



LANGUAGE POLICY

AMERSFOORT INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

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Author: Eryn Wiseman (in collaboration with AIS staff)

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Learning for All

A language policy is an action statement ... It is concerned less with where the students in a school are going, and more with how they are going to get there.

Language Policy in Schools, Corson (1999)

At AIS, we firmly believe that knowledge is co-constructed through social interaction, collaboration, and meaningful experiences and relationships. This vision of social constructivism (Valke, 2018) brings with it the responsibility of encouraging students to engage with their peers, question, and explore. Through this approach, our students become active, engaged language learners, shaping their understanding of the world.



Purpose and scope of this document

Purpose

This language policy sets the guidelines for how we use language at AIS. It helps us communicate well, support different languages, make our classrooms inclusive, and help students with language skills. It's an important document that encourages diversity in languages, fairness, and good education in our school community, while matching our goals and values.

Scope

This document will endeavor to describe the vision and related approaches to language at AIS, including multilingualism, inclusive language, language support.

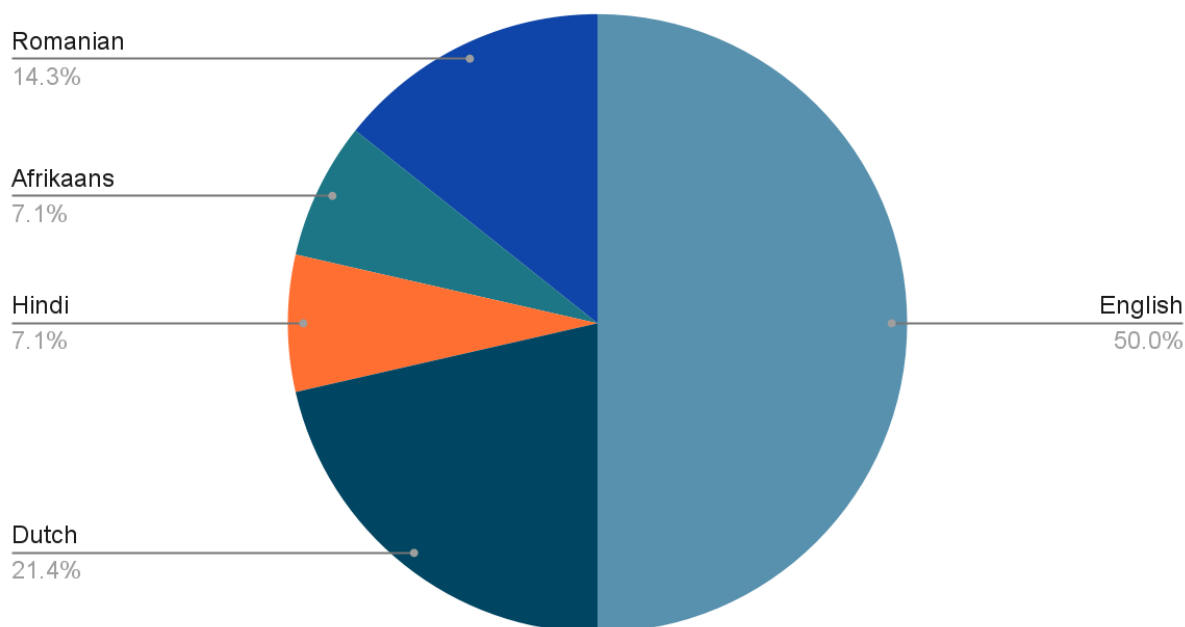


Our language profile

At AIS we have a learning focus on two languages, namely English and Dutch. English is the language of instruction and Dutch is taught as an additional language, from the age of 4-years old, as the host country language.

We recognize, however, that these are not the only important languages in our school. We have students, families and staff that speak a range of other languages which also need a place. These languages include Afrikaans, Dutch, Hindi and Romanian.

Languages spoken at AIS



With the recognition of all of these languages, we are able to identify opportunities to best help students to work within their “Learning Zone” (Kozulin et al., 2003), in both the language of instruction as well as the host country language, providing the correct level of support and challenge.



Language of instruction

The "language of instruction" refers to the primary language in which teaching and learning activities are conducted in an educational institution. It is the language used by teachers to deliver lessons, explain concepts, engage with students, and assess their understanding. At AIS the language of instruction is English. As an IB school, we organize our language into three strands: oral (speaking and listening), visual (viewing and presenting) and written (reading and writing). Every teacher at AIS is responsible for providing instruction in, through and about this language.

Language development is greatly influenced by interaction and communication with others (Bruner, 1983); it is not just a tool for communication but a means for shaping thought. This is why our approach to learning languages, including our language of instruction, is one of collaboration, where students work together in groups or pairs to complete language learning tasks, discuss concepts, and solve problems.

Learning is a continuous cycle (Kolb, 1984) where students engage in experiences, reflection and active experimentation to progress.

For this reason, with the choice of Song of Sounds, we ensure our youngest students follow a multisensory, synthetic phonics programme which is creative, engaging, and meets the diverse learning needs of our students. Our older students' language development is supported by a Pie Corbetts' approach to language where students internalize the language structures needed, moving from dependence towards independence, with the teacher using shared and guided teaching to develop the ability in children to read and write. Both of these are cyclical in nature and use scaffolding, reflection and feedback to support learning.

Our spelling practices focus on phonics and morphology, to provide learners with essential tools for decoding, encoding, and understanding written language. These skills are foundational for both reading and writing, and they empower language learners to navigate the complexities of a language more effectively.

Language support

This school year, at AIS, we are in the unique position that we have a very high teacher to student ratio. For this reason, our students receive almost one-to-one in-class language support. All of our teachers support learning the language of instruction, by making learning authentic and visual. They provide scaffolding through which students can become increasingly independent in their language choices. We use technology and our own multilingual knowledge and strategies to ensure access and understanding.

Our language support practices are based on the work of Dare and Polias' "Teaching in English in Multilingual classrooms. See Appendix 2 for more practical applications of support.



Host country language

Our host country language is Dutch and this language is taught and promoted in a few ways at AIS.

Immersion

We are lucky to be part of the De Kubus community of Amersfoort and our students interact with the local students on a regular basis. Early Years students travel to the Spaarnestraat location for outside play where they are immersed in the Dutch language and our primary students have both outside play and physical education lessons with their Dutch peers. In addition to this, we have specialist teachers for the arts, who visit the school a few times a year and provide lessons in Dutch. At all times, the AIS teacher is in the vicinity to help support understanding, and the Dutch specialist teachers take care to ensure instructions and demonstrations are clear.

Focused lessons

At AIS our students participate in focused lessons to become more familiar with the Dutch language and culture. Twice a week, our students learn Dutch in a safe, supporting environment, where they can learn and make meaning together. We take an approach where learners actively engage with real-world language use (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), encouraging students to explore and build their lexicon based on their interests and needs, aligning with our principles of ensuring that language learning is relevant to learners' lives and experiences. Because authentic language use often involves cultural nuances, customs, and norms, this allows our students to not only acquire language skills but also gain insights into Dutch practices and perspectives.

Language assessment and proficiency

It's important to note that language proficiency is a complex concept, and it can vary depending on the individual's background, exposure to the language, and specific language skills (e.g., listening, speaking, reading, writing). Based on the work of Scott, Dare, and Cummins we use a continuum of proficiency for our English language learners, which can be viewed in Appendix 1.

When students join AIS, they first have a period of settling in, where the teachers observe and interact with the students, making notes of initial language use (all languages used). After a few days to a week, teachers meet to discuss observations, decide where the student is on the continuum and what kind of support the student should receive. Currently, we do not use any standardized language assessments to determine the student's level, but rather base it on classwork and observations. Progress in English language learning will be communicated to parents in the same way as all learning, through written reports, conferences and anecdotal communication.

Once a student has developed a certain level of proficiency in English, then their proficiency starts to be viewed against (inter) national norms for language development. This is guided by the Dutch *Kerndoelen* en *referentiekaders*. These two documents, form the legal framework for the core of the educational content of primary education. The *Kerndoelen* is a global description of important educational contents. The *referentiekader* contains the reference levels that prescribe what students should know and be able to do when they leave primary school and consists of fundamental levels and target levels. These correspond with our PYP 8 learning outcomes for language.



Multilingualism

Grosjean (2010) refers to multilingualism as the ability of an individual, community, or society to use and communicate in multiple languages. Multilingualism can manifest at various levels, from individuals who are fluent in two or more languages to communities where multiple languages are used for daily communication.

AIS promotes the use of multilingualism through celebrating all the languages our students carry with them. With the addition of each new student, we add to our Hall of Fame representing them with flags, a frame of identity and a multilingual poster of their own making. In class, we use and share our languages in learning engagements, looking for similarities and enjoying differences found. We encourage our students to use all of their languages, and translanguaging behaviors, to access learning, make friends and understand the world around them.

Library resources

When procuring books for our school library, we try to ensure that our diverse population is represented. We look for books with protagonists and families from all walks of life. We look for bilingual books or copies of the same book in multiple languages. We look for books that provide different perspectives on relevant issues.

We maintain flexible access to all library resources, which supports the model of authentic language use (Lantolf, & Thorne, 2006), by providing learners with opportunities for meaningful and self-directed language engagement. When learners have easy access to a variety of books in their target language, they can explore diverse topics, genres, and perspectives that align with their interests and language proficiency. Additionally, flexible access to books encourages learners to engage in authentic reading contexts, where they use language to comprehend, interpret, and communicate ideas, mirroring real-world language use scenarios.



Inclusive language

International schools often have a diverse student body representing various cultures, backgrounds, and identities. Inclusive language respects and acknowledges this diversity, fostering a sense of belonging among all students and staff. It promotes equity by ensuring that no one feels marginalized or excluded based on any of their characteristics. It creates an inclusive environment where everyone's contributions are valued. It encourages empathy, tolerance, and an appreciation for different perspectives, which are essential life skills.

Using inclusive language to foster a welcoming and respectful environment for all students is a crucial aspect of creating an inclusive school community. At AIS we do this by learning appropriate ways to address each other, encouraging students to use their home languages when relevant, and developing a curriculum that includes diverse voices, perspectives, and experiences (Cummins, 2001).

Some of our guidelines for using inclusive language within an international school community are (Sue, D. W., et.al. (2007).):

- Be aware of cultural sensitivities and preferences regarding terminology, greetings, and expressions of respect, including individuals' pronoun choices. Ask for and use preferred pronouns when in doubt and use gender-neutral terms to avoid assuming someone's gender. For example, use "students" instead of "boys and girls." Promote cultural sensitivity by learning and using culturally appropriate greetings, expressions, and forms of address (Grosjean, 2010).
- Refrain from using stereotypes or making assumptions about people based on their background, appearance, or identity and steer clear of offensive language, slurs, or derogatory terms that can harm or demean individuals or groups.
- Ensure that language is accessible to everyone, including those with disadvantages or disabilities. Use alternative formats for content and materials as needed.
- In curricular materials, literature, and classroom discussions, include a variety of voices, experiences, and perspectives to reflect the diversity of the school community and the wider world.



Parental Involvement and support

"Parental involvement is invaluable for any new arrival in transition. The learner's family may be the only group of people who truly understand their transition. The parents may have very little understanding of what happens in an English-speaking school or the approach you have to education. Parental involvement will help you to understand more about the child's life as well as build a valuable rapport and level of trust between all parties."

(Scott, 2012)

Newly arrived families

At AIS, we welcome our new families as much as we do the students themselves. Our open door policy in classrooms and with leadership help build relationships with school staff and help new families become familiar with and comfortable in the school environment. Importantly, they'll also be able to obtain information more easily. To further facilitate this, we organize moments where our parents can visit the school, both educationally and informally. Where possible, we encourage more experienced parents to buddy up with newly arrived parents, for extra support.

Access

To help make our newsletters and updates more accessible, we try to keep the messages sort and to the point, as well as accompanied by images to clarify the content.

Supporting home learning

Parents have a vital role to play as they discuss learning at home with students, deepening understandings across and beyond the programme of inquiry. This also enables connections among languages to develop. We encourage students and parents to work in their home language and set learning that promotes the use of their home language.



Policy Review

The AIS Language Policy will be updated annually to best reflect current school data, but the main content of the policy will be updated less often. Our first review will occur after the IB Authorization visit and every three to five years after that. This will be a collaborative process, whereby input is gathered from the full range of our community. For this version, staff have read and provided feedback which has been incorporated. This document has been shared with the parent community via our [website](#).

Policy document history can be found in Appendix 3.

Other policies that relate directly to language teaching and learning are our (admissions and) assessment Policies, which can also be found on our website.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

([EAL Assessment Framework for Schools - LL V8 \(cam.ac.uk\)](#))

([Learning-EAL-in-the-Early-years booklet-as-HO.docx \(live.com\)](#))

([assessment_in_EAL.pdf \(learningvillage.net\)](#))

Pre-Beginner:

- Little to no proficiency in English.
- Limited vocabulary and minimal comprehension.
- Mostly use gestures or non-verbal communication to convey basic needs.

Beginner:

- Basic vocabulary and understanding of simple phrases.
- Can express basic needs and greetings.
- Limited ability to engage in meaningful conversations.

Elementary:

- Expanding vocabulary and ability to construct simple sentences.
- Improved comprehension of everyday topics.
- Can participate in basic social interactions.

Intermediate:

- Stronger vocabulary and ability to express ideas more fluently.
- Improved comprehension of a wider range of topics.
- Can engage in casual conversations and express opinions.

Upper Intermediate:

- Solid vocabulary and ability to discuss a variety of subjects.
- Can understand and contribute to more complex discussions.
- May still struggle with nuanced or specialized language.

Advanced:

- Extensive vocabulary and ability to communicate effectively in most situations.
- Can engage in discussions on a wide range of topics.
- May still have occasional challenges with idiomatic expressions.

Proficient:

- Near-native proficiency in the target language.
- Comfortable with complex language structures and idiomatic expressions.
- Can participate in academic or professional settings with ease.

Native or Near-Native:

- Native-like fluency and understanding of the language.
- Mastery of all language aspects, including cultural nuances.
- Can excel in academic, professional, and creative contexts.



Appendix 2

Children are naturally curious about other languages. Multilingual schools intentionally provide opportunities to explore language and stimulate curiosity and open-mindedness in a spirit of inquiry. These might include seeing, hearing and sharing languages:

- spoken and sung
- displayed on different alphabet and number charts, posters, labels
- used in learning spaces, games, poetry and performances
- used in learning displays
- used within identity texts*, and bilingual texts (oral, written, digital, poetic, musical, and so on)
- chosen for the exhibition
- through technology
- in explorations of the similarities and differences between languages
- through learning experiences within a unit of inquiry
- from other members of the learning community
- within the context of action.

(Cummins, 2001)

One way to develop common understandings and agreed language practices in a multilingual school is for students and teachers to draw up language agreements, sometimes known as a “class language policy” (Chumak-Hortbatsch, 2012.) These agreements can be displayed for members of the learning community to see and refer to throughout the year. They might also be shared or developed with parents.

Sentence starters for developing language agreements might be formed as shown.

- In (class name) languages are...
- (class name) believes languages are...
- Languages are important to us because...
- Our beliefs and thoughts about languages are...

Possible questions to explore are:

- What languages did you use or will you use today? For what purposes?
- What languages are used in our class? Our community? Our country?
- What are some of the different ways we use language?
- How are languages the same and how are they different?
- What differences do you find when speaking and listening and reading and writing among your languages?
- What choices do we have to make about language at school? Outside school?
- What do you like about languages?
- What is tricky or difficult about languages?
- Do people always say what they are thinking? Why or why not?
- Can words hurt or heal? How or why might this happen?
- What do you think happens in our brains when we use more than one language?
- What does “multilingual” mean to you? Why do we want a multilingual school and community?
- How can we create a multilingual school together?



Appendix 3

Policy document history

Version 1: October 2023

