

## **International Bilingual School of Provence 001386**

### **Evaluation 2017**

#### **IBS Language Policy**

The school remains true to its concept of origin that the study in lower and middle school in two languages of all major subjects contributes enormously to the acquisition of linguistic skills and cultural knowledge far beyond that which is normally achieved via foreign language lessons alone. A student entering the school with no prior knowledge of French for example is not expected to either take notes, do homework, or pass tests in that language since this would not accurately reflect the learning of the student. However, such immersion does increase the learning of vocabulary and verbal and written skills without the student always being aware of this.

All students with a limited proficiency in one or either of these languages are immediately given support by having 3 modules each week of extra French or English tuition by the specialized foreign language teachers for this. Upon reaching grade 9 however the students have the choice as to whether to have all classes in English, in French, or whether to continue in the bilingual stream. The policy of the school is that all students continue to learn both French and English at the appropriate level throughout their time with us and should be capable of achieving certified proof of their ability in the form of either Foreign language examinations such as the FCE or First/Second language examinations such as the IGCSE, AS level or IB Diploma subjects.

As a result the school is a recognized test centre for the above examinations and is forever seeking to increase its testing possibilities to include other ALTE level examinations. We encourage students throughout the school to rise to the challenge of studying a language to its fullest by preparation for other exams tested elsewhere such as the TOEFL, IELTS, CILS and DALF. For the school it is deemed a necessity that each student continue language and cultural studies in their own mother tongue and at a level corresponding to that which they would normally receive in their native country.

This is not easy but the incorporation into the timetable of mother tongue Spanish, Russian, German, Italian, Dutch, and occasionally Arabic in place of a sports session on a weekly basis shows the extent to which we take this issue seriously. All of these are taught by experienced first language native speakers and IBS is fortunate in its situation to have the language faculty of Aix-Marseille University close at hand where some of these teachers are also engaged. Class sizes are always small but even where only one student is concerned, IBS tries its best to accommodate the needs of that student.

In any particular year group containing 70-80 students, following IBS policy the class sizes are small due to their separation into two groups of "first language" and a group of "second language" followed by two or three groups of "foreign language" students. Invariably this

may change slightly according to specific years' needs, but in general this policy is applied and leads to class sizes of maximum 16 students in first language and about 8 in foreign language.

Our policy is that language classes should also devote time to the study of the countries, cultures, history, geography and religions where the languages are spoken but that these aspects should be incorporated naturally into the teaching time. School events such as German Day, Italian Day, Spanish Day, English Day, and celebrations of the Chinese New Year are organized to promote diversity of linguistic experience as well as throughout France and abroad.

The Director of school, Headteacher/IB Coordinator and the designated Heads of English, French and Modern languages are all involved in the recruitment of teachers to the Linguistic faculty since it is a vital part of our school. Recruitment of a specialist "debutant" foreign language teacher for grade 6 is deemed by us here at IBS to be as important as that of a first language literature teacher at IB level. It is an evidence that our "best" teachers have a particular gift in a few but not all domains. Managing our human resources in this way allows us to send them to specific training options available to us and maintains their professional development.

It is the IBS policy that the school will continue to support training/evolution of its staff throughout the school in every way it can. The Heads of languages meet bi-weekly (at present every Tuesday at 13H15 in the conference room) to discuss developments and changes and to report on various issues of concern. Any particular special needs concerning support or learning difficulties are to be reported to Erica Plazanet, who will refer to the special needs consultant Jessica Hagar (Learning Support Coordinator) for eventual resolution of action to be taken or given.

The school is the largest domestic centre for online Cambridge ESOL examinations for schools here in France sitting KET, PET, FCE and CAE exams and is also a centre for the DELF examinations whilst this year our IGCSE examination entries include first languages English, French, German, Spanish, Russian, Dutch and second language English together with foreign languages French, Spanish, German, Dutch and Mandarin. More are available and the opportunity for support in the instruction of these is almost always available.

The importance of language instruction as part of the IB Diploma is striking and served as a major reason for IBS to apply to become an IB world school in the first place. To this end IBS offers the following languages at Literature A level in group one every year (all at both Higher and Standard level): English, French, German Spanish, Italian, Dutch, and Russian. Instruction is on a weekly basis of 5 hours (HL and SL). This choice appears to accommodate our present enrolment very well but of course is susceptible to change should the future needs require it. The self-taught option is available at standard level but of course only with the support of the school and requires students choosing this option to attend weekly classes with our specialist Sandra Lawrence who both teaches and oversees

their preparation for literary analysis, orals and written work and liaises with any external teachers or online tutors.

The importance of ensuring candidates' personal work is his or her own is of course paramount. This may involve choosing similar literary works to those chosen in our taught languages and even assisting in classes with those teachers. It is hard to generalize since each case may require a different approach. The emphasis is on allowing a student to avoid being handicapped in any way by having to choose a group one subject in a language different from his or her own when the literature content has so many cultural references that are special to that country. The choice of group one subject is heavily reflected upon during the school interview since the difficulty of the programme to be followed is not always appreciated by the student or parents and of course the eventual Higher education possibilities also come into consideration.

A vital part of IBS policy concerning not only the languages but also any subject where "groupings" or streams arise is that these shall not be considered definitive and this throughout the school. In other words every attempt should be made to ensure that if justifiable each student should be allowed to move from one level to another and this at any time during the year. The timetable is constructed to allow for such possibilities since this allows a student to avoid discouragement or to be stimulated and "pushed" if promoted to a higher level. The emphasis however should be upon "getting it right in the first place" by discussion, promoting the challenge and testing prior to placement. It is contrary to IBS policy to allow a student to "rest on his/her laurels" achieving higher marks in a subject level that is clearly not stimulating or challenging enough for that student and where progress is not at all evident. This is clearly not in the students' interest in the long term which should be the overriding consideration of our school.

The School offers group two subjects at all three levels available and these in the two timetable slots devoted to group two and group six subjects so that a maximum choice is promoted. The subjects at present include English, French, Spanish, German, Italian, Dutch and Mandarin but have also in the past include Korean, Hindi, Japanese and Polish. As stated previously IBS does its best to maximize the possibilities on offer to satisfy the individual needs of the student in the domain of the languages. The loss of A2 level as a group 2 subject has led the school to develop a particular Higher level B group with a particular emphasis on literary studies included still within the brief of the syllabus but aimed at a special group of high achieving students. Once again 5 timetabled hours are available at HL and 4 for SL each week.

The placement of students in groups B and in ab initio is based upon previous learning experiences, interviews and eventually on placement tests but care is taken to ensure that the student is aiming for a genuine progression in his or her ability within that language. Previous reports are considered when deciding upon level acceptance since it is clear that only students with very little or no prior experience of a language can be allowed to take the ab initio option and that three or four years of foreign language instruction should normally dictate that the B higher level option should be taken.

IBS policy is that the study of languages should encompass an understanding of the cultural issues and past of those countries where the language is spoken. Any activities that enhance the grasp of these factors shall be fully supported and teachers are actively invited to discuss themes normally the domain of TOK classes. It is essential that the knowledge and importance of languages be either discussed in class or even in the teachers active participation in TOK classes themselves. The extended essay is to be viewed as a wonderful opportunity for language teachers to contribute in either the role as supervisor or as a tutor in furthering the understanding of the students language or perception of the country's culture.