



LANGUAGE POLICY

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Purpose

This policy establishes ISH's concept and philosophy regarding language and language learning across the Primary Years Programme (PYP), Middle Years Programme (MYP), and Diploma Programme (DP). It defines how language learning supports academic success, intercultural understanding, and personal identity development. The policy aligns with the IB philosophy of multilingualism, ensuring that all students develop as proficient communicators in multiple languages.

School Values

Language learning at ISH is driven by our core values:

- **Wellbeing:** Students develop confidence and agency in expressing themselves.
- **Autonomy:** Encouraging self-directed learning and ownership of linguistic development.
- **Belonging:** Honoring students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds.
- **Connection:** Fostering international-mindedness through multilingualism.

ISH Philosophy and Principles of Language Learning

Language is fundamental to all learning. At ISH, language learning is a means of educating and guiding students to be responsible, reflective, and critical thinkers, empowering them to take thoughtful action in their personal, academic, and global roles. Language is not only a vehicle for communication but also a tool for inquiry, enabling students to engage with diverse perspectives and construct meaningful understanding. ISH recognizes language as an evolving, dynamic process that shapes identity and fosters intercultural awareness.

Rooted in the IB Learner Profile and Approaches to Teaching and Learning (ATL), ISH embraces language learning as a transdisciplinary practice that nurtures international-mindedness. Through inquiry-driven methodologies, students develop communication, research, and thinking skills, supporting their ability to express ideas confidently in multiple languages. By embedding academic integrity, reflection, and collaboration into language learning, ISH ensures that students are equipped to make meaningful contributions in a multilingual world.

Core Characteristics of Language Practice at ISH

- Every teacher is a language teacher, responsible for supporting students' language development.
- Language is a tool for inquiry, thinking, and expression, not just a subject of study.
- Multilingualism is a right and a resource, supporting global engagement.
- Home languages are valued and contribute to identity formation.
- Translanguaging strategies are encouraged to help students navigate their linguistic repertoire.

The Role of Language in the Learning Community

Language as a Shared Responsibility

All ISH teachers are language teachers, integrating language development into their subjects. This means:

- Language acquisition supports learning across disciplines.
- Scaffolding and differentiation are key for students learning in a language other than their home language.
- Inquiry-based and authentic language learning is emphasized.

Multilingualism and Translanguaging at ISH

At ISH, multilingualism is both a right and a resource, reflecting the IB's commitment to language as a tool for meaning-making, communication, and cognitive development. Translanguaging—the intentional use of a student's full linguistic repertoire—enhances learning by allowing students to draw on home and additional languages to construct understanding and express ideas.

ISH fosters home language development and ensures that students have access to engaging, high-quality books in their native languages through the ongoing development of the library's home language collection.

The Role of Translanguaging in Learning

Translanguaging activates prior knowledge, affirms cultural identity, and helps students access content more effectively. Rather than limiting students to a single language, it encourages them to use all their linguistic resources to make meaning. This aligns with IB principles that emphasize student agency, intercultural understanding, and cognitive growth.

Translanguaging Across the IB Programmes

- PYP: Supports inquiry-based learning by allowing students to express ideas in multiple languages, strengthening conceptual understanding.
- MYP: Enhances intercultural communication and engagement with diverse perspectives, encouraging deeper analytical thinking.
- DP: Develops academic literacy across disciplines, preparing students for global citizenship and lifelong learning.

Balancing Translanguaging and English Proficiency

As English is the language of instruction, our goal is to ensure students develop the academic English skills needed for success, while also leveraging their home languages as scaffolding. However, over-reliance on translation tools (e.g., Google Translate or Generative

AI) may hinder English language development. Instead, purposeful translanguaging strategies provide structured support for learning.

Classroom Strategies for Translanguaging

Teachers integrate translanguaging intentionally by providing opportunities for students to:

- Build background knowledge of new concepts in their home language.
- Brainstorm, draft, or take notes using all linguistic resources.
- Use bilingual dictionaries to support vocabulary development.
- Engage with multilingual research and content to strengthen connections across languages.

By embedding translanguaging as an intentional pedagogical strategy, ISH empowers students as multilingual learners while ensuring they develop the necessary academic English proficiency. This approach celebrates linguistic diversity, fosters cognitive growth, and aligns with the IB's vision for international education.

Language Support for Diverse Learners

- English Language Acquisition course and English as an Additional Language (EAL) support are available for students learning in English.
- Language acquisition courses in Finnish, French, and Spanish enable students to develop additional proficiency in these languages.
- Home language development is encouraged through independent study, local external language provision and self-taught language options provided by the school:
 - [**MYP Independent Language Studies \(ILS\)**](#): an option for grade 9-10 students who wish to study their home language (or another language) as an elective during the school day.
 - **DP School-Supported Self-Taught Literature**: an option for grade 11-12 students who wish to undertake their home language as an IB Diploma subject with online tutoring

Promotion of the Host Country Language (Finnish)

- The curriculum provides opportunities to learn about, through and in the Finnish language for both Finnish and non-Finnish speakers.
- Cultural activities, field trips, and school events create possibilities for developing an appreciation for the Finnish language.
- Non-Finnish speakers are encouraged to engage with Finnish through daily interactions, greetings, and community initiatives.

ISH Language Profile

At ISH, we recognize that each student arrives with a unique and rich linguistic repertoire, shaped by family, culture, and interactions with the wider world. Students are not just language learners—they are language users and creators, bringing valuable and complex

linguistic experiences that influence how they communicate, think, and learn.

Each student's language profile is shaped by their linguistic background, experiences, and personal learning goals. These factors can be captured and visualized through tools such as a student language portrait, allowing educators to understand and support multilingual development more effectively.

Language Demographics of the School	
Language of instruction	English
Additional languages taught	<p>Language and literature:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> English, Finnish <p>Language acquisition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> French, Spanish, Finnish, English, Swedish
The range and types of home languages and other languages in the community	<p>At the time of writing, the following home languages are represented in our student population:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 40% = English - 14% = Finnish - 46% = Other
Government Compliance and National Language Requirements	<p>ISH operates under the licences (<i>järjestämisluvat</i>) granted by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Decision of 4 October 2021 concerning the provision of basic education and pre-primary education. The Decision of 21 September 2023 concerning the provision of upper secondary education (<i>lukio</i>). <p>Together with the Finnish Basic Education Act and the Upper Secondary School Act, these permits establish the following language requirements for students who are Finnish citizens:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finnish as Mother Tongue (<i>äidinkieli ja kirjallisuus</i>): All Finnish citizens enrolled at ISH are required to study Finnish as their mother tongue from Grade 1 through the end of compulsory education (typically age 16). In the Diploma Programme, Finnish citizens continue their studies in Finnish Literature. This requirement is based on citizenship, not on the mother tongue recorded in the Population Information System. Second National Language (Swedish): The opportunity to study the second national

language (Swedish) must be offered. In IB terms, this corresponds to a **Language Acquisition course** (Group 2), where Swedish is studied as an additional language. ISH may offer Swedish at this level in the Upper School, subject to sufficient enrolment and available resources.

- **Nature of Obligation:**

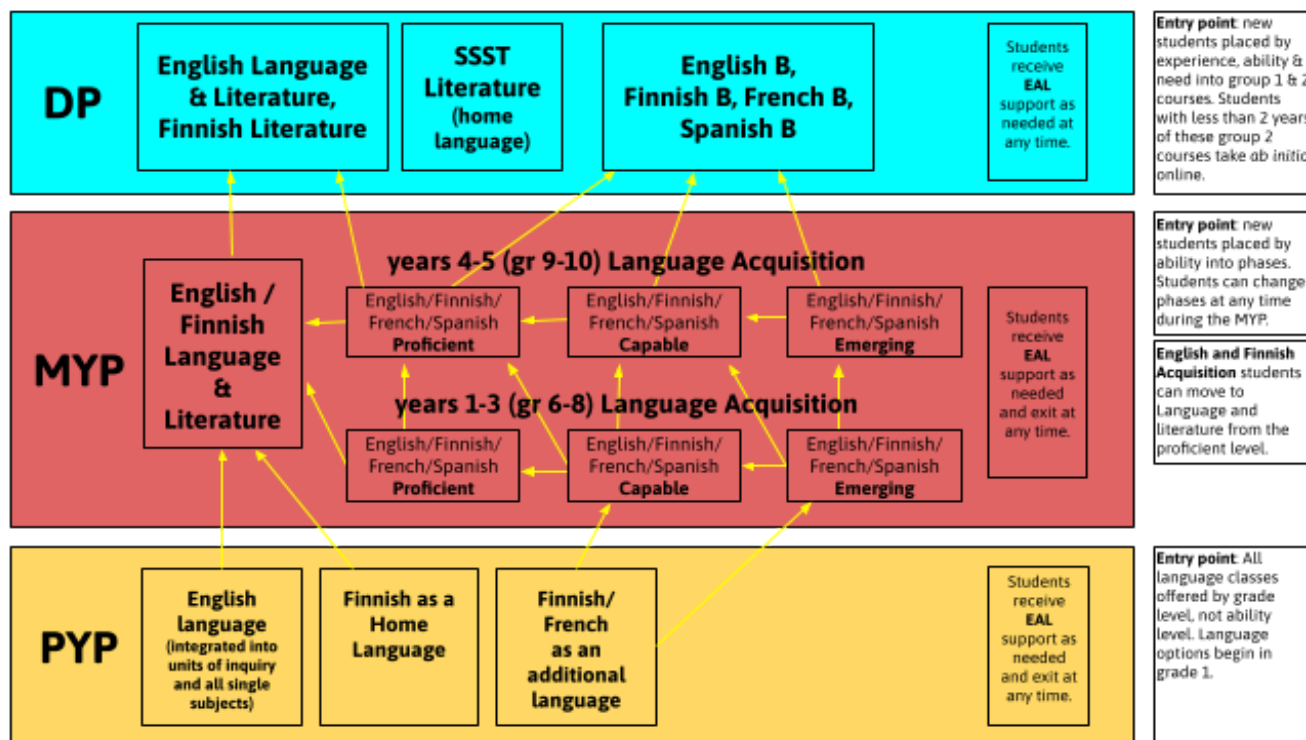
The Finnish mother tongue requirement is defined by Finnish legislation, and ISH's education permits. They are **factual administrative actions**, not administrative decisions made by the school, and therefore are not subject to appeal.

- **Other Students:**

Students who are not Finnish citizens may also participate in Finnish or Swedish courses where appropriate, subject to viability. Students demonstrating sufficient proficiency may enrol in Finnish Language and Literature courses, even if Finnish is not their registered mother tongue.

By embedding these requirements into school practice, ISH ensures that its language policy remains aligned with both national legislation and its operating permits, as well as the International Baccalaureate programmes.

Language Offerings & Progression Across Programs



This diagram illustrates the language pathways possible at ISH. As part of the process of determining the most appropriate progression through different options, all students entering the school in grades 6-12 will take placement exams for language acquisition courses. A writing sample will also help assess students in MYP Language and Literature and DP Group 1. Additionally, in the MYP, the IB publishes language acquisition continuums, the MYP language acquisition global proficiency table, and the assessment criteria rubrics, which are used to determine placement, marking progression, and establish language learning pathways for students.

Language Teaching and Learning Strategies

PYP Language Approach

- Language learning is embedded within the transdisciplinary inquiry framework.
- Early literacy focuses on phonics, guided reading, and storytelling.
- Oral communication, writing, and media literacy are integrated into Units of Inquiry.

MYP Language Approach

- Language acquisition follows the IB levels of proficiency (emergent, capable and proficient).
- Differentiated instruction supports students at various proficiency levels.

- Language learning is reinforced through collaboration between subjects and interdisciplinary units, where possible.

DP Language Approach

- Group 1 (Language & Literature) and Group 2 (Language Acquisition) options support students at different proficiency levels.
- DP students can pursue bilingual diplomas through language studies.

The Bilingual Diploma

The International Baccalaureate (IB) awards a bilingual diploma when a student demonstrates advanced academic proficiency in two languages. A bilingual diploma may be earned in one of two ways:

- By completing two Group 1 (Language and Literature) courses in different languages,
or
- By completing one Group 1 course and one subject from Group 3 (Individuals and Societies) or Group 4 (Sciences) in a language other than the Group 1 language.

This recognition highlights a student's ability to study, analyse, and communicate in more than one academic language. It affirms the value of multilingualism and intercultural understanding, and is highly regarded by universities worldwide.

Use of Digital and Physical Resources

- ISH provides bilingual books, digital language apps, and online databases.
- Librarians collaborate with teachers to provide authentic language resources.

Language Placement, Progression and Assessment

Language Placement in the PYP

PYP students create a language profile reflecting their linguistic background and learning history. From Grade 1 onwards, students who are not Finnish nationals, in EAL, or Learning Support choose Finnish or French as an additional language with parental guidance.

To ensure steady progress and strong language development, students are expected to remain in their chosen language throughout their PYP years. This continuity avoids disruption, allows teachers to build on prior learning, and ensures that students gain the depth of proficiency needed for future studies. Stability in language choice also supports smoother assessment, planning, and transition into the MYP, where progression is built upon the foundation established in PYP.

Requests to change an additional language after placement will not normally be considered unless there are exceptional educational circumstances, reviewed and approved by the school.

Special Circumstances for Finnish Citizens

In line with Finnish law, Finnish citizens are required to study Finnish. Where a Finnish citizen does not yet demonstrate proficiency at the expected level, the school will assess their profile and determine the most appropriate provision. Final placement decisions rest with the school and are guided by both legal requirements and the student's educational needs.

Language Placement in the MYP

In the MYP, returning students continue with the language pathway selected in the PYP, ensuring continuity and steady progression in language development. Placement within that pathway is based on previous achievement levels and teacher recommendations, following the IB's language proficiency benchmarks (see the table below). This consistency supports deeper proficiency, allows teachers to build on prior knowledge, and provides a strong foundation for future DP studies.

New students entering the MYP undergo initial assessments to determine the most appropriate language course and proficiency level for them. Requests to change from one language pathway to another are not normally granted unless there are exceptional educational circumstances, reviewed and approved by the school.

Language Placement in the DP

In the DP, students continue with the language pathway they have followed in the MYP, or in Grade 10 if they are new to the school. This continuity ensures depth of proficiency, supports success in academic literacy, and prepares students for the demands of DP assessments and, where applicable, the bilingual diploma.

Placement in Higher Level or Standard Level is determined through student choice, guided by recommendations from previous teachers and performance in the first weeks of Grade 11. This balance between continuity and appropriate challenge ensures that students enter the DP at a level suited to their abilities and aspirations.

If a student has not gained more than three semesters of prior experience in English, Finnish, French, or Spanish language learning, they will typically be enrolled in a Spanish *ab initio* course. This course is often offered online due to the limited number of students requiring this option.

Requests to change language pathways at this stage are not normally considered, except in exceptional educational circumstances reviewed and approved by the school.

Assessing Language Development

- In the PYP, students are assessed against learning outcomes using rubrics based on the PYP Language Scope and Sequence. Assessment focuses on growth in oral communication, reading, writing, and media literacy, with feedback used to guide next steps in learning.
- In the MYP, both formative and summative assessments are used to track language development. Students are evaluated using the IB Language Acquisition Phase Descriptors, which provide a continuum of progress from emergent to proficient. Assessment results inform placement decisions, support planning, and ensure students build steadily on their prior learning.
- In the DP, assessment is aligned with IB subject criteria for Language and Literature and Language Acquisition courses. Student progress is monitored continuously, with formative tasks supporting preparation for IB examinations and summative assessments providing benchmarks of proficiency.

Language Proficiency Benchmarks

IB Language Acquisition Phases	Expected Proficiency Level
Phase 1-2	Emergent
Phase 3-4	Capable
Phase 5-6	Proficient

Language Inclusion, Equity, and Support

Support for EAL Students

Students will enter the school with varying levels of English proficiency. Students whose first language is not English and/or who have not attended a school where English is the medium of instruction for at least 3 years are identified as potential candidates for EAL instruction and support. The information provided by students' previous schools and parents during the application process helps to identify students who may qualify for EAL services. Teachers, parents, or students can initiate a referral for an EAL assessment. ([Admission Policy](#) includes the school's English language requirements for applicants.)

EAL Support in PYP

Students identified and assessed as needing EAL services receive three lesson blocks per week of instruction, along with in-class support. Those identified as emergent learners receive additional lessons to enhance their language acquisition. For students with learning support needs or Finnish nationals, a flexible support model is tailored to meet their individual requirements.

EAL Support in MYP

MYP 1-3 (Grades 6-8)

Students whose assessment results show they are Emergent (phases 1 and 2) or Capable (phases 3 and 4) users of English qualify for EAL services. Instead of studying two additional languages, Emergent learners attend two lessons of English Acquisition and two lessons of EAL subject support per week. Capable communicators attend two lessons of English Acquisition and one additional language.

MYP 4-5 (Grades 9-10)

Students who join ISH in Grade 9 or 10 should possess at a Capable (phase 4) level of English upon entry. Students qualifying for English Acquisition attend 3 English Acquisition lessons each week instead of English Language and Literature. Students in Grade 9 are assessed based on Phase 4 Language Acquisition criteria; students in Grade 10 are evaluated according to Phase 5 Language Acquisition criteria to prepare them for studying English B in the DP.

EAL students receive accommodations that are appropriate to their level of English and allow them to access the content.

This may include:

- **Extended time for assessments** based on language needs
- Scaffolding including visuals (glossaries, and sentence stems) and audios (with subtitles)
- Allowing alternatives for demonstrating their learning (depending on the criterion)

EAL Support in DP

- Students who require EAL support can receive one-on-one support during Flex hour.
- Eligible students can receive accommodations on assessments.

Policy Alignment

Academic Integrity Policy	All school policies align with our guiding statements (vision and mission) and the philosophy of the IB. In all of these policies and positions, the student is central.
Admissions policy	
Assessment policy	
Inclusion policy	
Language policy	

Policy review protocol

The policy is reviewed annually by relevant stakeholders in light of the guiding statements and the changing needs of the students and the wider community. Data from student assessments, surveys, and IB evaluation reports inform updates.

Communication of the school policies

This policy will be listed with the other school policies on our public website.

Reference List

- Guidelines for Developing a School Language Policy (IBO, 2024)
- IB Programme Standards and Practices (IBO, 2020)
- IB Language Tenets (IBO, 2024)
- Language in the PYP, *Learning and Teaching*, My IB (IBO, 2024)
- *Learning in a Language Other Than Mother Tongue in IB Programmes* (IBO)
- International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO, 2018), *Primary Years Programme Translanguaging*, accessed via <https://resources.ibo.org>
- Guidelines for School Self-Reflection on its Language Policy (IBO, 2012)
- *Translanguaging* (IBO, 2018)

National and Legal References

- Ministry of Education and Culture (Finland), *Decision 04.10.2021* — Permission to Organise Pre-Primary and Basic Education (*Opetuslupa 4.10.2021, perusopetus+esiopetus*)
- Ministry of Education and Culture (Finland), *Decision 04.10.2018* — Permission to Organise Upper Secondary Education (*Järjestämislupa 10.2018, lukio*)
- Ministry of Education and Culture (Finland), *Decision 04.10.2018* — Permission to Organise IB Upper Secondary Education in English (*OKM/21/530/2018*)
- Ministry of Education and Culture, Written Clarification (September 2025) — Confirmation of Finnish citizen obligation for mother tongue (äidinkieli) instruction, irrespective of Population Information System records.