

Language policy

1. School language philosophy

Lessing-Gymnasium, a school with a bilingual tradition, considers language learning to be pivotal for learning in a globalized world.

"Language is integral to exploring and sustaining personal development cultural identity and intercultural understanding. As well as being the major medium of social communication, it is tightly linked to cognitive growth because it is the process by which meaning and knowledge is negotiated and constructed. It is the main tool for building our knowledge of the universe and our place in it. Language then, is central to learning, as well as to literacy, and is thus closely related to success in school."
(Learning in a language other than mother tongue in IB programmes, April 2008, p.1)

Therefore language learning is one of the main pillars of education at Lessing-Gymnasium that takes places at all times and in all situations either through learning about language, learning in a language or finally learning languages.

Learning about language mainly takes place in the mother tongue. Therefore education in German is meant to develop the students' language awareness and their ability to express themselves orally and in writing in their mother tongue, in a wide range of situations and styles. The study of German literature allows students to develop their understanding and appreciation of literary works and to develop sensitivity for linguistic phenomena.

Learning in a language takes place in all subjects since we understand learning to be a constructive process that is based on prior knowledge and understanding. Thus the importance of language cannot be overemphasized since a student cannot learn what he / she cannot understand (compare special educational needs policy).

Finally, learning foreign languages promotes inter-cultural understanding and communicative competence in the contemporary world. Both aspects are central to our school programme and are catered for by our choice of foreign language courses, our bilingual streams and the range of international exchanges, experiences and projects we offer to develop the international-mindedness of our students.

Since we understand language to be central to our school community not only inside but also beyond the classroom, our school rules determine that all language and communication used by everybody in the school must show respect for others.

2. School language profile

The main language of teaching is German as Lessing-Gymnasium is a German state school. In the bilingual streams and the IB Diploma programme English is used as the language of instruction in a number of subjects. In foreign language classes (English, French, Italian and Russian), the target language is the language of teaching.

Second languages taught are

English from Year 5 (age 10)

French or Latin from Year 7

Italian or French are offered as options from Year 9

Italian or French are offered as options from Year 11 (*EF/Einführungsphase*)

Languages spoken by students:

German is the primary language spoken by the majority of our students and serves as the main language of communication throughout the school. Many students come from multilingual or internationally connected family backgrounds and grow up using more than one language in their daily lives. In addition to German, a variety of home languages are represented within the school community, including Turkish, Russian, Farsi, Italian, and English. This linguistic diversity contributes positively to the intercultural environment of the school.

Communication with parents: Liaising with parents takes place at parents' evenings, in individual interviews/counseling and department meetings. Information sessions for parents are held to pass on information about the different foreign language options and the bilingual streams offered by the school.

Language policy directives by the ministry of education

- The school's language profile is based on the language education framework of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia. In accordance with regional educational requirements, all students at Gymnasium level study at least two additional languages during secondary education. German is taught continuously as the language of schooling and academic literacy from Year 5 through to the Abitur examinations in Year 13.
- In the senior school (Years 11-13) students have to continue learning at least one of the above foreign languages. Those who choose the language profile for their national school-leaving qualification (Abitur) learn two languages.
- Students whose home language is not German have the opportunity to participate in heritage language courses offered by the City of Cologne. Through an external examination in their respective language, students may obtain formal recognition of these language competencies as equivalent to one of the required modern foreign languages not offered within the school curriculum.

Language practices of Lessing-Gymnasium

- At Lessing-Gymnasium all students continue learning English from Year 5. Compared to what is required by the ministry of education they get two additional lessons in English each week to give them a sound foundation which prepares them for the use of English as a language of instruction in other subjects in the bilingual stream.
- Students can choose to enter the bilingual stream in Year 7. The number of subjects that are taught in English is gradually increased starting with Biology and Geography in Year 7 and eventually also including Politics and History in Year 8.
- In senior school those students who choose to remain in the bilingual stream study English as a higher level subject and select at least one additional subject that is studied in English and tested in the Abitur exams.
- Language courses in Ancient Greek and Hebrew are offered in cooperation with other schools in Cologne. Interested students attend these courses during afternoon classes.
- Exchange programmes are in place with schools in France (Year 9 and 12), Ireland (Year 8), Italy (Years 11/12) and the United States (Years 11/12). The school takes part in the programme Brigitte Sauzay (Year 9).
- Additional intercultural experiences and opportunities for foreign language learning are offered through class trips (Belgium, England) and video conferences with foreign student (Wirtschaftsjunioren).
- The school takes part in language competitions (The Big Challenge, Bundeswettbewerb Fremdsprachen) and offers language certificates (Delf, Cambridge Certificates).

3. Language learning in the IBDP

All students to date take German A: Literature HL in the subject group 'Studies in language and literature' and English B HL in the subject group 'Language acquisition'. For international students whose English is stronger than their German the two languages can be exchanged.

Students can opt for a second foreign language instead of a group 6 subject. They have the choice between Italian and French Language B or Italian or French at ab initio level.

The development of the students towards additive bilingualism is reinforced through using English as the language of instruction for TOK (core) as well as History and Economics (group 3), Biology (group 4) and Mathematics (group 5). Depending on the choice of subjects IB Diploma students receive up to 22 lessons a week where the language of tuition is English.

4. Language and student admission

On account of the school language policy those seeking admission for Year 5 have to be willing to put an emphasis on the study of English in additional lessons.

Individual counseling is offered for students who wish to enter the bilingual stream in Year 7. This also applies for the choice of the second foreign language in Year 7 and to those wishing to choose a third foreign language in Year 9.

For admission to the IBDP above average proficiency in English is expected in order to be able to study group 3-5 subjects in English (compare school brochure and IB DP information leaflet). Intensive individual counseling is provided at this point.

5. Assessment of language learning

- The criteria for second language assessment are based on the levels of the European Framework. They comprise the communicative skills (speaking, writing, reading, listening and mediation) of the student as well as his / her proficiency, accuracy, precision, logic of argumentation and other aspects (compare assessment policy).
- Both summative and formative means of assessment are applied (compare assessment policy).
- Depending on whether the students are assessed for the German Abitur or the IB Diploma the directives of the ministry of education or the IBO are followed.

6. Special educational needs in language learning

Special arrangements for students with specific performance deficits, especially dyslexia, are regulated by circular from the Ministry of Education. These include for example the possibility of remedial courses as well as extension of time allowed for tests or help by technical equipment to make sure that all students can show their true potential in examinations and are not disadvantaged in any way (compare special educational needs policy).

Students with special talents in the area of language learning can choose to enter the bilingual stream, can learn up to four foreign languages, take part in language competitions and international exchanges or opt for one of the language courses described in the language profile above.

7. Communicating and reviewing the policy

The policy is regularly reviewed as required. Possible changes are discussed in department meetings, staff meetings and communicated in staff meetings, parent-teacher meetings, in circulars and information sessions for students.