as a foreign language

Year 3: choice between starting French (group F) or Latin (group L). The languages started in year 3 are called the "long language" (*lang Sprache*).

Year 5: Group F start Latin, group L start Spanish. The languages started in year 5 are called the "short language" (*kurz Sprache*).

The "short language" is studied in year 5, 6 and 7 but not in year 8 to give students more time to focus on the IB DP.

Admission to the Bilingual Programme (see also the Admissions Policy) and the implications on language choices

For admission to the Bilingual Programme in Year 1, please see the Admission Policy for details on the orientation process.

Students who join the Bilingual Programme in the Lower School without (near) fluency in German follow a full immersion policy for German. In the first two years in which they are in the Austrian school system, they attend all lessons, and we recommend additional private tutoring. In these two years, these students have *außerordentlicher Schüler* status meaning that they are not graded in a subject where they cannot (yet) fully follow the language of instruction. After that, they must be assessed in all subjects, becoming regular students ("ordentliche Schüler"). It is our policy goal that within 4 years, these students achieve C1 level in German. To support the *außerordentlicher* students, the school provides German as a foreign language classes which students attend instead of some of the regular German lessons.

In our Upper School (ages 14 - 18) Bilingual Programme, English is the main language of instruction in all subjects, with the exception of the languages. Students who join the programme at any point after the age of 14 (Years 5 – 8) have *außerordentlicher Schüler* (extraordinary student) status until they graduate. They prepare to sit only the IB Diploma.

If an *außerordentlicher Schüler* (a.o.) student joins in year 5 without sufficient proficiency in German, they are put in group L (see "Foreign Language teaching" above for explanation on Group F/L). With parent and teacher agreement, they are exempt from attending Latin as it is taught in German. In the same way as non-religious students who don't attend Catholic or Protestant religion lessons do not have to be on school premises during religion lessons in period 1 or period 6, a.o. students do not have to be on school premises during Latin lessons in period 1 or period 6. Attendance in all other subjects is compulsory.

If an a.o. student joins at the beginning of year 5 and the teacher agrees to teach Spanish in English, students attend Spanish as all students in group L start Spanish as beginners at the start of year 5. If an a.o. student joins at any point from the second semester of year 5 onwards, they do not attend either Latin or Spanish and the abovementioned rules regarding attendance apply to both subjects.

A.o. students in years 5 and 6 must attend German, but they are not expected to follow the main instruction. Instead, the parents should provide a German as a foreign language course book at the appropriate level and the student should work independently during the lesson. The student's German teacher can give recommendations for appropriate books.

Assessment in the Bilingual Programme (see also the Assessment Policy)

Students always have the legal right to answer in German if needed in the classroom or test situations, even if the questions are in English. Students may also use some German in their written work if they do not know or remember the English term. Students are not penalised for using German, with the exception of language tests.

IB Diploma Programme Group 1 and Group 2 language subject choices

Students with German as their home language

For most students at our school, German is the home language. These students are expected to complete all teaching as defined by the Austrian national curriculum and sit the Austrian School Leaving Certificate (*Österreichische Reifeprüfung*). The students who attend the Bilingual Programme part of the school have the enriching opportunity to do the International Baccalaureate Diploma. In order to explore and engage with literature written in their home language, students with German as their home language select German as their Group 1 Language A (Literature) subject for the IB Diploma. These students then take English B for (one of) their Group 2 Language Acquisition

subject(s). This course has been designed for competent foreign language speakers with a focus on speaking, listening, writing, reading and creatively processing a selection of literature.

French B or Spanish B are also available to students wishing to take two Group 2 subjects.

Students with English or another language as their home language

Students with English as their home language take English Literature as their Group 1 Language A subject. Students with a different language home language can either choose to do English A, depending on their language level, or a “self-taught course” in a language recognized by the IBO. In this case, the IB Coordinator will support parents in identifying a suitable tutor. The parents of the student must commit to paying the tutor for his/her services. The IB Coordinator will place families with common language goals in contact with each other, so that costs can be shared. Tutors are required to provide the IB coordinator with evidence of student progress.

Students who do not have German as their home language should enrich themselves by learning the language of their host country and so be able to integrate into its life and culture. To this end we require these students to choose German B or German ab initio as their Group 2 Language Acquisition subject, whichever is the most appropriate to the student’s language level.

French B or Spanish B are also available to students wishing to take two Group 2 subjects.