

Language Policy

1. Statement of Philosophy

"Language stands at the centre of many interdependent cognitive, affective and social factors that shape learning" David Corson, Language Policy in Schools: A Resource for teachers and Administrators (1999)

At Discovery College, we use language as a medium of inquiry, providing opportunities to challenge, nurture and develop both first and second language speakers.

Language does not operate in isolation but in the context of human experience and communication. Learning language is integral to the development of personal, cognitive, social and cultural identity as well as to making meaning of the world around us. Discovery College recognises that language is the foundation of all learning. Students learn language, learn through language, and learn about language.

We believe that students bring to any learning situation their prior knowledge and engage with the curriculum through the activities and assessments experienced. Within the interrelated components of the curriculum, students make sense of these experiences and construct meaning.

We understand that because our students come with many different language backgrounds, they will all progress at different paces. Discovery College values differentiated and varied instruction, which embraces multiple learning styles. All teaching integrates the skill areas of listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing and presenting.

We consider all Discovery College teachers to be language teachers and the language development of our students to be the shared responsibility of teachers, parents and students. Discovery College understands that the most conducive environment to language learning is a positive and encouraging one, wherein students have the opportunity to engage in authentic and meaningful learning experiences.

All teaching and learning is driven by the idea that through language, we are encouraging intercultural awareness and new perspectives, a culture of curiosity, as well as an appreciation of the richness of our world's diversity. We strongly believe that through this exploration of language, students develop as deeper, independent thinkers; as responsible, understanding citizens of the world; and as better communicators in our multilingual world.

All students experience an enriched English-medium language programme. Discovery College's curriculum is accessed through English, and it is also recognized that the Humanities, Technology, Mathematics, the Arts, Sciences and Physical Education all have important communicative aspects. These aspects help students render multiple understandings of the world.

Mandarin, and in the secondary school, Spanish, are taught as our additional languages. In the DP, students have the option of pursuing a self-taught language with a view to mother-tongue maintenance and development, and to widen access to the Bilingual Diploma.

1.1 Essential Agreements for the Teaching of Language:

All students:

- Are taught language by all staff and have opportunities to read, write, view, investigate, inquire and present across the curriculum.
- Are taught literacy skills in context.
- Are encouraged to develop a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, respond to, appreciate and construct texts.
- Are encouraged to use self-correcting strategies.
- Have access to, and are taught through, a variety of technological and information resources.
- Are encouraged to express themselves, orally and in writing, in a variety of media and situations.
- Are encouraged to share and develop their work in a social context.
- Are encouraged to see language as a tool for thinking, inquiring, reflecting and learning.
- Are encouraged to maintain and value their mother tongue and to value that of other students.
- Are given the opportunity to become proficient in more than one language.
- Are exposed to a broad range of literature reflecting a variety of cultures and perspectives.
- Are encouraged to develop a love of language and literature.
- Receive constructive and specific feedback from teachers and peers.
- Are exposed to modelling of rich language experiences.

- Are given time to reflect on their learning and to apply techniques appropriately.

2. English as the language of instruction at Discovery College

English is the primary language of instruction at Discovery College. Admissions requirements and assessments ensure that all students are able to access the curriculum in English. A range of procedures is used to assess English-language proficiency, including written and verbal language tests, observations, viewing of previous reports and interviews.

2.1 Primary Years Programme (PYP)

In the PYP, language learning takes place in authentic contexts and is dynamic, challenging and relevant. Through the transdisciplinary units of inquiry and conceptual learning, students are encouraged to construct linguistic meaning using a range of strategies, make connections across content and make ongoing cultural discoveries. Through a literature-rich environment with numerous experiences in language learning the curriculum builds on students' prior knowledge and understanding.

2.2 Middle Years Programme (MYP)

Students' study of language at Discovery College supports the MYP's Fundamental Concepts of Holistic Learning, Intercultural Awareness and Communication. Through language students are able to access knowledge and see it as an interrelated whole. We encourage students to make links within and across discipline areas through the five Areas of Interaction and explicit reference to the Learner Profile. Our choices with regard to how we teach languages in the MYP encourage students to consider issues from multiple perspectives, and learn about their own and others' cultures and societies. As students mature and gain a greater awareness of themselves and the world in which they live, their language development is supported through an increasingly sophisticated engagement and appreciation of world literature.

Language teaching in the MYP builds upon the competency and fluency of the PYP with rich language experiences of reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and presenting through a range of media and information technologies. The overarching focus is language as a means of exploration, expression and communication. Clarity and accuracy of language as well as confidence of self-expression are fostered through Discovery College's MYP. Reflective practices are modelled and encouraged. In all MYP discipline areas, communication is both an objective and an assessment criterion as it facilitates understanding and student self-reflection.

The performance of students through the MYP's Language A and B courses is regularly monitored to ensure that courses have appropriate rigour to develop students' language skills and ensure that individual learning styles and paces are factored into the programme. This process of monitoring will also be used to recommend Diploma Programme language courses at the conclusion of the MYP.

2.3 Diploma Programme (DP)

Subjects in Groups 3-6 and Theory of Knowledge (ToK) are taught through the medium of English. All students therefore use the English language as a means of gaining, communicating and evaluating knowledge and ideas, as well as a means of exploring multiple cultural perspectives. Through the language unit of the ToK course, students will become explicitly aware of these multiple functions of language. Virtually all students study English as their Group 1 subject, although it is possible to take a self-taught language in Group 1 and a language other than English in Group 2, hence obtaining the Bilingual Diploma. No matter the Group 1 language studied, students explore language usage in a variety of genres, and develop the skills of comprehension and expression, both written and oral.

3. Languages other than English

As an international school situated in Hong Kong, we are committed to enabling students to achieve proficiency in Mandarin. Throughout their schooling, students will be provided with learning opportunities appropriate to their level of ability and background in learning Mandarin. It is important to note that Discovery College does not offer a bilingual Mandarin and English programme.

In the PYP and MYP, students are placed in Mandarin classes according to their level of proficiency, from students with no previous history of learning Mandarin to students who may speak the language at home or have had significant experience in a Mandarin-medium school. These different courses lead to the study of Language A or B Mandarin at Standard and Higher Levels in the DP. We develop and support students who can operate in traditional and modern simplified written forms.

While all students are encouraged to learn Mandarin, we recognise that some students are better served by learning Spanish. This may include students who have been learning Spanish previously and wish to continue, students who envisage returning to a location where Spanish is a more commonly-spoken language (e.g. Europe or the Americas), or students for whom Mandarin is extremely difficult and who find Spanish more accessible. Therefore, Spanish is offered in the MYP and DP as an alternative to Mandarin.

3.1 PYP

Mandarin language learning at Discovery College is delivered using a co-teaching model including activities such as songs, games, labeling and other language rich activities. Where possible, connections are made with the concepts and ideas of the Programme of Inquiry (POI). Spanish is not offered in the PYP.

3.2 MYP

In the MYP, language learning is facilitated through regular classes dedicated to language learning and language rich activities. Students are placed in MYP Language B classes according to their language ability in preparation for further study of Language B in the DP. All MYP Language B teachers work collaboratively to promote learning through language and literature, communication of ideas and areas of interaction. These initiatives directly support the fundamental concepts of the MYP and facilitate links between subject groups and strong links between the cultures and languages studied.

3.3 DP

Students will follow the language course that is most suited to their present and future needs and that will provide them with an appropriate academic challenge. The degree to which students are already competent in the language, and the degree of proficiency they wish to attain by the end of the period of study, are the most important factors in identifying the appropriate placement point on the spectrum of language courses available. Generally speaking, students continue the Language B they have studied in the MYP into the DP. Students studying a second Language A in the MYP (usually Mandarin) will study Language A in the DP, hence qualifying for the Bilingual Diploma. MYP Language B students (Mandarin or Spanish) will study that Language B in the DP (at Higher or Standard Level as appropriate). On occasion, students may decide to switch language and study another from the beginning. In that case, Mandarin and Spanish are available as ab initio courses. New students entering the college in Year 12 from overseas with no previous exposure to Mandarin are encouraged to take Mandarin ab initio.

3.4 Mother Tongue Support

Discovery College believes that mother tongue language development is crucial to maintaining cultural identity and emotional stability. While we do not offer bilingual programmes, we do recognise that strength in mother tongue supports students in learning other languages. International schools have a special responsibility to recognise and support each and every aspect of language development.

With a significant proportion of students at Discovery College speaking a mother tongue other than Mandarin or English, we acknowledge the need to support these additional languages. Discovery College offers support for parent-led mother tongue groups where communities of speakers of the same language can gather together to foster the use of the mother tongue as a way of developing academic language proficiency as well as emotional and social proficiency. The focus is developing the listening and speaking abilities of the students to bridge the gap between 'school' language and 'home' language. Within the classroom students are encouraged to use their mother tongue as a tool for understanding and as a way of sharing their knowledge with others.

In the DP, students have the option of studying their mother tongue as a self-taught option. The College, in collaboration with ESF Language Centre, facilitates contact with an appropriate tutor of that language, and a school-based mentor (usually an English teacher) is provided to ensure that the students remain on target for fulfilling the various aspects of the course.

3.5 English as an Additional Language (EAL)

The term EAL is used to refer to students for whom English is an additional language. Students of all linguistic backgrounds are considered for admission to Discovery College. However, the admissions process seeks to determine whether learners are sufficiently proficient in English so that they can successfully access the curriculum in an English

medium learning environment. Upon admission, a language profile for incoming students is developed and a traffic light system is used to identify those students who may be in need of English language support.

Across all three IB programmes we are committed to offering a differentiated system of inclusive support to our EAL students, which might sometimes include parallel teaching in small groups. Appropriate scaffolding across all areas of the curriculum is required in order for EAL learners to succeed in achieving their potential. In order to track and monitor students' progress in addition to informing curriculum design and support levels in the MYP, in particular, a benchmarking system is used.

As our learners embark on their DP courses, they will face the rigorous demand for cognitive academic language proficiency. In order to be successful language learners, our EAL students are encouraged to take responsibility for developing strategies that will extend their language learning. Reading extensively outside the classroom and developing a richer vocabulary in English is strongly encouraged. As students progress into higher year levels this becomes even more important as they will be expected to read a range of increasingly sophisticated texts in different content areas.

4. Special Educational Needs (SEN)

In keeping with the philosophy of all three IB programmes, Discovery College has adopted an inclusive model of learning support. This means that students with individual needs are supported within mainstream classes and all students are given full access to the curriculum.

Teachers respond to the diverse learning needs and styles of the students in their care through using a variety of differentiation strategies to deliver the programme. These strategies may include the use of learning technologies, simplifying texts, supplementing information, providing checklists, using alternative forms of assessment and making assessment arrangements.

In cases where students' barriers to learning preclude the development of age appropriate literacy skills and additional support is required, mainstream class teachers may refer the student to the Learning Development Team. The referral process at Discovery College is in line with the ESF Guidelines for Implementation of the ESF SEN Policy (2008). The College is committed to providing support to students at Levels of Adjustment (LOA) 1-2. (Please refer to SEN policy document for further details).

Once referred to the Learning Development Team, students may be supported through parallel teaching, co-teaching, small group conferencing and if circumstances require, there may be some more intensively individual support provided for Level of Adjustment 2 (LOA2) students. It is expected that the college and parents work in partnership to help develop students' literacy skills.