



Language Policy

2020

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Ascensia International School – Philosophy of language teaching and learning

Ascensia International School (AAIS) is a candidate International Baccalaureate (IB) World School. At AAIS, we create a challenging and motivating multilingual environment where the language of instruction is English. We view language as a tool for making meaning in the world. We believe that every student has an individual and a cultural set of experiences, skills and interests, which must be considered in the teaching and learning process.

For AAIS, multilingualism and the development of critical literacy are considered important factors in fostering international-mindedness through the promotion of cultural identity, intercultural awareness and global citizenship. At AAIS, all teachers are language teachers as language transcends curriculum areas. Through the IB language programmes, we aim to develop confident, curious, highly proficient and enthusiastic readers, writers, viewers, presenters, speakers and listeners. 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. The learning of any language is developmental by nature, building constructively on what each individual student knows to help move them forward.

As an international school situated in Singapore, we are strongly committed to providing students with access to the English language learning and utilising the host country and community for language and cultural experiences throughout the curriculum. Equally important to the school is the belief that each student should have the opportunity to maintain and develop their mother tongue(s). The acquisition of additional languages allows students to further reflect upon and explore different cultural perspectives. At AAIS, we are committed to providing an inclusive and equitable learning environment. We aim to ensure access to the two IB programmes offered by the school for all students. As a candidate IB World School, we are committed to the following Practices:

- The school places importance on language learning, including mother tongue, host country language and other languages (IB Standard A, Practice 7).
- Teaching and learning addresses the diversity of student language needs, including those for students learning a language(s) other than their mother tongue (IB Standard C3, Practice 7).
- Teaching and learning demonstrates that all teachers are responsible for language development of students (IB Standard C3, Practice 8).
- Assessment at the school aligns with the requirements of the programme(s). (IB Standard C4, Practice 1).
- Collaborative planning and reflection recognizes that all teachers are responsible for language development of students (IB Standard C1, Practice 8).
- The school utilizes the resources and expertise of the community to enhance learning within the programmes (IB Standard B2, Practice 11).

Language Pathways: Practices at AAIS

These pathways collectively give an overview of the practices at AAIS that are in place and being implemented to bring our philosophy statement to life and exemplify how the School brings about excellence in language learning.

The school places importance on language learning, including mother tongue, host country language and other languages (IB Standard A, Practice 7).

At AAIS, language is taught holistically. Each programme has specific learning outcomes for the strands of speaking and listening, reading and writing, and viewing and presenting appropriate to the students' level. We promote inquiry-based authentic learning through an investigative approach of different genres. The School invests in qualified, professional language teachers for the language of instruction, host language and other languages.

Students are allowed and encouraged to use their mother tongue to access the curriculum. For instance, they may complete class work and assessments in their mother tongue and they are encouraged to share their learning and progress with their parents and other members of the community using their mother tongue. In the Primary School the language of instruction (English) is integrated into the units of inquiry or organised into stand-alone language sessions. Chinese is taught to students in all grades from Grades 1-5 to have two 50 minute lessons each week. AAIS is an English medium school, but our students speak over 10 different languages. Obviously, it is not possible to offer classes in all these languages. However, because educational research makes clear that those students who maintain their mother tongue will have better access to learning when working in a second or third language, it is important that we provide the opportunity for students to access their first, or mother-tongue, languages. In the Primary School, we greatly value children continuing to learn in their mother tongue. We aim to place children in classes with other children who speak the same languages they do whenever possible.

We prioritise those children who are new to learning English. We encourage parents to talk, read and write with their children in their mother tongue, and we also host a Mother Tongue and International Friendship Day each year at the Primary School.

When the School receives a request for a mother tongue course not provided in the school, the Coordinator in charge of Languages will manage the following process:

- the School will commit to identifying a tutor, and will provide that tutor with the curriculum, scope and sequence documents and training to deliver a suitable course which will appear on their Student Report Cards. Lessons will be scheduled during the regular school day.
- the parent(s) will commit to paying the tutor for his/her services. The Coordinator in charge of Languages will place families with common language goals in contact with each other, so that costs can be shared. This is a private arrangement between the tutor and the families for which the School has no responsibility.

*When external tuition is organized to meet the requirements for the IB PYP, tutors are required to provide evidence of student learning for the IB PYP language requirements.

Each year, there might be mother-tongue languages that are sufficiently popular that the School may consider contracting a tutor for the academic year. The School will consider a maximum of two additional school-supported mother-tongue language classes each academic year. The decision to meet the costs of a mother-tongue class is always at the discretion of the Head of School and is based on the following criteria:

- the class needs to be sustainable, by which we mean it is of sufficient size and that the families are committed to AAIS for the academic year.
- the School must be able to source a tutor with appropriate teaching credentials and professional references, and who has successfully passed a police background check.

Priority will be given to languages with high demand (class size) based on enrolled students on January 1st of each year, and those that provide continuity of learning on future academic pursuits.

The School offers optional Chinese courses after regular school hours in addition to their PYP Chinese courses. For native and near-native speakers there is the opportunity to take a class on Chinese cultures and societies. Students beginning their acquisition of the Chinese language may opt to take an extra class to focus on authentic oral communication and interaction with the host country and culture.

Teaching and learning addresses the diversity of student language needs, including those for students learning a language(s) other than their mother tongue (IB Standard C3, Practice 7).

Differentiation in language lessons is based on best practice according to the standards and practices of the IB. All teachers respond to students' needs and may therefore provide individualised instruction guided in some cases by specific learning goals and Individual Learning Plans (ILPs). Teaching strategies may include working in small groups, using different resources with different levels of language complexity, as well as changing the level of questioning and tasks for individual students. Students may also have choices so they can follow their own interests or use a preferred learning style.

The School also follows the IB recommendations on student placement. In addition to this, the School provides a range of specialist support, including profiling, individual support, speech and language specialists, etc. All students' language needs are determined through initial and ongoing assessments throughout the year. Teachers differentiate for the range of students' needs in different ways. In the Primary School, students might for example be placed in flexible ability groups. In homerooms, students may be grouped by ability for reading groups, but work in mixed ability groups for other tasks.

The Primary School also offers an 'initiation to English' programme for students in need of extra support. In the post-primary stages, students are placed in classes according to the IB's continuum of language learning phases. The School has a flexible placement policy that allows student movement throughout the school year in relation to students' progression along this continuum. In Years 1 to 5, beginners in English stay back in school once a week for further English language classes.

Teaching and learning demonstrates that all teachers are responsible for language development of students (IB Standard C3, Practice 8).

AAIS focuses on the transdisciplinary nature of language learning by recognising and modelling the role of language in each subject as well as in the language of instruction, host country language and in other languages, and by developing an understanding of the IB objectives and pedagogical language of the programmes.

The basic skills for all types of communication - Speaking and Listening, Viewing and Presenting, Written Language - Reading, Written Language - Writing - are explicitly planned for using our scope and sequence. When students are acquiring a language, our teaching is informed by incorporating four concepts: context, culture, reflection and fluency. Students are encouraged to think for themselves, recognize patterns, develop theories and construct meaning as they investigate language. As students progress, teachers enable them to see language as a means of self-expression, exploration of self and others, as context driven, having multiple meanings, and involving at all levels of discourse a personal stance, from simple communication to the core of academic language. Throughout AAIS, there is an expectation that in order to foster an enjoyment and love of reading, students will be encouraged to read at home – from packaging and emails to quality literature – and will read a wide range of genres in school to understand their features.

In the Primary School, students will be read to, read with or read every day at home. This may be done in a student's mother tongue. A variety of reading strategies will be introduced to support students in the mechanics of reading and comprehending the meaning of what they read. These include phonemic awareness, recognising patterns in text, decoding, making AAIS Language Policy inferences, recognising a bank of sight words and etymological understanding. Teachers also make use of guided reading and literature circles to develop students' reading skills. The writing process of drafting, revising and finalising will be modelled and explored in all languages.

The use of literature, games, role-play and multimedia will support students' understanding of different genres as well as developing their vocabulary, sentence construction, use of tense and punctuation. Using the text as a model, students and teachers can begin to analyse the features of different genres before jointly and individually constructing written or presented pieces. During the revision process, students will be encouraged to develop their knowledge of grammatical and spelling conventions by self-correcting. Finalising writing may involve students sharing writing with others, keeping it for themselves or publishing it for a chosen audience.

In order to enable students to develop accurate language use and self-correct errors, they will be introduced to different strategies to investigate words and groups of words. These include spelling strategies such as syllabification, saying the word as it looks and mnemonics, to a deeper understanding of language in context, such as collocation. Teachers encourage students to make connections between words in different languages. The Language specialists and the languages team work with the other school departments and the school librarian to:

- collaborate on vocabulary and concepts across the curriculum,
- spread use of a common language about language
- teach the conventions of referencing, citing and the principles of academic honesty

AAIS is committed to promoting the idea that all teachers are teachers of language through professional development opportunities. This includes outside speakers, in-school advanced skills workshops and training workshops based on the professional development programmes developed by the Ministry of Education. Training on using the IB criteria, creating assessment tasks, developing unit questions and writing task specific criteria is provided to external tutors when they begin working at AAIS throughout the school year.

Assessment at the school aligns with the requirements of the programme(s) (IB Standard C4, Practice 1).

Assessment is integral to teaching and learning at AAIS. Using a range of tools and strategies, teachers are able to determine students' knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes towards language. At the School, teachers use pre-assessment to determine what students already know, can do and understand. Formative assessment is used to check in and to give constructive feedback or praise on learning. Summative assessments are used to gather evidence about students' learning at the end of a unit. Various forms of both formative and summative assessment may be used. Along with teacher assessment, students are often asked to peer- or self-assess as well.

Assessments are reported to parents in different ways. Students receive written report cards about their language learning. Parents are also invited to attend parent-teacher, three-way and student-led conferences. At the Primary School, students are regularly assessed using the expectations from the School's language scope and sequence. Achievement of different learning outcomes will be recorded and passed on throughout their schooling at AAIS to facilitate each student's learning.

At the beginning of tasks, criteria are shared or created by the students so that learning goals are clear. In addition, AAIS uses age appropriate modified criteria using the interim objectives set out by the IB for grades 1-5. Task specific rubrics are also created for each assessment and are shared with the students. Externally taught mother tongue courses in the PYP follow the above guidelines. Students may be referred for further assessment within the School to enable teachers to gain as much information as possible about a student's strengths, interests and areas in need of developing and to monitor their progress. In some circumstances, Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) are developed for individual students depending on their individual learning needs.

Collaborative planning and reflection recognizes that all teachers are responsible for language development of students (IB Standard C1, Practice 8).

Since students learn about language and through language, we understand that all teachers are responsible for the language development of students in the School. As a result, collaborative planning and reflection is built into the regular schedule of staff as well as it being the focus of staff meetings through the year. In this way, we are able to develop links between different subject areas and departments across the School. At the Primary School, all teachers review the language scope and sequence to ensure that it is as relevant and comprehensive as possible. Teachers then plan collaboratively, during grade level meetings, grade meetings, meetings with the PYP coordinator and with English as Second Language (ESL) and learning support staff. Timetabled curriculum planning time allows teachers to meet together as a teaching faculty. This may be done as whole staff meetings or

divided into smaller meetings where teachers meet in department groups, language groups or interdisciplinary groups. During these meetings, teachers plan what will be taught, reflect on best practices and consider the needs of individual students. They also discuss articulation, transitions and progression between the two IB programmes and ensure that delivery of the programmes is consistent and current with developments in the IB. External mother tongue tutors are encouraged to collaborate with their students' subject teachers in order to develop strategies to help students to better access the curriculum.

The school utilizes the resources and expertise of the community to enhance learning within the programmes (IB Standard B2, Practice 11).

All language teachers are responsible for sourcing and purchasing a range of quality texts so that students can explore different genres such as recounts, stories, explanations or persuasive writing in different languages and at different levels. Students also have access to a variety of dictionaries to assist them including picture dictionaries and mother tongue dictionaries. The Coordinator (PYP) collaborate with the librarians in ordering and cataloguing books in different mother tongue languages for the library and as classroom resources. Students have access to other resources such as newspapers and magazines –that they can also subscribe to- in a variety of languages, which help them to be aware of current affairs, to foster an interest in reading, and to develop confidence, fluency and comprehension. The use of ICT is an integral language learning tool. Students are encouraged to use ASUS MemoPads to access programmes or tools to support their language learning such as Google Translate or voice-activated applications. Lastly, games, art, music, maps and artefacts are used to help students make connections in their language learning. Interactive touch boards are also used to encourage a more interactive approach to teaching and learning in order to accommodate the various learning styles of the students. The community is considered a valuable resource to aid language learning. Students go on numerous field trips such as to museums, libraries, theatres and cinemas where they have an opportunity to use the host country language in context and gain an insight into the host country culture. Guest speakers such as story tellers or representatives from different organisations are frequently invited into school, and they may speak in English, or in other students' mother tongue languages. Throughout the year, students are exposed to numerous celebrations linked to the diverse cultures within our community to promote international mindedness and an appreciation of the host country's culture.

In order to source qualified external tutors for mother tongue and self-taught languages, the IB PYP actively uses local resources such as embassies and libraries, as well as through liaising with parents. The involvement of parents is important in our School. They are able to expose students to different mother tongue languages through visits to the library and classrooms and during days such as International Friendship Day. Presentation and communication skills in all languages are showcased to parents and other members of the community through projects such as the Year 5 Exhibition. School productions may use existing school facilities, local venues and associations.