

English as an Additional Language: Parent Handbook

Introduction

The EAL department's role is to provide instruction to students arriving in ISHR whose first or strongest language is not English and who may have difficulties accessing the school's curriculum. The aim of the EAL department is to bring students to a degree of competence in the English language, to enable them to participate fully in the life of the school and to share equal access to the curriculum with all other students.

Philosophy

In common with other international schools, ISHR has a wonderful opportunity to educate bilingual and multilingual students, whose skills are increasingly valued in the societies in which we live and work today. Far from being seen as a problem, students coming to the school with languages other than English - the language of instruction - are viewed by the school community and by the EAL department as being one of our greatest assets. They are already on the way to being competent bilingual or multilingual students, which is a stated aim of our school as well as of the International Baccalaureate Organisation. For this reason, we bear in mind the principle of **additive bilingualism**, whereby English language skills are acquired without negative impact on first language competence. To this end, we stress the importance of parallel English and Mother Tongue development. While it is the primary task of the EAL department to develop students' competence in English, every effort will be made to ensure that in doing so Mother Tongue development is not neglected. Some of the main benefits of this approach are:

- Recognising and valuing first language skills will enhance self-esteem, helping a student realise the validity of prior knowledge and experiences.
- Mother tongue language skills are often transferable to other languages. This not only refers to possible similarities in vocabulary or grammatical structures, but also to an overall awareness of how different language systems can operate.
- Mother tongue development may be essential for returning to the home country education system.
- The Mother Tongue may be chosen as the Language A option for study at IB Diploma level.

The EAL Programme

General Comments

The EAL Programme is based on assisting students in developing skills in the language of instruction and enabling them to access the school's curriculum. To this end, it follows a flexible, differentiated curriculum. It seeks to respond to the needs of individual students, each of whom experiences different challenges as they come to our school. It is our task to identify and address these difficulties as they arise. In many cases, the students themselves drive the course of the lessons and the overall programme, as they are encouraged to bring their questions and problems to the EAL classroom. In all cases, it can be said that the emphasis is on developing competence in academic English. In the primary school, therefore, this means we work within the framework of the PYP, developing vocabulary and grammar within the context of the Units of Inquiry and other areas of **mainstream** class work. In the secondary school, likewise, lessons are often linked to other subjects from across the curriculum, enabling students not only to develop their overall skills in English, but also cope better with the tasks they face.

Throughout the school, students will work with texts from a variety of genres likely to be encountered in the school environment and investigate the specific language features characterizing such texts. By the end of their studies in EAL, students should be familiar with a range of text types, including explanations, information reports, historical recounts, persuasive texts, scientific reports and others. In addition, students will be introduced to reading works of English literature as well as producing written responses.

It should be clear from the above that an EAL programme differs significantly from a traditional foreign language course in that it aims to ensure that the student's cognitive and academic development takes place simultaneously with language acquisition.

EAL in ISHR is a programme of small-group instruction. This allows the EAL teacher to focus on particular areas of difficulty and tailor lessons to individual needs.

The EAL department also works with other teachers to maximise the learning of EAL students. This may take the form of joint planning of units or lessons, adapting tests and worksheets or providing advice on language issues. The department is also responsible for keeping other teachers informed about developments in EAL research, promoting awareness of the central role language plays in learning, and training colleagues in the use of language teaching strategies in the mainstream classroom.

EAL in the Primary Years Programme

Children entering the primary section of ISHR are assessed in various ways in order to ascertain their level of English. In some cases, where there has been little or no exposure to the language, the need for EAL instruction is assumed. In other cases, where there is some prior knowledge of the language, the child's skills in listening comprehension, speaking, reading and writing may need to be assessed by EAL staff. Whenever possible, first language skills will also be taken into account. The EAL Department provides instruction to those children considered to need help in accessing the curriculum and working to their full potential. EAL instruction is given in small groups, typically of three to six children. Normally, this takes place during the time the rest of the class is studying Language Arts (English). In the early weeks, the emphasis is on developing oral skills, enabling the children to function well in the social life of the school. Within a short time, however, the focus changes to reading and writing skills, developing the kind of language required to function well in the classroom. Liaison between the EAL teacher and classroom teacher ensures that topics covered in the classroom, including the Units of Inquiry, are reinforced in the EAL classroom. Experience has shown that this kind of **content-based instruction** is the best approach in developing the target language.

As well as withdrawal from classes, students may receive support in-class if an EAL teacher is available. In such situations, the EAL teacher works in collaboration with the mainstream teacher to assist an individual student or a group.

EAL in the Middle Years Programme

All students entering the secondary school are assessed using ISHR's entrance tests in English and/or EAL. In borderline cases, students may undergo further assessments during their initial weeks in the school. Students considered needing extra language development may be withdrawn in small groups - typically 2 - 5 students - for extra EAL instruction. This may take place between 4 - 8 times a week, depending on the level of need. Normally, withdrawal is from a language class - French or Spanish - which the student is not required to take. Every effort is made to avoid withdrawal from other mainstream classes, but this may happen on occasions. Normally, all EAL students will take part in at least one other language course.

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As well as withdrawal from classes, students may receive support in-class if an EAL teacher is available. In such situations, the EAL teacher works in collaboration with the mainstream teacher to assist an individual student or a group.

Students in the EAL classroom receive highly **differentiated instruction**, targeted to their individual needs. In some classes, the emphasis may be on an aspect of the English language itself, using course textbooks such as the 'Headway' and 'English Plus' language courses. Many other classes are based on areas of the curriculum and are linked to current units. Liaison between EAL and mainstream teachers ensures an optimal efficiency of such sessions. On the other hand, students themselves may indicate which subject areas or assignments are proving difficult, and these difficulties will then be specifically addressed. In this way, students often themselves direct the course of the programme.

On exiting the EAL programme, EAL students will continue to receive language instruction and support through the English Language and Literature course.

EAL in the Diploma Programme

Assessment and exiting the EAL Programme

Throughout their studies in the EAL department, students will be continually assessed in all areas of language use: speaking, listening, reading and writing. In line with the aim of the department, particular emphasis will be placed on assessing the student's ability to understand the kinds of texts likely to be encountered at that particular grade level, as well as produce appropriate texts of their own. Decisions as to when a student no longer requires EAL instruction are made as a team, involving Head of EAL, EAL teachers, mainstream teachers and Heads of Section (Primary or Secondary). A number of assessment tools are involved. Foremost amongst these is the assessment of written tasks in the student's portfolio (collection of written tasks). These texts, together with the student's speaking, listening and reading skills, are assessed using guidelines such as the EAL Exiting Criteria, CEFR and SACSA assessments. Exiting the programme will also involve discussions between EAL and mainstream teachers regarding overall performance of the student in the mainstream classroom.

It should be noted that MYP students with very little or no English will not be given a grade in mainstream subjects. As soon as a teacher feels it is possible to assess the student fairly, however, EAL students will be assessed according to MYP criteria for that subject.

Frequently Asked Questions

How long will it take my child to become fluent in English?

It is not possible to give one answer to this question, as there are so many factors involved (see question 3 below). When talking about English proficiency, EAL teachers generally make a distinction between social English skills (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills, or **BICS**) and academic English skills (Cognitive Academic Linguistic Proficiency, or **CALP**). If we were to give a rough estimate, based on research from

International Schools in several continents, we could say that a student arriving at such a school with no prior experience of English could be expected to achieve BICS within 1 – 2 years, and CALP within 3 – 7 years.

How long will my child be in the EAL programme?

Students typically spend 1-2 years in the EAL programme, but this will depend very much on the progress of the individual. It is important to bear in mind that exiting the programme does not mean the student has reached full proficiency in English. Further language learning will be integral to lessons in all other subjects.

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Why do some children learn English more quickly than others?

There are many factors which influence the language acquisition of a particular student. Some of these factors include:

- prior knowledge and experience of target language
- level of anxiety
- motivation, including attitude to target language
- literacy in first language
- age
- aptitude
- similarities to first language

The above list is - very roughly - in order of importance. It will be noted that factors such as anxiety level and motivation tend to be more important than natural aptitude for language. Many studies have shown that children learn languages best in situations where they feel it is important to do so (motivation) and where they feel secure and able to take risks (level of anxiety). Literacy in the first language also plays an important part, as skills in this area are often transferable to the second language. This also has an impact on the factor of age, since older children are more likely to be literate in their first language. Motivation comes fairly high on the list. This is because many children of international families find themselves uprooted, in an unfamiliar environment and learning in a language that they do not at first understand. This situation can be at least unsettling, and at worst traumatic, and until the child has come to terms with the change, the level of motivation to learn the target language can be very low.

How can I support my child at home?

The kind of support needed depends very much on the individual child. In general, however, the following recommendations can be made:

- Ensure that, while your child is acquiring English, development of the mother tongue is also maintained.
- Content of units being studied in school could be supported by material in the mother tongue.
- Encourage social contact in English, through such things as school events or after-school activities.

Ensure your child is not under too much pressure. For children in the early stages of English acquisition especially, it can be a very frustrating and tiring experience to spend the school day in an English-speaking environment. They may well just need time to relax.

Suggested Readings

Baker, C *A parent and teacher's guide to Bilingualism*, Multilingual Matters, ISBN 1853594555

Baker, C. And Flor, A., *Guia para padres y maestros de ninos bilingues*, Multilingual matters, ISBN 1-85359-511-X

Barron-Hauwaert, S. *Language strategies for bilingual families*, Multilingual Matters ISBN 1853597155

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Carder Maurice 2007. *Bilingualism in International Schools: A Model for Enriching Language Education*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Tokuhamma-Espinosa, T., *Raising multilingual children*, Bergin Garvey Greenwood, ISBN 0897897501

IB 2004b. *Second Language Acquisition and Mother Tongue Development: A Guide for Schools*. Cardiff, Wales: IBO.

IB 2008b. *Learning in a Language Other than Mother Tongue in IB programmes*. Cardiff, Wales: IBO.

Glossary of Terms

Additive bilingualism: a situation where someone develops skills in a second language with no loss of the first language

BICS: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills. The term refers to the ability to use every day English for basic communication, normally in the context of spoken language (Baker and Prys-Jones, 1998).

CALP: Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency. The ability to interpret and produce more abstract language with a more demanding subject matter. Baker and Prys-Jones, 1998).

Content-based instruction: a strategy of teaching language within the context of the academic curriculum of the school.

Differentiated instruction: the practice of planning and teaching a lesson in such a way that the needs, skills and abilities of individual students are taken into account, ensuring that the content is aimed at an appropriate level.

Genre: A text type, the language and structure of which is determined by the purpose and subject matter.

Mainstream: the name given to the whole class, or to the main curriculum.

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IB 2004a. *Diploma Programme Language B Guide*. Cardiff, Wales: IBO.

IB 2004b. *Second Language Acquisition and Mother Tongue Development: A Guide for Schools*. Cardiff, Wales: IBO.

IB 2008b. *Learning in a Language Other than Mother Tongue in IB programmes*. Cardiff, Wales: IBO.